MANUFACTURING

CONFUCIANISM

Chinese Traditions & Universal Civilization

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For my parents,
who lovingly gave me my life,
and for Susan, Hannah, and Elena,
who in giving me everything else,
taught me the joyful
meaning of it
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INTRODUCTION:

CONFUCIUS, KONGZI, AND

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Figure 7. “Cum Fu Ču sive Confucius.” The first Western portrait of “Confucius,” by an unknown engraver in Philippe Couplet et al., *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (Paris, 1687), a hybridized image of him as still point of the bibliographic world. This woodcut was inspired by the popular Ming hagiography, *Shengji zhi tu* (Portraits of the Sage’s Traces), as well as the Jesuit imagination of Kongzi informed by the *Lunyu* and the *Li ji*. The French artisan’s woodcut relied on established motifs for the depiction of royalty as congeneric with the cosmos, and as “Confucius” was worked into this artistic framework, his features became more Western. The image was the source for all subsequent illustrations of Confucius. (Photograph courtesy of the Special Collections Library of the University of Michigan)
Calderón likened glories to dreams, and had Segismundo ask where, in the end, truth finally lay. My response to that question has been to show that men who act for posterity can never be certain that their animating values will survive the historical future. Not only that, sometimes the acts themselves matter less than their images—however distorted—which are re-formed in the eyes of subsequent perceivers. This does not mean that historical myth is merely fiction, since events must have credibly occurred for the story to be effective. But it should warn any historical actor that “our virtues,” as Shakespeare wrote in Coriolanus, “lie in th’ interpretation of the time.” Audiences are fickle, ideals labile, and glories fleeting. Conviction, after all, is the least—and noblest—of human certainties.—Frederic Wakeman Jr.

A little more than four centuries ago, a detachment of seamen in service to Philip II of Spain (r. 1556–1598) and a few missionaries of a new order of the Catholic Church, the Society of Jesus, sailed by Portuguese carrack to the south coast of China. We have lived the consequences of this passage ever since. Portuguese vessels, in particular, had been navigating this route for about three decades by the 1570s, calling twice a year at China’s southern port of Guangzhou (Canton) for luxury items. Thus, there was nothinglogistically unusual in the missionaries’ arrival in 1579 on Chinese soil. The historical significance of their landing would not be apparent until several years later, when they would enter China as native priests (mendicant Buddhists, to be exact), and a conversation on indigenous ground was begun.

From this dialogue of cultures at the far reaches of the known world, Christianity would assume a distinctive Chinese character and simultaneously a single Chinese teaching, and its founder would be translated through Latin into the language of contemporary moral science in Europe.

Before the European maritime expansion, China and Western Europe were isolated from each other. However, in the four centuries since the Jesuit contact, East and West have become bound by commerce and communication and joined, more importantly, in imagination. China and the West today are as near as they have ever been. Each is registered in the lexicon of the other: the Chinese are increasingly knowledgeable about the West, its culture as much as its technology, and Westerners are keenly aware of the politics, economy, and demography of China. The cultural vocabularies of both have been unselﬁconsciously enriched. For us in the West, the term “Confucianism” is richly familiar as an indigenous tradition translated by the Jesuits out of China. Indeed, China and the West have been bound in imagination by the concepts of Confucius and Confucianism since the late seventeenth century.

To any observer of the religions of China, it is evident that Confucianism holds a privileged place for us. Even to the casual browser of the local bookstore who finds works on Confucianism among the titles in “Eastern Re-
The introduction of this book begins an extended meditation on Confucianism: how it was made, the Western and Chinese communities involved in its making, and the consequences of its invention. It begins with the premise that Confucianism is largely a Western invention, supposedly representing what is registered by the complex of terms ru jia [ru family], ru jiao [ru teaching], ru xue [ru learning], and ru zhe [the ru]. Presuming that the ancient Chinese philosopher Confucius (known to the Chinese as Kongzi) is the source of this complex, it takes his figure as its focus.

I propose that we resist the reflex to treat these entities, Confucianism and ru, as equivalent and consider rather that what we know of Confucius is not what the ancient Chinese knew as Kongzi [Master Kong]. I suggest instead that Confucius assumed his present familiar features as the result of a prolonged, deliberate process of manufacture in which European intellectuals took a leading role. Our Confucius is a product fashioned over several centuries by many hands, ecclesiastical and lay, Western and Chinese.

In this century in China, Confucius, the largely Western invention, inspired a re-creation of the native hero, Kongzi, who was then absorbed into Chinese intellectuals' font of mythological material and proved critical to their endeavor of making a new Chinese nation through historical construction. The joint quality of this invention is the main concern of this book: how the sixteenth-century Chinese supplied the raw material with storied forms of Kongzi that inspired the Western celebrity of Confucius and lent novel form to a contested European representation of science and theology; and how the imported nineteenth-century Western conceptual vernacular of nationalism, evolution, and ethos lent dimension to the nativist imaginings of twentieth-century Chinese, who reinvented Kongzi as a historicized religious figure.

The reader should not conclude that to establish a Western provenance for Confucius suggest some kind of fraud. This book is not mere iconoclasm, a simple act of demythologization, consonant with a contemporary, postmodern criticism that dismantles accepted ideas. Nor does it imply that there can be no native heroes, only foreign-made ones, or attack the hegemony of Western culture. My story of Confucius and Confucianism is a reverent account of an ecumenical impulse or spirit, definitive of a modern temper formed in the Renaissance, forgotten since the seventeenth century in the West, and recovered in the twentieth century in China. It is a tale of two different centuries of turmoil and of two eras of cultural reformation in which pious communities disposed to reasonableness and toleration recognized in their local circumstances the prophetic intimations of the absolute.

As the twentieth century draws to a close, images of Confucius [Kongzi, 551?–479? B.C.E.] and of the religion or philosophy inspired by his memory,
Confucianism, appear to grow in number and in salience. In the West, Confucius is seen, or rather represented, almost everywhere: in videotapes on conducting business with the cultures of the Far East; in software applications; in in-flight magazines; on T-shirts; in cartoons; in public television documentaries; on menus; in travel magazines; on yogurt containers; in recent efforts to portray Confucianism as a new world religion; on the World Wide Web; and in an increasing number of scholarly treatments of Chinese religion, Chinese thought, comparative philosophy, and the indigenous cultural roots of Asia’s astonishing economic success. The number and variety of such images rival the array found in China in 136 B.C.E., when an imperial cult honoring Kongzi was purportedly inaugurated and when followers of his teaching in service to the emperor were too numerous to count.

Examples of Confucius’s contemporary popularity range from the parody of “Confucius at the Office” (figure 1)—which shows the sage laboring to produce clichés—to the high regard in which Confucius is held by Freemasons. (A likeness of him, along with such other wise men of the East as Zoroaster and Mani, may be found on the interior walls of many Scottish Rites temples.) Other examples include the collection of witticisms “Confucius Say,”1 or the self-help book How Would Confucius Ask for a Raise?2 Confucius is part of the undigested mass of our modern cultural stock, one which has been accumulating since the seventeenth century, when European intellectuals appropriated the iconography of this figure and the native tradition identified with him and represented in the letterbooks, translations, and treatises of Jesuit missionaries stationed in southern China.

And it is with the work of this missionary community that the intertwined tales of Confucius the hero and Confucianism the religion begin, for it was from this community’s mission among the Chinese that the man and the religion were made. Indeed, he was made, first fabricated in the late sixteenth century by a small, reverent band of “accommodationists”3 Jesuit fathers living in the wilderness of southern China, who had been especially inspired by the example of a culture hero revered by the Chinese as Kongzi. Following their arrival in China in 1583, the fathers quickly produced a volume of testimony in Latin, Italian, Portuguese, and Chinese of the moral genius of their inspiration, Confucius, drawing on a thousand-year-long transmission of indigenous texts and tales about Kongzi.

Their Confucius was initially always paired with Kongzi. In fact, “Confucius” was invented as a Latinized equivalent for “Kong Fuzi,” a rare, respectful title for the Chinese sage Kongzi that could only be found on the spirit tablets (shenweiz) of certain regional temples devoted to worship of this hallowed figure and his extended apostolic lineage.4 Thus for these sixteenth-century Jesuits, “Confucius”/“Kong Fuzi” was a dual symbol best likened to Janus, the Roman god whose two-headed face was identified with gates, doors, and beginnings.

This Jesuit-Chinese construct was formed at the beginning of what the Jesuits later termed “Christiania expeditio” (the Christian expedition) and served as a door through which the fathers passed into Chinese life, discarding in transit much of what defined them in their church’s eyes as “soldiers of Christ.” Moreover, “Confucius”/“Kong Fuzi” marked the humble beginning of something these missionaries could not have anticipated, but with which we are familiar—sinology. From this beginning, where the native Kongzi and the foreign Confucius were joined in the minds of the makers on local Chinese ground, “Confucius” quickly acquired a universal character. It is this newer, solitary Latin incarnation that was conveyed across the globe in the spirit of the Enlightenment and has reached us today through the polymorphous passion of commerce as the icon Confucius.

The Making of the Icon Confucius

Throughout the seventeenth century the fathers of the China Mission translated indigenous texts into Latin to demonstrate the inchoate monotheism of native Chinese faith. In the course of these labors, they provided their superiors and benefactors with encyclopedic documentation of Chinese habit and belief. Back home, an educated European laity excited by the intellectual passions of discovery—cartography, astronomy, mathematics, and linguis-
tics—anxiously awaited the publication of the letterbooks and journals of the missionaries. Among these observers, dilettantes, and scientists, the Jesuit "Confucius" found an especially hospitable ground, where his writings were welcomed as containing a wisdom remarkably compatible with Western morality.

At the dawn of what was then an empirical mapping of the world, geographically, linguistically, culturally, and, most important of all, religiously, the reification of Confucius by members of Europe’s Royal Society—now without his alter ego, Kongzi—dissolved one-half of a bivalent symbol. The power of Confucius as a symbol derived from the European presumption that he was the iconic representation of Chinese native otherness. Consequently, as Jesuit letterbooks containing the missionaries’ accounts of life in China were published in the last decade of the sixteenth century, his popularity spread along separate, contiguous fronts, ecclesiastical and lay.

The icon Confucius served two distinct European communities, for which it functioned differently: for the Jesuits, who knew him as Kongzi, he was dear to a small group of missionaries living among, and increasingly sympathetic to, the Chinese; for cultivated Europeans he was a symbol of either the nobility of the savage or of the inherent rationality of the “natural,” known, as were most other admired intellectual figures of the day, by a Latin cognomen.

By the late eighteenth century, as Europe acquired an “Enlightened” cultural self-consciousness, Confucius was firmly entrenched in contemporary Western culture as a sage, and his Chinese followers were called “Confucians,” a term that evoked a panoply of associations: deference, urbaniety, wisdom, moral probity, reasoned and not slavish classicism, and a learned, paternal authoritarianism. These qualities, like the figure who embodied them, were the desiderata of Europeans doubtful of the institution of monarchy and despairing of religious war.

Confucius, and the China metonymically captured in this symbol, appeared in the writings of many Enlightenment figures: Voltaire, Rousseau, Montesquieu, Comte, Quesnay, Fontenelle, Diderot, Leibniz, Wolff, Malebranche, Bayle, even Defoe. Confucius’s greatest moment came perhaps in 1758, when a French edition of Diogenes Laertius’s work, *The Lives of the Philosophers*, published in Amsterdam, included a ninety-page exposition of his doctrines. Confucius, as symbol of things Chinese, was critical to an emerging political, social, and theological criticism that yielded such works as Bayle’s *Dictionnaire historique et critique* (1697–1703), Voltaire’s *Essai sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations* (1756) and *Dictionnaire philosophique* (1757), Montesquieu’s *Lettres Persanes* (1721) and *De l’esprit des lois* (1748), and Quesnay’s *Le Despotisme de la Chine* (1767). At this moment of conflict between the *anciens* and the *modernes*, the image of the Chinese ancient helped shape the self-image of the modern, our modern.

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The distribution of Confucius’s name and image in Europe at this time may have been far-reaching because, like capital, his value was not bound by the conditions of his production. In this environment, Confucius simply existed as a finished product, a symbol of certain values, chief of which was otherness, and thus he could be appropriated by any person or group seeking to represent such values. For Voltaire, he could symbolize a genuine, non-European moral reason while for Montesquieu he represented despotism. This symbolic variability reflected contemporary European debates about self, society, and the sacred at the inception of the nation-state.

The wide popularity of Confucius was also coincident with global economic developments of the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that brought Europe and China closer than ever before. At the end of the sixteenth century, a rudimentary global economy was in place that linked China economically with Europe, with the Americas and sites like the silver mines of Potosí in the New World. By the beginning of the seventeenth century nearly 50 percent of the precious metals mined throughout the world found their way to China. A conceptual market developed alongside the spice, metals, and luxury trade, bearing many icons of the Chinese that circulated widely in Europe, among them the icon Confucius.

In the simultaneous circulation of ideas and material goods that linked China and Europe in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, Confucius was a significant, and salient, artifact. The frequency with which his name and image appeared in letters, memoirs, treatises, travel literature, and histories suggests that he was moved like New World specie in an expanding market of new ideas joining Rome with Paris, London, Berlin, Prague and then, in turn, with the missionary outposts at Goa, Canton, Macao, and Beijing. According to Paul Rule, the first engraved portrait of Confucius, which appeared in 1687, was “plagiarized by countless works of the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century,” including a popular memoir by the French Jesuit and royal mathematician Louis le Comte (figure 2). The chief intellectual consequence for us of this conceptual commerce was that the Confucius/Kongzi of the Jesuits of the Zhaoqing mission became, simply, Confucius: the person whom we know as teacher, moral exemplar, sage, political philosopher, and, above all, the patriarch of China’s civil religion.

Scholars and the public alike often presume that these many different roles correspond to traits of the native Kongzi; all are sure they know who “Confucius” is. But despite the array of images that supposedly represent him, this Confucius, detached from his native ground, is a figment of the Western imagination. The Confucius and Confucianism to which we have granted a compelling authority are conceptual products of foreign origin, made to articulate indigenous qualities of Chinese culture. Of Kongzi himself, little is

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known. It is this irony that accounts for the marvelous symbolic diversity of Confucius and of Kongzi.

Confucius, the celebrated etymon of our tradition, Confucianism, and Kongzi, the revered patriarch of the ru transmission, are tropes rather than persons. Confucius and Kongzi have, like all prophets, martyrs, and heroes, been granted an impressive collection of realia, vestiges of the many traditions made in the name of this hero. Indeed, in China and in the West, the making of such traditions displays an uncanny functional similarity, for in China for millennia Kongzi has been a popular focus of invention.

The Native Restoration of Kongzi: Commerce and Fetishism

While the story of Confucius's popularity reveals much about the history of our culture, it also doubles back upon the Chinese today, where Kongzi, his native narrative substrate, has been restored to a prominence comparable to that of the Western invention. In present-day China, where tradition is again in [officially administered] vogue, Kongzi is quoted in public service advertisements warning of the perils of gambling; he is seen in television documentaries on such topics as Han minzu wenhua [the culture of the Han race] and as a symbol of the nobility of antique culture. For that matter, wenming (civilization) and wenhua (culture) are heard and seen everywhere—even on street signs (wenming weisheng lu, a civilized and sanitary street) and at work units (wenming weisheng danwei, a civilized and sanitary work unit). Both wenming and wenhua bear a single connotation—the proud superiority of Chinese tradition, of which Kongzi is increasingly the popular icon.

The Chinese, in the throes of hypergrowth and zealously promoted modernization, are borrowing from this indigenous ethos and have rediscovered their Kongzi—as Confucius. Characteristic of this national revaluation of Kongzi as a figure of international significance is a very recent work, titled Ruxue yu dongfang wenhua [Rusism and Eastern Culture], by Xu Yuanhe, who insists that East Asia's economic miracle is the epiphenomenon of what he calls fuxing ruxue de dao [the moral road of revived Rusism].

Scholarly and popular works touting the resources of tradition and culture, in particular Confucianism, are increasingly numerous in China. At the same time, publishing houses, most notably the Guji Chubanshe [Classic Publishers] in Shanghai, have spawned a steady growth in reprints—in traditional rather than the officially sanctioned simplified characters—of the classical texts of Kongzi's era. And the current global popularity of the East Asian Development Model ensures that the interest in Confucianism will be sustained.

Kongzi and his teaching have enjoyed a steady resurgence since the late 1970s, when earlier campaigns to shape national moral fiber through criti-
cism of Lin Biao (1907–1971) and Kongzi receded. It is now politically correct to appreciate Kongzi, whereas from 1973 to 1978 the fervor of the country's socialist consciousness, its "redness" (zhong), was displayed through the grandly choreographed public excoriation of this cultural patriarch. The winds of change in Chinese political culture blow furiously and always to extremes—as the fluctuations of reform and repression following the Tian'anmen Square demonstrations in the spring of 1989 demonstrate. But since the Department of History at Shandong University sponsored a reevaluation of Kongzi and rujia sixiang (ruist thought) in the fall of 1978, the political climate has favored Kongzi decidedly.

The annual observances of his birth, which many believe date back to the Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.—220 C.E.), have resumed with great pomp and circumstance—a celebration keyed to a new "great leap forward" in domestic and international tourism. In 1980 the Kongzi Research Center (Kongzi Yanjiu Zhongxin) was founded in Qufu (three years later it was renamed the Kongzi Research Institute, Kongzi Yanjiusuo). In the same period the Chinese government authorized publication of Cai Shangsi's Kongzi sixiang de xitong (The System of Kongzi's Thought [1982]) and Zhong Zhaopeng's Kongzi yanjiu (Research on Kongzi [1983]).

The New World Press of Beijing followed this revival of Kongzi and in 1984 published an intriguingly titled memoir, Kongfu neizhai yishui—Kongzi houyi de huiyi (Anecdotes from the Women's Quarters of the Kong Residence—The Reminiscences of Kongzi's Descendant), written by Ke Lan and Kong Demao, a seventy-seventh-generation descendant of Kongzi. In the same year, the book appeared in English translation as In the Mansion of Confucius's Descendants and claimed to reveal "the legends, stories, ceremonies and intrigues connected with the mansion of the main branch of the Kong clan—the lineal posterity of Confucius."

On September 22, 1984, when the 2,533rd anniversary of Kongzi's putative birth was celebrated, three thousand selected Chinese and foreign guests presided over the ceremonies while the populace filled the temple grounds. The statue of Kongzi, which had been demolished when Red Guards, on a mission to destroy all symbols of China's "old culture," raged in Qufu during the high tide of the Cultural Revolution, was restored to mark the occasion.

The most telling evidence of Kongzi's rehabilitation came in June 1985 with the establishment of another Kongzi Research Institute (Kongzi Yanjiusuo)—this one located in the former imperial temple to Kongzi, just southeast of the Forbidden City in Beijing.

Once an outcast, he is again the sage and has been received as would be any mythic hero returned home. At Qufu, in Shandong Province (Kongzi's disputed home, the official locus of the ancient cult honoring him), shop owners proudly display bottles of San Kong Pijiu (Three Kong's Beer), "the number one beer in central Shandong," and in the center of the city stand three twenty-foot-tall mockups of the celebrated local brew. Another beverage named for Kongzi has acquired an international following: the "Confucius Family Liquor" (Kong Fu Jia Jiu), made from sorghum, wheat, barley, and peas and produced by the Qufu Distillery, is now distributed in the United States by Conwell Import and Export, Inc., of South El Monte, California.

On the streets of Beijing in 1984, the revered "Little Red Book" of Chairman Mao's selected quotations was not available, although several vendors proudly hawked Kongzi's Selected Sayings (Lunyu) in a handsomely bound vermilion-covered pocket book edition. A local publication of the Qufu Tanwenwu Guanli Weiyuanhui (Qufu Control Committee for Cultural Artifacts), the obviously imitative production contained all twenty chapters of the standard Lunyu printed in simplified characters (figure 3). Its resemblance to the first editions of Mao Zedong's quotations is startling—which may account for its sudden disappearance and replacement with a second, jade-colored edition. A restauranteur in Beijing has even opened the Confucius Restaurant (Kong Shangtang), justifying his choice of name with the

Figure 3. The Little Red Books. The universally celebrated and maligned "Little Red Book" (Quotations from Chairman Mao Zedong) juxtaposed in this photograph with the 1984 "Little Red Book" of the Lunyu (Selected Sayings of Kongzi), which circulated for a brief period in Qufu and Beijing. The Lunyu's appropriation of the format and color of Mao's book provoked officials to confiscate the former. (Photograph by author)
rhetorical query, "Why not the best?" Kongzi is simply good business, a fact not lost on the nation's postal system, which in 1990 issued a commemorative stamp set bearing his likeness. One stamp was valued at 1 yuan 60—the exact amount needed to post a card to the West in 1990—and portrays Kongzi, riding high in a scroll-laden chariot, attended by four disciples on foot. In an interesting reflection of contemporary Chinese prosperity and the popular association of Kongzi with success, he is depicted as heavy, even corpulent.

More impressive than Chinese popular culture's reinvention of Kongzi has been the steady growth of Sino-Western scholarly interest in Confucius and the religiophilosophical complexes of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism. While the Confucius of Gary Larson's cartoon and the Beijing restaurateur has attained universality at the expense of meaning, scholarship in Chinese intellectual history and philosophy has sought to confer global significance on Confucius and Confucianism on the basis of an uncanny relevance of the philosophy of the latter to contemporary problems, academic and social. These philosophical and religious claims to a universal status have been secured for Confucianism by East Asian scholars whose work reproduces in another form the interpretive predilections of the Jesuits while it reiterates the current commercial fetishization of Confucius.

Confucius, Confucianism, and the Politics of Scholarship

Asian politicians and scholars in the 1980s and 1990s have used images of Confucius and his teaching to counteract the spiritual and cultural consequences of rapid economic expansion. Engaging in an essentialist fetishization of Confucianism as a fundamental native value, such individuals, most prominently the former prime minister of Singapore, Lee Kuan Yew, have made Confucius the symbol of an Asia-specific religious ethos.18

Late in a century in which the integrity of the family—Western and Asian—is believed to be dissolving and in which alienation can no longer be assuaged with the balm of individualism, these scholars contend that the Confucian values of the home, moral self-discipline, reciprocity, mutual respect, and benevolence provide a way out of moral meaninglessness. They believe Confucianism to be both a defining ethos of Asian peoples and, not coincidentally, the spiritual force behind the Asian dominance of world economic markets. In this respect, Confucianism is less an intellectual or philosophical phenomenon and more a vital form of life, one reminiscent of the transformative impulses of Max Weber's Puritanism, though without Puritanism's otherworldly, transcendent yearnings.

East Asian scholars argue that there is a necessary generative relation between Asian "hypergrowth" and a fundamentalist Confucian culture.19 They claim that the economic success of Hong Kong, Singapore, Taiwan, and South Korea (the "Four Little Dragons") is emblematic of an alternative development paradigm wherein the "ancient" cultural claims of family, respect for education, compliance with authority, and religious faith will counteract the deleterious effects of modernization so common in the West. Face Weber, who had claimed that Confucianism sought accommodation with, not transformation of, the world, the Four Little Dragons display an aggressive entrepreneurial spirit and an indefatigable work ethic, thanks to Confucianism. Thus tradition yields modernity on its own terms, and Chineseness provides the model for a new "age of the Pacific Rim."

Tu Wei-ming is the principal spokesman for this creative reinvention of Confucianism as a form of religion. He claims that Confucianism is undergoing a "third wave" of rejuvenation. This contemporary incarnation of the tradition (which I call postmodern Confucianism) should, argues Tu Wei-ming, be recognized as a new world religion, on a par with Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, given to the same contemporary fundamentalist reactions:

[This] position envisions Confucianism . . . as a tradition of religious philosophy. Confucianism so conceived is a way of life which demands an existential commitment on the part of Confucians no less intensive and comprehensive than that demanded of the followers of other spiritual traditions such as Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, or Hinduism.20

Curiously, this universalist vision of postmodern Confucianism is grounded in the specific, parochial qualities definitive of the local tradition, both place especially strong emphasis on the family as a timeless ethical unit of labor. Ru, liberally reinterpreted as xin ruxue (new Confucian learning), is undergoing a revitalization that its advocates believe is continuous with a millennial cumulative tradition inaugurated with Kongzi. Claiming that their vision of a humane modernization requires a return to the fundamental virtues of Confucianism, these contemporary practitioners of Confucian religion are also involved in manufacturing a new moment of a tradition.21

The assertion that a Confucian resurgence in the form of the Asian family and work ethic is responsible for the preternatural economic growth of East Asia is more imaginative than empirical. Although quite different from American popular perceptions of Confucius, academic works such as these are no less manufactured and must be recognized as products of scholarly desire that mask their own status as fictions.

Within Western academic circles, another identifiable trend evident through the manufacture of Confucius and Confucianism is Neo-Confucianism, defined most fully by Wm. Theodore de Bary. The objective of this scholarly industry has been to establish incontrovertibly the vitality of the
Confucian tradition, now defined as a direct line of intellectual affinitive transmission from Kongzi through the Song period (970–1279 C.E.) lixue (learning of principle) and Ming (1368–1644 C.E.) xinxue (learning of the heart) fellowships to the present. From the twelfth through the eighteenth centuries, as de Bary tells it, Neo-Confucianism was the culturally hegemonic force produced from the union of Buddhism and the native Confucian tradition. As a cultural force it encapsulated the profound social, intellectual, technological, and political changes of these seven centuries and yet remained fundamentally consistent with the tradition of learning put forward by Confucius, who stressed weiji (learning for oneself) as the ideal.

De Bary construes the Neo-Confucian—read Zhu Xi (1130–1200 C.E.)—emphasis on zide (getting it oneself) as a latter-day manifestation of the same heuristic instinct, an instinct which he identifies as both individualist and liberal. In a recent collection of his essays, de Bary justifies the application of these modern, Western terms because they correspond to what he finds in the native texts:

The question of the individual in Confucian thought is one I stumbled into some years ago while pursuing other lines of inquiry, historical and political, which, it turned out, could only be dealt with adequately by addressing first the problem of the Neo-Confucian self. In doing so, I found myself using terms like “individualism” or “liberalism,” not because of any predisposition to read Western values into Chinese thought but because, against my original assumptions and preconceptions, certain resemblances could not be ignored.

De Bary is not just concerned with providing an adequate description of Chinese thought, of course. He is also engaged in building a connection back to the world of the Neo-Confucians, a world whose culture was vibrant, innovative, and changing, and full of the very values that Westerners hold dear. It is the resemblance of the Western liberal self and the lixue disciple who discovers the meaning of a passage, for himself, zide, that is remarkable. All men, it seems, are brothers. Just as with classicists like Zhu Xi, who explicitly identified a responsibility to seize the moment of the past before it disappeared and to preserve it through transmission, de Bary, inspired by the humanity of ancient example, commends himself to the task of its recollection:

Today no people can look to their own traditions alone for this kind of learning and understanding, all the more so could the Confucians earlier. The latter at least understood the need for dialogue and discussion as essential to “advancing the Way,” even though they were unable to sustain it, much less broaden it, in the given circumstances. Now the time has come for us to extend and expand the discourse, as a dialogue with the past, with other cultures, and even with future generations, who cannot speak for themselves but whose fate is in our hands.

Arguments such as these, with their message of the enduring relevance of medieval Chinese beliefs and of the continuing vitality of a tradition deemed dead earlier in this century, are inspiring in that they offer proof of the vitality of the ru tradition of scholar-officials. Nevertheless, such accounts also reveal much about the desire of the interpreter. All interpretations and translations involve intention, and accounts of ru or Confucianism have been no exception. De Bary’s account of the contemporary relevance of Zhu Xi’s thought, then, is in this sense his own and not Zhu Xi’s construction. Although such a construction may rescue lixue and Zhu from the contempt in which they were held by early-twentieth-century Chinese nationalists, what the account salvages should not be taken as simply restoring the tradition it purports to uphold.

Though we can never entirely restore the true principles of lixue, Neo-Confucianism is significant because of the demonstration of its contemporary relevance. After more than thirty years, de Bary’s manufacture of an individualist, humane, and liberal Neo-Confucian tradition remains controversial, perhaps because it often seems to claim to be above intellectual debate, to have some special claim to authenticity or truth.

But even those who attempt to avoid claims of authenticity and truth find it difficult. In Thinking through Confucius, David Hall and Roger Ames have provided an intriguing construction of Confucius through an “experimental dialogue” in comparative philosophy. While the authors make it clear that their endeavor to reveal the thinking of Confucius requires the translation of concepts across differing cultural contexts and times, they do not see that their enterprise is in fact fabricated. Their book, however, is a significant rejoinder both to previous contemporary interpreters/translator of Confucian texts such as de Bary and Wing-tsit Chan and to the Anglo-European philosophical tradition.

Their result in thinking through Confucius is, first, an understanding of the principal issues in his thought and, second, the application of his “take” on these issues to a reshaping of the philosophical premises that ground our way of thinking in the West. In announcing their comparative interpretive advantage, Hall and Ames state:

We are convinced that our exercise in cross-cultural anachronism will provide us a truer account of Confucius for the following reason: current Western understandings of Confucius are the consequence of the mostly unconscious importation of philosophical and theological assumptions into primary translations that have served to introduce Con-
fucius’ thinking to the West. These assumptions are associated with the mainstream of the Anglo-European classical tradition. In point of fact, as we shall demonstrate directly, these assumptions have seriously distorted the thinking of Confucius. Our thinking through Confucius therefore must be in its initial phases an unthinking of certain of the interpretive categories that by now have come to be presupposed in understanding Confucius.27

The authors’ objective is an accurate linguistic and conceptual translation; thus, they presume it is possible hermeneutically to recover the “true” Confucius. By considering their account of Confucius to be truer than preceding ones, Ames and Hall fall victim to the Anglo-European philosophical paradigm of commensurability against which Richard Rorty, whom they hold in high regard, has so eloquently written.28 The consequences of this thought experiment are the elevation of Confucius to world-philosophical significance and a message of Deweyan moral rebuke to contemporary Western philosophy—philosophy has no meaning if ripped from its moorings in public life.

Looking back over this high- and low-culture catalogue of the imaginative constructions of Confucius/Kongzi and Confucianism/ru it may seem obvious which are fabricated and which are fictitious. Surely Confucius was not the author of the platitudes he is portrayed as creating in Gary Larson’s cartoon. Nor did the Confucius of Warring States [479–221 B.C.E.] China appear with the darkened skin and white tobes of a man from the Levant (least of all because his wearing white would suggest that he was in mourning) or the headpiece of an ancient Egyptian ruler, as he does in the iconography of Freemason orientalism. The Confucius of these two imaginations is an invention, more obvious, perhaps, to our eye than the views of a Beijing businessman or the thoughts of the teeming throngs at the national shrine of China’s Zhongguo wenhua de daren, “the great man of Chinese culture.”

We are right to consider these as examples of a commoditizing manufacture of Confucius, and believe that postmodern Confucianism, de Bary’s Neo-Confucianism, and Ames and Hall’s rethought Confucius are less so. The latter examples are, however, no less manufactured, regardless of claims of continuity with the tradition as handed down from Zhu Xi, or of the contention that one offers an “understanding of Confucius’s thinking.” Each of these interpretations is a metaphorical wager on coherence and succeeds insofar as it is able to command contemporary assent.

Thus, in juxtaposing these very different cultural phenomena, low-brow and high-brow, as examples of invention, I am suggesting that they are functionally similar. They are reminiscent, moreover, of a plasticity evidenced by Kongzi himself in antiquity. Throughout Chinese history, Kongzi and the name assumed by the followers inspired by his example, ru, ran a similar gamut of parodic extremes that may be observed in native texts from the pre-Qin [579–221 B.C.E.] to the Tang [618–906 C.E.] eras.

Ru: Storied Truth and Symbolic Plasticity

For early followers of the ru tradition, Kongzi was the sage exemplar of a proper life. Praise of the sort uttered by Mengzi [Mencius] when recalling the virtues of Kongzi, Be Yi, and Yi Yin [all sage heroes] is neither uncharacteristic nor inordinately fulsome: “All were wise men of antiquity. I as yet have been unable to follow their path; still, what I desire is to emulate Kongzi . . . . Since the birth of humanity there has been no one like Kongzi.”29 Kongzi and ru, however, much as they were honored by such latter-day followers, were ridiculed and denounced by contemporary adversaries. Indeed, ru and Kongzi traveled widely through the imaginations of other literary traditions, as hypocrites, shallow thinkers, liars, and panders. We find them in the texts of adversarial groups like the Daoist, Mohist, Legalist, Eclectic, and Utilitarian schools, where they stand for sentiments consistent with, as well as contrary to, those expressed in the Lunyu.30 From the frequent citations of Kongzi and ru in traditions antithetical to them it is clear that in the late Warring States period, Kongzi and ru functioned as tropes of excessive ritualism, or traditionalism.

By calling them “tropes” I mean that they were figurative expressions of diverse symbolic character and a certain authority, as shown in this passage from the philosophical Daoist Zhuangzi, typical in its treatment of Kongzi and ru as coded concepts:

On water it is most convenient to travel by boat, on dry land in a carriage; if you were to try to push a boat on land because it goes well on water, you could last out the age without traveling an inch. Are not the past and the present [Kongzi’s] water and his dry land? And Zhou and Lo his boat and carriage? At the present day, to have an urge to get the institutions of Zhou running in Lu is like pushing a boat on dry land, there’s no result for all your labor, you’re certain to bring disaster on yourself.31

Inspired by the morbidity of ru ritual service at funerals, these same adversaries used grave robbing as a grisly metaphor for the ru’s obsession with antiquity, as in this memorable vignette:

Ru, taking up the [Book of] Odes and the [Record of the] Rites, rob graves. The big ru announces to his subordinates: “In the East, the day begins, how is the work going?” The little ru reply: "We have yet to remove the grave clothes, but there’s a pearl in his mouth!” . . . [They] push back his
sidelocks, pull down his beard, and then one ru, using a metal gimlet, pries into his chin, [and] delicately draws open the jaws, never injuring the pearl in his mouth." Kongzi and ru, as tropes, could be worked to denote as well as to lionize, and thus were instantly recognizable to aficionado and adversary.

The effectiveness of this trope, like that of any other, depended entirely on the reader's familiarity with Kongzi and ru—an obvious presumption of the Zhuangzi authors. And from the frequency of their appearance in these texts it is evident that Kongzi and ru were very well known, although their significance was not uniform. At the same time that Kongzi was bandied about in this way by rhetorical proponents and opponents, cycles of stories grew around him that were repeated generation after generation and came to resemble a transmission text inscribed on the memories of a raconteur and audience. A collected body of lore attested before the Han era included stories of Kongzi's magical birth, the heroic deeds of his father (Shu Liang He), the travail of his mother, the illicit nature of his parents' union, the physical deformity of his older brother, and tales relating to his later travels among the kingdoms of the Zhan'guo era. Indeed, fragments of this legend cycle can be found in a number of such early literary works as Mozi, Lushi changju, Mengzi, Yunzi changju, Lunyu, Huainanzi, and Zhuangzi and were authoritatively assembled in the first official biography of Kongzi in the Shiji.

In the book of Mozi, for example, there is an entire chapter, "Fei ru," or "Contra-ru," one of many disputations of principal rhetorical categories. Here ru ritual obsession, extolled in their texts as devotion to gu (antiquity), is represented as self-serving and, like the Zhuangzi passage above, this Mozi text declares that the real motivation for ru insistence on elaborate funerals and a three-year mourning rite is not the preservation of ancient practice, but the collection of revenue. Near the end of this "Contra-ru" chapter, Kongmou, or "So-and-so Kong," appears with increasing frequency, usually in connection with the telling of a tale that we also know from the ru story traditions. In these instances Kongmou is a narrative marker, and it identifies the single figure from Lunyu lore, Kongzi, as a congeneric invention of the era. By comparison of these two tellings of the same story, we can observe the semiotics of Kongzi as trope and glimpse some of the symbolic plasticity common to our postmodern culture.

In a well-known account from Lunyu 15.1 that depicts the fledgling fellowship on the edge of extinction in the course of one of their many sojourns following Kongzi's exile from his native kingdom of Lu, the ru narrative reads:

In Chen when provisions ran out, the followers became so sick that they were unable to stand upright. Zilu approached him [Kongzi] and said querculously: "Is it proper for lordlings [junzi] to be reduced to straitened circumstances [as we are]" He said, "A lordling can endure hardship; however, it is the lesser man who, when subjected [to such hardship], dissolves." Now compare this passage with a parallel account from the Mozi, where the tale of ru destitution is told with the same raw material worked up to a very different effect:

Once, So-and-so Kong was destitute between Cai and Chen having only vegetable soup without rice to eat. [After] ten days, Zilu roasted a pig for him. So-and-so Kong did not inquire from whence the meat came and simply ate. [Zilu, then] took a person's clothing and bartered it for wine. So-and-so Kong did not inquire from whence the libation came and simply drank. [Yet when] Ai Gong [Duke Ai of Lu] received Kongzi, Kongzi refused to sit on a mat that was not properly placed and would not eat meat that was not properly sliced. Zilu approached [him] and asked: Why the obverse of what was done between Chen and Cai? So-and-so Kong replied, "Come, I will tell you. Then our objective was to remain alive [while] today our objective is righteousness."

Using the same tale, the Mozi passage emphasizes a situational ethic and lampoons the application of an uncompromising ethical standard that could result in death with honor. In this account, two separate events are condensed into the one retelling to achieve an effect of insincerity and falsehood. This "Fei ru" chapter of the Mozi was assembled circa 375 B.C.E.—at least a century following the putative death of Kongzi. Therefore, it is significant that its account would so accurately reproduce the story from the Lunyu. As a narrative device "Kongmou" testifies to the existence of a larger collection of stories or at least of multiple renderings of the same story.

In fact, portions of the Lunyu and later hagiographic works like the School Sayings of Kongzi (Kongzi jiazu) and the Kong Transmission Record (Kong congzi), though replete with remarks attributed to Kongzi, were nonetheless produced from just such a wider, popular lore. In other words, in native texts Kongzi was not simply the ancestral teacher of classically educated followers, called ru, as Han redactors believed and as we have conventionally assumed. Indeed, by the Tang dynasty he was a well-worn tool of narrative invention, in virtually the same manner that Emperor Yang of the Sui (589–617 C.E.) served as a protagonist in the historical romances of the seventeenth-century Chinese novel. Thus Kongzi appeared, as Arthur Waley has shown, as a protagonist in satirical and even pornographic popular ballads, some of which have been preserved in the graffiti of Dunhuang. In his study of Chinese scholars and the state in the Tang, David McMullen...
notes that Kongzi was the focus of “an official cult of satire and ribaldry” associated with court entertainment by the mid-ninth century. Moreover, in a dramatic example of the loosening of sectarian ties, Kongzi, along with his most cherished disciple, Yan Hui, entered into popular Buddhist cults as a bodhisattva (pusa), a compassionate semi-divine being—an honor visited most recently on the late Chairman Mao Zedong (1893–1976).

As we see from these and many other examples, the name “Kongzi” may recur over time, but the individual it designates is anything but consistent or continuous; the history of Kongzi, like that of Confucius, is one of differential invention and local manufacture.

In Defense of a Title: The Meaning of “Manufacture”

A question that I have deliberately hesitated in answering is, why “manufacture”? There are many reasons why “manufacture” is an appropriate term for describing the processes of conceptual invention with which I am concerned and of which we have already considered some examples, past and present.

“Manufacture” conventionally means “made by hand.” It derives from the Latin “manusfactus,” literally, “hand-made.” And “handmade” is an apt term for a tradition, that discrete transmission of custom, habit, stories, and the rights to the telling of them. In this way, “manufacture,” with its connotation of “many-handedness,” captures the palimpsestic labors of a cumulative tradition of local knowledge of rite, text, and the strategies for using them that we associate with Confucianism.

Although “manufacture” was widely used in the West in the eighteenth century because of the increasing definition of industrial work as manufacture, the word first appeared in the final decades of the sixteenth century, when it was used to describe a product of “the artificer’s hand”—an image formed by human agency, rather than something naturally occurring. Less than two decades later, two continents away, Chinese provincial officials were considering granting several Jesuit fathers in Macao the right to build their first mission in southern China.

“Manufacture” functions as a temporal marker in a cultural chronology that, in defining me (for example) as an interpreter living in the era of industrial civilization, identifies my place in relation to the texts of the works and lives I have elected to study. I am a latecomer to these texts, but then so were the Jesuits in studying Kongzi, and as Kongzi was in studying the Zhou.

But more than chronology and handmadeness favor my use of “manufacture”; it is the doubleness of its meaning that makes it suitable for disclosing the construction of communities of sense that emerges from these texts. The early meaning of “manufacture” emerged from the interstice between some-

thing made by hand and the natural object. What was made by hand was, ipso facto, not God-given. Such an artifact, while it was not natural, was no less real than nature. The significance of “manufacture,” like so many other words, comes from the ambiguity of its cognate associations, in this case from the slippery distinction between natural and artificial. We will see in each of the chapters below that ambiguity is the most prominent characteristic of both Confucianism and ru, and it is responsible, moreover, for invention.

The equivocal significance of manufacture as both “made” and “made up” recalls the ambiguity of “fiction,” from the Latin fingere, to fashion, to fabricate, or to form. Yet such emphasis on “fiction’s” madness does not prevent it from having the connotation of “false,” for fingere is also the root of “feign.” In the popular consciousness, fiction is work that is feigned in the same way that “manufactured” refers to something made up. In the specific context of Kongzi’s celebrated remark (Lunyu 7.1) “Shu er buzuo” ([I] receive but do not invent), the ambiguity of our modern term is also evident, as Kongzi implies that it is better to accept what is handed down than to make something new. Perhaps madness always bears the disparaging significance of “false.” Certainly, it is easy to see how the sense of “manufacture” as fraudulently or fictitiously invented derives from the fact that the products of such fabrication are manmade and thus in a sense unnatural. As the term increasingly has been glossed with reference to modern industry, the use of mechanical power, the assembly line, the division of labor, and even robotics, the unnaturalness of its resonance is very pronounced for us.

“Manufacture” appears in this book usually in the sense of fabricating from raw material, that is, from culture: what we receive as categories for interpreting the world and what confronts us in everyday life that must be shaped in accord with what is received. The product of this conjuncture is manufacture. By “manufactured” I mean created, invented, fabricated, each of which is consistent with the Chinese word zuo, which they are meant to represent. The gloss of zuo as “invent” fits the general theme of this book; yet it does not stray from traditional definitions such as Xu Shen’s reading, zuo: qi ye, “to start.” Furthermore, the meaning of zuo in passages from Zhou bronze inscriptions and from the Shi jing (Book of Odes), “to make,” “to open up,” “to erect,” “sprouting,” is unmistakably inaugural or foundational. Thus “invent” works as a gloss for zuo. Given that Kongzi himself has been transmitted through invention, it is necessary for us to preserve in our own translation something of the difference and similarity of these meanings. “Manufacture,” I think, accomplishes this with an impressive linguistic economy, and my use of the term is motivated by the sense of “fiction” as an enterprise of forming significance.

I should point out that I do not consider such fictiveness problematic in
the way that, for example, Gu Jiegang (1893–1960) did seventy years ago when he followed a path pioneered by Cui Shu (1740–1816) and discovered that Chinese antiquity was intricately and reiteratively layered by the inventions of later scholars. Of course, it is difficult to escape the associations, common in our day and emerging in Gu’s, linking fiction with the untrue, but I insist on making the ambiguity more pronounced by emphasizing the productive fictiveness of “manufacture.” Both “Confucianism” and ru are ambiguous terms, and when I speak of them as manufactured entities I exploit the ambiguity of “manufacture”—an ambiguity contained in the Lunyu’s use of zuo—because the meaning of the term can be determined only in the context of what is being made and how it is being made. Yet I do not claim that there is no meaning, no real world, no real past. Concepts are not endlessly fungible. There are lines within which sense may be constructed and beyond which sense is lost. It is a dialectic of works and lives, or as we will soon learn, a dialogue between texts and interpretive communities that is responsible for the charting of these lines.

My use of the gerund “manufacturing” in the title of this book is intended to accentuate the essential and continuing conceptual processes by which ru and Confucianism have been made and remade. “Manufacturing” is used to stress the action of manufacture so as to distance this project from any attempt to characterize it as simply another meditation on a dead tradition. “Manufacturing,” thus, suggests that this corporate enterprise of making sense of China by way of Confucianism continues. Though as this three-hundred-year-old tradition called Confucianism continues by reinvention today in some of the ways discussed above, it does so, some argue, with an implicit sense of an earlier “failure,” the failure of Confucianism to endure as the socioethic of the Chinese people authorized by a living dynasty.

To speak of the failure of Confucianism is, however, to betray a lack of understanding of tradition. Moreover, such talk announces our distance from the ground we aim to represent. In fact this sense of Confucianism’s failure is quite prevalent among Western and Chinese scholars whether they are defending or attacking it. Such fatalism also reflects the doctrinal persistence of the denigrative interpretation of ru and the dynastic state as decaying obstructions of modernity, which was first put forward by student nationalist advocates of “new culture” in 1915 and which was a salient concern of those demonstrating against the inequitable terms of the Treaty of Versailles in Tian’anmen Square on May 4, 1919. In this May Fourth Movement, as it came to be called, ru and Kongzi were singled out as cultural symbols of death, prominent figures of the past that had long outlived their usefulness and which an iconoclastic generation in pursuit of enlightenment was challenged to destroy, as summed up in the slogan “pohuai Kongjia dian” (Smash the shop of the Kong family). The virtual synonymy of ru, Kongzi, and China’s imperial past in this critique provided an effective framing device for generational revolt, but there is little reason for us to continue to subscribe to such an indiscriminate interpretation today.

There should be no defensiveness to tone in our account of earlier manifestations of the practices we have elected to call Confucian. Reiterative invention of the concept ru and the communities represented by it throughout Chinese history, or the more recent multiple mutations of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism show plainly that tradition is a process of constant reinvention. Thus, to take one moment in this process, say the ru scholarly practice of the last years of the nineteenth century, as emblematic of the whole ensures misunderstanding. While I have considerable doubts as to the representative value of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism as interpretive fictions, doubts very similar to those expressed by Roger Ames and David Hall, I cannot subscribe to the notion, popular with some, including them, that Confucianism “failed” in the early twentieth century.

Lastly, through the use of the terms “manufacture” and “manufacturing,” I seek a vocabulary that, while essentially a contemporary Western one, still might be used to describe the cultural processes, not of our era but of an earlier one, and yet functionally homologous with our own. “Manufacture” is intended to serve as metaphor of interpretation and of the construal of sense. It is meant to describe the reiterative reproduction of meaning within the native tradition, ru, before the widespread use of industrial machinery, and, if effective, to join past and present, native and foreign on common metaphorical and similar cultural ground.

The appropriateness of the metaphor will be determined in the course of the book’s argument, which proceeds in two parts. Part 1, “The Manufacture of Confucius and Confucianism,” analyzes the foreign manufacture of Chinese identity, and part 2, “Making Sense of Ru and Making Up Kongzi,” examines the native manufacture of national Chinese identity. For both, the lines of manufacture draw from ru. I explore two moments at which Confucius/Kongzi and the tradition identified with him were reinterpreted, made important, yet made to conform to the specific needs and desires that prevailed among a community of interpreters at the moment these entities were fashioned. The moments are (1) the sixteenth-century Jesuit encounter with the Chinese and with the tradition that they deemed Confucianism, and which has been known ever since in the West by that name, and (2) the early-twentieth-century encounter of Chinese with themselves through the intermediary of the West, in which efforts to define and “organize a national Chinese heritage” [zhengji guogu] produced critical reflection on the meaning of ru, in the form of a Chinese equivalent (more or less) of Confucianism.

Chapters 1 and 2, “The Jesuits, Confucius, and the Chinese,” and “There and Back Again: The Jesuits and Their Texts in China and Europe,” examine
the fictive roots of Confucianism. The inquiry is conducted through historical criticism and analysis of the Western inventions "Confucius," "Confucian," and "Confucianism," as these emerged in the texts—letters, catechisms written in Chinese, memoirs, a history of the China Mission, translations of and commentary on the Sishu (Four Books), and a monumental summary of Chinese culture called the Confucius Sinarum Philosophus—of a century and a half of Jesuit life in China. These two chapters pose the question of reality and representation in the specific context of the Jesuit encounter with China. They treat the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century conjunction of European and Chinese cultures as an instance in which the adequacy of indigenous categories of thought (Chinese and Western) to a novel situation were tested.

The result of this experimentation was the successful representation of Christian monotheism, using the native language of ru restorationism, and the invention of Confucianism. The Jesuit invention also reveals the same mechanisms of canon construction and textual manipulation that were so critical to the ru tradition while displaying an essential tension between universal message and sectarian defense. The opening chapters of this book demonstrate our contemporary conceptual indebtedness to the early Jesuits while permitting us to distinguish the processes critical to the invention of any tradition.

In part 2, I evaluate the extent of indigenous reflection on ru to determine (1) how Chinese represented themselves in it, and (2) how in so representing themselves they reasserted the Jesuit metonymic equivalence of ru and Chinese. In chapter 3, "Ancient Texts, Modern Narratives: Nationalism, Archaism, and the Reinvention of Ru," I show that it was only with Western economic expansion and the decline of Manchu political and cultural authority early in this century that the normative scholar-official definition of ru, through which the Jesuits manufactured their own native identity, was replaced by a conjectural history of socioreligious evolution in which ru were defined as priests.

Unlike the normative conception that was fashioned by Sima Qian (145–89 B.C.E.) and Liu Xin (43 B.C.E–23 C.E.) and that presumed ru were the congzheng, "the followers" who took Kongzi as their zongshi, "ancestral teacher/commander," this conjecture, the product of an impressionistic philology by Zhang Binglin (Taian, 1868–1936), established a pre-Kongzi meaning of ru that was linked to the patrimonial theocracies of China’s Bronze Age. The bulk of chapter 3 and all of chapter 4 are dedicated to a critical presentation of the two twentieth-century interpretations of ru—that of Zhang and another by Hu Shi (1891–1962)—where the emphasis will be on the specific conditions between 1900 and 1934 that inspired the differing developmental histories each scholar constructed of ru. In these two chap-

ters I am concerned as well with how their combined accounts of an ancient history of ru achieved the status of a master fiction for the Chinese and for us. So persuasive was this "take" on ru that most subsequent interpretations took this account as their fundamental premise.

Chapter 4, "Particular Is Universal: Hu Shi, Ru, and the Chinese Transcendence of Nationalism," shows that scholarly acceptance of Hu's and Zhang’s explanatory fiction had much to do with the former’s systematic representation of the history of Chinese and Western civilization as distinct moments in a unitary process of spiritual/material evolution. In this context, I will demonstrate how Zhang Binglin's effort to identify and then employ the plural meanings of ru as moments in a narrative of evolutionary change from antiquity to the present provided the raw material that Hu Shi worked up into a cosmopolitan vision of the world's cultural evolution from a messianic past to a secular present. Such a vision was uniquely akin to the ecumenical understanding of sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Jesuits, who saw in China compelling evidence for the world’s spiritual unity in God.

Most striking in Hu Shi's interpretation was, as we will see, the way he read the evolution of ru by means of the history of Christianity's emergence from the Judaic cult of the Perushim, or Pharisees, and in turn glossed this Christian history with respect to the generation of Kongzi's teachings from a vestigial cult of Shang religious observance. The Jesuits had insisted that Christianity and ru were highly compatible but offered little more than faith as proof. After the questions raised in part 1 about reality and representation with respect to the Jesuit construction of ru, it is ironic that Hu Shi would return us to these same questions from the native point of view, in his insistence that only Christianity provided the most appropriate symbolic fund for the meaningful interpretation of the episodic manufacture of ru.

Acknowledging that Western and Chinese imaginings of ru are indeed indissociable, the book concludes with a reprise of the specific impulses that conditioned these separate instances of manufacture—seventeenth-century Jesuit and twentieth-century Chinese—and a reflection on contemporary prospects for the realization of Hu Shi's effort to establish a fundamental identity of East and West on the basis of a shared pattern of civilizational growth.

The chronology of this study may seem rather odd in the sense that if my interest is in determining what ru was made of, then I should begin with the earliest texts in which there is a record of this term. Yet it should be obvious from the above discussion that my interest is not in what ru in fact may have been, largely because it is impossible to "authenticate" such a notion. My real interest is in what ru and Confucianism mean for us, and thus I am concerned with setting forth a reasonable historical conjecture of these two
conceptual inventions. Given that neither ru nor Confucianism was ever one thing, I have tried to show how the plural interpretive constructions of the Jesuits and certain twentieth-century Chinese intellectuals in the names of these two surprisingly interchangeable entities have provided a uniform representation of ru as a secularized religion that continues to influence our comprehension of this term.

The interpretation advanced in this book is merely an interpretation, and so no argument is made for the exclusiveness of my claims. The readings consequent upon my engagement with texts of an earlier time are, like Hans-Georg Gadamer’s understanding of hermeneutics, “horizontal.” I have obviously benefited from previous readings of the same literature, and this may be evident from my interpretations of them. If I differ from received interpretations or violate conventional readings, I do not denigrate them. Instead I have assimilated them, gathering such accounts into what I hope is a wider spectrum of understanding. Therefore, while my work is intended to stand alone, my findings are significant only in the context of a horizon of interpretations manufactured out of previous encounters with these texts. In this respect, my work is just the most recent inscription on a palimpsest that preceded my arrival by a number of centuries.

Thus, this book is not a defense of, nor an attack on, Confucianism. Rather, it is a defense of the creative impulses that have sustained centuries of invention in its name and that of its native equivalent, ru. Some may find this reading unconventional, even provocative, although the methods that enable my reading are conventional, even traditional. My aim is, rather, to draw historians of China, particularly intellectual historians and philosophers like myself, into a conversation that evaluates an implicit faith in our own interpretive conventions and in a continuity of Chinese culture made immemorial by us in the two-thousand-year marriage of Confucianism and the Chinese imperium. Simply, I ask for a conceptual reckoning that proceeds along two distinct but interwoven lines—the imagination of the interpreter in search of coherence, and the indigenous culture out of which the interpreter, foreign or native, hones a narrative. Proceeding in this way we will lose little but learn much, above all, about ourselves.

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28 Introduction

PART ONE

THE MANUFACTURE

OF CONFUCIUS AND

CONFUCIANISM

Verum et factum convertuntur.  
[The true and the made are convertible.]  
—Giambattista Vico

What you have as heritage,  
Take now as task;  
For thus you will make it your own.  
—Goethe, Faust
CHAPTER 1

THE JESUITS,

CONFUCIUS, AND

THE CHINESE
"He [Cook] is a god." But then recognition is a kind of re-cognition: the event is inserted in a preexisting category, and history is present in current action. The irruption of Captain Cook from beyond the horizon was a truly unprecedented event, never seen before. But by thus encompassing the existentially unique in the conceptually familiar, the people embed their present in the past. — *Marshall Sahlins*

In ancient times they followed the natural law as faithfully as in our lands, and for 1,500 years this people was little given to idols, and those they adored were not such a wretched crowd as our Egyptians, Greeks and Romans adored, but a lot who were very virtuous and to whom were attributed very many good deeds. In fact, in the books of the *literati* which are the most ancient and of the greatest authority, they give no other adoration than to heaven and earth and the Lord of them. When we examine closely all these books we discover in them very few things contrary to the light of reason and very many in conformity with it. — *Matteo Ricci*

By the time the Italian Jesuits Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) had established the first Christian mission of the modern era in China in September 1583, Zhongni, Kong Qiu, or Kongzi had been dead for over two millennia, but "Confucius" was about to be born. He was born, in a manner similar to that which Marshall Sahlins describes in his account of Captain Cook's incarnation as a Maori god, that is, in an instant reflexive translation of what was strange into a preexistent understanding. Cook was decidedly a man, not a god, yet he and his retinue from the British Royal Navy were not at first comprehensible to the Maori as men. If not men, then they were, says Sahlins, gods, thus Cook the man was appropriated as Lono, the god of fertility.

For sixteenth-century Chinese, the native entity, Kongzi, was a man-god, a *shengren*, who was the object of an imperial cult, the ancient ancestor of a celebrated rhetorical tradition, and a symbol of an honored scholarly fraternity (the *ru*, or "Confucians") represented by a phalanx of officials who staffed every level of the imperial bureaucracy. But before the eyes of clerics newly arrived from the West he appeared as prophet, holy man, and saint (*santo*).

In Jesuit hands the indigenous Kongzi was resurrected from distant symbolism into life, heroically transmuted and made intelligible as "Confucius," a spiritual confrere who alone among the Chinese—so their version had it—had preached an ancient gospel of monotheism now forgotten. As the Italian fathers imagined him, this Chinese saint and his teachings on the One God, *Shangdi*, had presaged their arrival. It was with this presumption that they undertook a restoration of what they termed his "true learning" (zhengxue). In this way, Ruggieri, Ricci, and several generations of accommodationist fathers construed Kongzi through a timeless vertical relation with divinity, re-cognizing him as "Confucius" while inventing themselves, qua *ru*, as native defenders of the sage’s "first Ru" (*xianru*) doctrine.

This Confucius was more than the cognitive adjustment of Sahlins's Maori and more than translation. It was a symbol manufactured by the early Jesuits
in the course of their adaptation to China. Through their invention, these first missionaries overcame the cultural strangeness of late imperial China and, more surprisingly, within a decade of life among the Chinese, were able to represent themselves to the natives as the orthodox bearers of the native Chinese tradition, the ru. In the name of “the true learning” and its master, Confucius, Ricci, Ruggieri, and others were reinaugurated as a Chinese fundamentalist sect that preached a theology of Christian/Confucian syncretism. In turn, the Chinese accepted the fathers as ru and even referred to them, in some cases, as shengren mênxia (followers of the holy men).

Today the term “Confucius” and its derivative “Confucian” endure as the principal symbols of China, Chineseness, and tradition. For some time, Confucius has been seen as a legacy left by the Jesuits, yet scholars have been unable or disinclined to identify an author or text that would confirm the presumption. The figure was assuredly the Jesuits’, but it was the second-order reinvention of “Confucius” in Europe, not merely its local invention by the Sino-Jesuit community, that made the term so potent. Our Confucius is in fact a product of both these moments of invention. Although it is proper to acknowledge the Jesuits’ role in inventing Confucius, in doing so we tend to obscure the other historical conditions of its invention and reinvention, and thus overlook the term’s differential functioning in two separate textual communities. This chapter queries this conflation of the two figures and begins by questioning the invention “Confucius.”

It is not my objective to ascertain when and by whom “Confucius” was originally uttered, principally because there is no historically verifiable first use. Instead, I am concerned with the representational mechanics associated with the Jesuit strategy for their mission in China. Specifically, I wish to explore how they, as foreigners, were able to construct a native complex of reference according to which they made sense of both themselves and the Chinese. Secondly, I am interested in the manner in which a certain conceptual product of the local Jesuit conversion project, “Confucius,” was received and interpreted in Europe within a collateral, universalizing complex of reference in a fashion contradictory to the intentions of the fathers, but productive of a rich array of fetishes bearing the aura of Chineseness.

What runs through both of these concerns is the fictive character of Confucius, examination of which inevitably opens a window onto the life of the community that created it and onto another one abroad in Europe, which reconceived it under very different cultural circumstances. In chapter 2 I will consider the consequences of the Jesuit assimilation in both China and Europe by examining the difference in the meanings of the missionary “Confusius” (the earliest Jesuit spelling of the name) and the “Confucius” of wide Continental celebrity with which we are more familiar.

However, in this chapter the focus will be the ecclesiastical community in China. This community was the cultural matrix from which a certain “Confusius” was brought forth; it remains the least well understood of the protagonists in this story, having been portrayed only as a mediator between historically given communities. But the first Jesuits were a self-constituting intellectual community, whose local identity was obtained through a lengthy process of translating themselves into native reference while translating Chinese texts into the language of their faith. Their translation was a complex negotiation of identity on native terrain in which they were assiduous Chinese while also helping themselves to the multiple symbolic resources offered by the culture that they quickly made their own.

Through study of this Jesuit enclave and its “engaged representation” of the Chinese, we can reconstruct the making of a tradition, learning how communities of persons create communities of texts, all interrelated and mutually elucidating. We begin by retracing the route taken by those unusually pious priests who, in seeking to make themselves Chinese, constructed a path that for more than four centuries interpreters have used to cross over into China.

Cultural Wilderness and the Reach of Jesuit Imagination

A traveller who has lost his way, should not ask, “Where am I?” What he really wants to know is, Where are the other places? He has got his own body, but he has lost them.—Alfred North Whitehead

To arrive in south China in the last quarter of the sixteenth century must have been disorienting, as well as difficult and dangerous for Michele Ruggieri, Matteo Ricci, and the other missionaries who accompanied them on their respective journeys there in 1579 and 1582. While “China,” as the Italian fathers called it, was not uncharted territory, it remained a wilderness for them, a place of fanciful European dreams and a spur to the imagination of adventurers and cartographers. Fathers like Ruggieri and Ricci who requested service in the yet-to-be-founded China Mission, elected to undertake a kind of boundary exploration, devoting themselves to pacing and measuring the contours of the line between this wilderness and their own civilization. The passage from Lisbon to Goa and on to Macao took at best one year, but there was always a considerable risk of maritime disaster en route. In their transit to China, the Jesuit fathers endured a lengthy apprenticeship in the unknown to arrive at a tiny outpost of European civilization on the tip of China’s southern coast. Macao was a fitting location from which to take the measure of the vast wilderness to the north. But it was strange nevertheless, and the largely European character of its public works could not neutralize its strangeness.
These circumstances must have been quite unsettling for the two men for, unlike many of their fellow residents in this polyglot entrepôt, they were not to return home soon. Macao was for them a way station propaedeutic to a greater enterprise, of which neither the perils nor the fruits could be known, only imagined. They were also virtually on their own. Their zeal to immerse themselves in the culture of China distinguished them from the other missionaries in Goa as well as their predecessors in the Mission of the Indies, who, unlike Ricci and Ruggieri, resisted the impulse to go native, preferring instead to preach in their own vernaculars with the assistance of local converts.5

On several counts, then, the experience of these two missionaries was one of cultural dislocation. They were isolated in Macao, where few would hear their message. More important, they lacked a language to convey what they could preach so effortlessly on the streets of Rome. To give voice to themselves, "the fathers simply wrote themselves into existence. From the records they have left, they were engaged, it would seem, in a feverish self-inscription. During their first years, they generated, in short order, a great volume of letters, a Latin catechism, and a world map."

They wrote in Chinese, Latin, and Portuguese,6 and between 1581 and 1586, there seemed no limit to their curiosity. In a letter of October 1581, three years after Michele Ruggieri arrived in Macao, Father Pero Gomes, another of the early missionaries, reports: "Father Rogerio [Ruggieri] and I who have been here these months, are employing our time in composing a brief history of the beginning of the world which will be used at the same time as a Christian doctrine and this in the form of a dialogue which will be translated into the Chinese language."7 That same year, Ruggieri completed a catechism and a version of the lives of the saints, both written in Chinese with the assistance of an unnamed Chinese convert.8 They had taken three years to write. By 1585 he had become a fair calligrapher and had already written a number of poems in conscious imitation of Tang style. He also completed much of a bilingual (Portuguese/Chinese) dictionary, which when finished comprised 189 folios.9 In these years Ruggieri ranged across much of the cultural terrain before him, writing down and explaining the Chinese terms for the heavens, the twenty-four periods of the lunar cycle, and the tiangan dizhi (stems and branches) system of calculation. He identified the thirteen provinces of the empire as well as the northern and southern capitals of the Ming dynasty and even undertook preparations to assemble a globe with Chinese notations.10

The same sense of fervid acquisition of local knowledge can be seen in the first letters that Ricci and Ruggieri posted from China. These early letters were given (tirelessly) to the details of the quotidian: documenting what they could of Chinese custom, rehearsing their plans for a mission settlement in China proper, chronicling the scholarly activities of the fathers, particularly their progress in language study, and reporting on their meetings with local Chinese officials, from whom they sought permission to enter the country. Of the last of these there is frequent mention, giving any reader of the letters the impression that the Jesuits were directing extraordinary effort at carving a niche, geographic and political, for themselves and for the mission volunteers they presumed would follow. Through this significant epistolary production, they were constructing a frame of reference, situating the China that loomed before them in relation to the known world. They were, like Whitehead's lost traveler, finding the other places.

When in the autumn of 1584 these first letters were sent via Portuguese carrack to awaiting Jesuit censors, the missionaries had already acquired a tract of land near the town of Zhaoping, ninety miles west of Canton on the south bank of the Xi River, and Ruggieri was laboring over a series of maps that would be made into an atlas of China.11 At the same time his colleague, Matteo Ricci, was completing his first mappamondo, or world map (see figure 4), which proved to be quite a novelty to the Chinese eye. The mappamondo was an established genre in sixteenth-century Europe, its conventions dictated that China be placed on the eastern edge of the map, with Jerusalem in the center, and Europe in the West. Thus the mappamondo charted the new reaches of known civilization, specifically marking the borders of the unknown and wicked, and all in relation to the ancient locus of the cartographer's faith, Jerusalem.

However, Ricci's mappamondo was different. He composed it in situ to chart his relation to the civilization he had left, but his cartography was most unconventional. In fact, it violated the conventions of the mappamondo genre, as if to indicate a drift toward native perspective or to portray the degree of his cultural displacement. For on Ricci's map, Europe was in the far West. And perhaps in unconscious deference to the Johannine Chinese cultural conception of centrality (zhong), Ricci put China near the center, the Holy Land was represented in the western quadrant as an isthmus that linked Asia with North Africa.12

The first version of the map went through a series of editions and, owing to its great popularity among the Chinese, became a well-known symbol of Jesuit erudition, reiteratively redacted and reproduced over five decades by subsequent detachments of missionaries. This initial effort was obviously not made to assist Jesuit proselytism: the original map was stolen from the Zhaoping compound not long after it was finished and was then reproduced by woodblock in multiple copies for an inquisitive Chinese audience. Consequently, unlike its many subsequent revised and annotated editions, this first map was intended exclusively for Ricci and his fellow missionaries, offering a visual, documentary testament of the wide reach of God and fram-
While it did serve as a very important though very imperfect template, from which was produced a second version in the Chinese language, the *Vera et brevis exposition* was clearly of greater value to the Jesuits in coping with cultural estrangement than it was to prospective Chinese catechumens. In drafting a Latin *doctrina* of this sort at the interface of the unknown, Ruggieri and Ricci were able not simply to reaffirm but to nourish and celebrate, in the language of their beloved church, the cardinal tenets of their faith. Thus, they steeled themselves spiritually for what God had asked of them by making a declaration of faith under duress.

While adumbrating the outlines of known civilization and locating themselves within its expanding perimeter, the Jesuits were also training their imaginations on the task of reaching Chinese souls. Yet, to acquire a more profound understanding of the China they had mapped and now entered, the fathers would need more than the assistance of the two well-connected southern officials—Wang Pan (1539–1606) and Guo Zizhang (1543–1618)—who ceded them the land for the mission. As dictated by their missionary strategy of accommodation, entering the cultural horizon of the sixteenth-century Chinese required the Jesuits to seek out what was common in the experience of two very different cultures, to locate lines of filiation. These lines were ultimately manufactured—not discovered—among *ru*, or what Ricci designated “la legge de’ letterati” (the order of the literati), and whose founder Ricci called “Confutius,” a cultural patron on whose established native authority as Kongzi the Jesuits could present themselves to the Chinese. But there was nothing inevitable in the analogical choice of *ru* or in the Jesuits’ appropriation of a cultural patriarch; these were largely fortuitous consequences of an initial identification with Buddhist monasticism in which the fathers in accommodating themselves to China literally assumed the identity of Buddhist priests.

“Accommodation,” a simple term, was in fact a very complex, even treacherous, process in which the men of the Mission of the Indies reinvented themselves, in effect abandoning their identity as European priests in order to, in the words of Ruggieri, “become Chinese.” Within this bold experiment lies an understanding of the Jesuits’ meaningful representation of themselves, of Chinese culture, and of the native tradition of “la legge de’ letterati.” It is a story of accident and misapprehension in which men of two different worlds, Chinese and Jesuit, become almost indistinguishable, one becoming more like the other.

**Jesuit Accommodation: Constituting a Native Community**

The topic of “accommodation,” a term invented by twentieth-century Jesuits to refer to the sixteenth-century evangelical operation in China, has
received very thorough treatment in the works of Johannes Betray and D. E. Mungello. Rather than summarize their arguments, I will analyze accommodationism in three respects—culture, theology, and literature—in order to illustrate the manner in which the first missionaries constituted themselves as a local community. The reader, however, should recognize that these distinctions are heuristic and should try to imagine them as continuous links in a chain of personal experience, preexistent logic, and cognitive appropriation instinctually forged at the juncture of the two cultures.

In its widest application, accommodationism identifies a specific missionary method employed by the Society of Jesus to obtain, in Ricci's words, "entrauta nella Cina" (entrance into China), and to bring the Chinese into the Christian fold. The accomplishment of either of these objectives was less than routine. Before the establishment of the Zhaoqing mission, Ricci and Ruggieri's Jesuit precursors had found it especially difficult to enter China, getting no closer than the Portuguese entrepot of Macao—and that for only three months at a time. The Jesuits' own Francis Xavier (1506–1552), after spending three years catechizing and converting the Japanese to the "Sacred Faith" (San Freda), sought passage to China, convinced that "all of the religious orders and rites of the Japanese originated in China." However, before he could make further progress in propagating Christ's teachings throughout Asia, Xavier was marooned and died on the island of Shangquau—twenty leagues from the Guangdong coast—waiting to be ferried to China for a meeting with the emperor. Nevertheless, he succeeded in drafting a plan for the conversion of all of China and Japan, believing that a well-articulated imperial structure such as China's, where the emperor commanded absolute obedience, would embrace Christianity without hesitation. Through the politic judgment and direction of Father Visitor Alessandro Valignano of the Jesuit order in the East Indies (1539–1606), Xavier's plan "accommodationism" was pursued right down to the adoption by missionaries of indigenous dress and language, despite the vigorous objections of seasoned missionaries at the mission's headquarters in Goa. As unaccustomed as an earlier generation of Jesuits might have been to such a strategy, for those to whom it was to be applied—the Chinese—accommodation was not unfamiliar. As many previous foreign cultures did, upon taking up residence in China—most recently the Mongols— the Jesuits adopted a strategy that could be termed "sinification."

Sinification and the Paths of Enculturation

Accommodation was in effect a form of sinification, of becoming Chinese, and in the first sense we may treat it as a cultural phenomenon, that is, the Jesuits' acceptance of China's foreignness and acclimation to it by diligent study of language, custom, and habit. Accommodation, however, was a more thorough form of cultural assimilation than was sinification and could not have been accomplished without significant Chinese indulgence. In retrospect, what is most striking about the accommodationist endeavor is its success in generating a native Chinese identity for the fathers: they conducted themselves in a Chinese manner and were, in turn, recognized as Chinese.

In this light, "enculturation," rather than "sinification," is the more appropriate descriptive term. Over the course of this enculturation we can observe a pattern of two distinct phases: an initial phase from 1583 to 1595 in which the Jesuits carved a niche for themselves in China by assuming an identity as Buddhist monks, followed by a longer period symbolized by their second incorporation as Zhu and their subsequent engagement in doctrinal debates and polemics with Chinese scholars over the meaning of the Zhu teaching. Obviously the success of such a bold program required both a significant weakening of European cultural habits and Christian sectarian superiority as well as a distinct Chinese magnanimity.

In contrast to earlier missionaries and most of their contemporaries, the Jesuits divested themselves, as much as was practicable, of a belief in the superiority of their message. They shed as well an unrealistic expectation that conversion would follow immediately on the heels of exposure to the message of God's envoys—even if those envoys spoke only the languages of God's favored cultures and not the language of the people they hoped to convert. Their proselytizing predecessors in Goa and Macao insisted on taking full advantage of King Sebastian's Padroeado, or patronage, and limited their preaching to Portuguese residents, relying on interpreters to catechize prospective converts. The Jesuit fathers selected by Valignano, by contrast, conscientiously pursued a meticulous cultural imitation of the Chinese. The extent of their willingness to undergo acculturation in the name of conversion was nothing short of remarkable, for their colleagues at the mission headquarters in Macao were still "portugaeling" the natives, insisting that Chinese converts assume Portuguese names, wear Portuguese clothes, and practice Portuguese customs. At the strenuous urging of Valignano, the China Mission was to operate in de facto autonomy from the Jesuit community and authority at Macao. The mission was, therefore, an outpost in two senses—foreign to Chinese terrain and exceptional in theory and practice within the larger Asian missionary community. Theirs was a novel and unique experiment countenanced by very few within the order, but Ruggieri and Ricci molded themselves on the example of their revered Xavier and adopted the clothing, tonsure, and native title [heshang] of Buddhist monks, or "bonzes" [the Portuguese term].

Although Michele Ruggieri and Matteo Ricci stressed in their reports to
mission authorities and their letters to friends the similarities between Roman Catholic priests and Buddhist monks, their actual assumption of Buddhist monastic identity entailed a major shift of strategy and a significant conceptual leap. And yet, correspondence preserved in Jesuit letterbooks and published in the formative period of early contact with the Chinese suggests that the fathers were hardly discomfited by this change. We see there a priestly enthusiasm, not for merely imitating the customs of the natives, but for becoming Chinese.

In a letter to Vallignano of February 3, 1583, shortly before the founding of the mission of Zhaoqing, Ruggieri recounted the events of a critical meeting (held in December 1582) with the city's prefect and benefactor of the Jesuits, Wang Pan. At this time Wang agreed to cede property and to provide a small house in Zhaoqing for the missionaries' purposes. It was suggested that the members of the order attire themselves in the contemporary fashion of Buddhist priests. Wang, according to Father Ruggieri, "wished us to dress in the manner of their fathers, which is a little different from ours, and now we do so dress, and, in short, we have become Chinese so that we may gain the Chinese for Christ."25

Ricci's secondhand account of the same episode does not entirely corroborate that of Ruggieri. From him we learn more of Ruggieri's alacrity to adopt the appearance of bonzes, than of Wang's exhortation. In a letter posted from Macao on February 13, 1583, rather than confirm the interpretation of his senior colleague, Ricci depicts Wang Pan's recommendation somewhat differently, as an affirmative response to an offer made by Ruggieri, saying, "when the fathers said to him [Wang Pan] that they wanted to become vassals of the king of China, and that they would even change their mode of dress . . . he said that he would give them the habit of the priests of Peking, which is the most honored one could give."26

With different contemporary perspectives on what constituted the common ground of the missionaries and the Chinese, clearly there was more than one way to "become Chinese," or at least there were as many ways as there were theories on the most effective means of delivering the Christian message. Two theories of accommodation emerged from the first fifteen years of evangelical practice in southern China, with Ruggieri and Ricci as their respective proponents. The application of either theory required the Jesuits to remake themselves, in the former case as Buddhists and in the latter case as ru.

The Bridge of Buddhism

Early on, the Jesuits were impressed with China's masses of Buddhist believers. From his observations of the plurality of sectarian Buddhist practice--Tiantai, Chan, Huayan, or Jingtu—in his history of the China Mission, Ricci concluded that Buddhist monks alone numbered in the millions.27 If the objective was to preach among the people, then it may have been wise to become Buddhist monks of the Pure Land (jingtu) sect, particularly in the last decades of the Wanli era (1573–1619 C.E.), when popular Buddhism was undergoing a renaissance of sorts. Tiantai monasticism presented another accommodative possibility, insofar as the Jesuits could exploit the theological similarity between their one omniscient and ubiquitous God and this sect's notion that all phenomena are manifestations of the one mind. Given such congruences, even the skeptical Ricci at first believed the Buddhist incarnation appropriate, if not natural. Indeed, writing to Giulio Fuligatti in November 1584, Ricci takes Buddhist costume to be indexical of Chinese-ness and appears excited by the prospect of having crossed over, when he reports: "I have become a Chinaman. In our clothing, in our books, in our manners, and in everything external we have made ourselves Chinese."28

In assuming the identity of osciani (Buddhist monks) the fathers did not imitate the natives but "went native" and in a formal sense at least ceased to be priests, having exchanged their Catholic vestments for the homespun robes of Buddhist priests. Describing the change in habit to Fuligatti, Ricci made a distinction between external appearance and internal commitment, a distinction that is too facile, if not somewhat disingenuous, to have made themselves Chinese in everything external meant that Ricci and his cohort denied those very trappings that reinforced their identity as priests. Adopting the identity of the other challenged the fathers to reinvent themselves in alio esse, in another mode of existence. The testimony of Ruggieri and Ricci at the time of this image change makes clear that they were not simply stepping from one priestly world into another. Rather, they imagined Buddhist monasticism to be a vehicle for becoming Chinese. We cannot overestimate the significance of this act, particularly in light of the fact that men like Ricci were fully aware that the conclusion of their evangelical work was a meeting with their Maker, not a joyous homecoming in their native land. Their native land was now China.

The challenge for these men was to find themselves among the natives, trusting that as they traveled the path of enculturation in speech and in bearing, they would meet the Chinese coming back. The Jesuits could carry liturgy in their hearts, but liturgy must be applied, or enacted, to be meaningful. Indeed ritual enactment and liturgy are mutually reinforcing; the one will atrophy with the decline of the other. What would enactment of the liturgy mean in a world where the physical accoutrements of ecclesiastical life were nowhere in evidence? Moreover, how did the radical transformation of their physical appearance affect their internal disposition? The fundamental difference in their physical appearance and in the religious landscape

Jesuits, Confucius, and the Chinese
meant that Jesuit identity, like their liturgy, would not mean what it did at home in Europe.

This they had to negotiate among the Chinese. Having cast away the trappings of their former identity and not yet having cleared ground upon which they could enact the rites of their faith, these men were without visible support. They were victims, like anthropologists in the field, of culture shock, and shock such as this could only be overcome through invention, invention based on analogy.\textsuperscript{29} This is why the assumption of Buddhist identity was equated with Chineseness, for the Jesuits could project themselves into Chinese life on the basis of the structural homology they apprehended in Buddhist monasticism. Buddhism, thus, served as the tool with which the Jesuits first constructed themselves as Chinese, thereby mitigating the shock consequent upon their encounter with the native population.

The choice of monastic Buddhism as the initial mode of enculturation may have made sense to the fathers because it was, in a general sense, politically sound. If, as Ruggieri recalls, Wang requested that the Jesuits dress as Buddhists, such a suggestion was wise in that their appearance as 

\textit{heshang} was not liable to draw the kind of official protest or suspicion of heterodoxy that would endanger the order and its Chinese benefactors. Indeed the Jesuits were aware of the risk of appearing in another, unfamiliar guise, as is obvious from this cautionary statement from Ricci’s journals: “In order that the appearance of a new religion might not arouse suspicion among the Chinese, the fathers did not speak openly about religious matters when they began to appear in public.”\textsuperscript{30} Ruggieri shared his colleague’s wariness and informed his superiors that he and Ricci were not practicing the rite of baptism, saying, “for now we do not move to make Christians in order not to give any occasion to the Demon to demolish this new plant.”\textsuperscript{31} Furthermore, although there was a small chapel on the grounds, Jesuit letters are silent about mass, giving one the impression (an impression confirmed in later letters, in which Ricci states that they will “open no more churches, but instead a preaching house and we will say mass in private in another chapel”)\textsuperscript{32} that the chapel was more like the \textit{shu yuan}, or private academies, that proliferated in the late Ming.\textsuperscript{33}

As long as they were recognized as Buddhists, there was much to recommend in this accommodation strategy and, from what Ricci reports here about the votive gifts of early visitors to the mission, the Chinese did, in fact, see them as Buddhist monks: “Many also began to offer perfumes as incense for the altar and also alms to the fathers for their food and for oil for the lamp that was lit before the altar.”\textsuperscript{34} In the late sixteenth century, Buddhist sects were already numerous, and, according to some scholars, they were on the rise; thus there could be little harm (even from the perspective of a suspicious government) in the appearance of yet another sect or subsect spawned from an increasingly indistinguishable mass.\textsuperscript{35} Considering that pious Chinese honored the fathers with symbolic offerings such as lamp oil that were peculiar to Buddhist rite, it would appear that no distinction was made between the Jesuits as “Chinamen” and the Chinese \textit{heshang}.

And why should Chinese have distinguished between these two monastic orders? Buddhist monks were not like most Chinese. They occupied a marginal symbolic plane, something made particularly clear by their generic socioreligious function as celebrants of the mortuary rite. The Jesuits were physically different from the Chinese and from Buddhist monks, but there was nothing to prevent the Chinese from taking them as pietistic travelers from the land of the Ganges—they lived as monks, had shorn their hair, wore robes, were celibate, and were known to have come from India. This was precisely how the Japanese had seen Francis Xavier and his fellow Jesuits, noting the same features and coincidences.\textsuperscript{36} In China the fathers were as different and as marginal as Buddhist monks, so for Chinese observers little conceptual innovation was required to make them comprehensible. And, as these monks came from the West appearing in shapeless robes, hemp belts, and tonsures, bearing devotional icons peculiar to their worship, the structural similarities to Buddhist monasticism were compelling. The Chinese, to borrow again from Sahlin, “re-cognized” the Jesuits as Buddhist monks.

Such recognition was undoubtedly facilitated by the fact that the magistrate, Wang Pan, like many officials in late imperial China, was very partial to Buddhism. In fact, in one of his first meetings with Father Ruggieri and Father Francesco Pasio he donated a single tael of silver as alms for the mission. By bestowing the title of Buddhist monks on the fathers, it is clear that Wang believed he granted them a privilege of which they were particularly deserving. Within a year of the meeting between Ruggieri, Pasio, and Wang Pan, the Jesuits were given a residence with a chapel constructed on the new site.

Wang marked the occasion by presenting Ruggieri with two gilded plaques and a poem commemorating the mission’s founding and honoring its founders. The first plaque read \textit{xiánhua si} (Immortal Flower Monastery), while the second read \textit{xi lai jìngtu} (From the West comes the Pure Land).\textsuperscript{37} The allusions here are to tenets of the Huayan and Jìngtu sects. Wang, like the other Chinese almsgivers, considered the mission to be a monastery, and Ruggieri and Ricci its abbots. And in this way Chinese reflexively translated the foreigners into familiarity. For Wang, the fit of foreign priests and Buddhist monks was particularly apposite, and so his assistance was inspired less by the demands of his office than it was by a belief that in so acting he accumulated merit for a future salutary moment when the goddess Guanyin would deliver him to the \textit{jìngtu} (“The Pure Land,” for which the sect was named). The instinct of the Chinese, popular and elite, to see the Jesuits as Buddhist
monks elicited their generosity, for in assisting these monks, they made
spiritual gains.

There were as well unspecified others, “Chinese friends” as Ruggieri called
them, who were moved to generosity on the fathers’ behalf. Indeed without
the financial assistance of these Chinese individuals, the mission’s chapel
would not have been built. Writing on January 25, 1584, to his superior,
Ruggieri reveals that there had been difficulties in finishing construction at
the mission compound, difficulties that were exacerbated by the refusal of
Portuguese authorities in Macau to provide needed monies for the construc-
tion materials—more evidence of the troubled relations between the fathers
and their Portuguese benefactors.38 He goes on to say that the crisis was
averted by the intervention of Chinese friends who donated one hundred
silver dollars to defray the remaining expenses. What he doesn’t say is that
this subsidy was apparently used to complete the construction of the chapel,
as the fathers’ residence had been provided with the original grant of land.

This, of course, is a sizeable admission, conveying as it does the extent of
native embrace of the Jesuits. Such local willingness to assist the mission-
aries in their enterprise, while greatly appreciated by Ruggieri, would have
been anathema to Vatican authorities. This must have been evident to Ruggi-
ieri for though he acknowledged the Chinese contributions, he still insisted
that they were used to complete the construction of the Jesuit residence. One
gets the sense that Ruggieri did not wish to admit that unconverted Chinese
had financed the construction of a dwelling place for the Christian God and
that the Vatican was disinclined to admit any pagan responsibility in the
making of the mission. Consequently, other significant details—that the Je-
suits were, in effect, no longer Jesuits, but Buddhist monks and that uncon-
verted natives had made possible the erection of God’s dwelling place—were
omitted in the epistolary accounts of the mission’s founding or censored by
church authorities prior to publication in the order’s letterbooks. Conscious
omission of this kind, while essential to the local success of the enterprise,
would prove especially problematic later, as church authorities became
aware of the difference between the reality of the missionaries’ entrenchment
in China and its representation in Jesuit letters.

The fathers, accepted as Buddhists in China, remarked on certain obvious
formal similarities between the two orders: an apparent trinitarian concep-
tion (i.e., the pledge of devotion to Buddha, sangha, and dharma) a notion of
heaven and hell; temples and devotional statues; the qingxiu, or “pure rules,”
governing monastic life; the practice of almsgiving, prayer and meditation;
and vows of celibacy and poverty. Certainly the wide appeal of Buddhism in
the late Ming provided a prescription for Jesuit success as an earlier religious
culture that had migrated eastward into and across China. The course of Bud-
dhism’s adaptation had been so thorough, its practice so widespread, fur-
thermore, that it had come to seem—especially to the fathers—indigenous.39

In time, the Jesuits learned that it was not indigenous, and this fact proved
significant, for in the decades after their official embrace of “la legge de
letterati” (lu) in 1595 the Jesuits did not tire of noting the essential foreign-
ness of Buddhism. The fathers also later noted that the sect was not publicly
appreciated by their well-placed Chinese benefactors; it was lacking in social
status, and was viewed with contempt by many Chinese. Particularly in its
popular jingtu manifestations, they took Buddhism as corrupting China’s
archaic belief in the one God through a bewildering array of idols.40 Near the
close of book 1 of his Storia, Ricci seems astonished by the countless idols
populating the Chinese landscape:

One thing that is hard to believe is the multitude of idols that exist in
this kingdom, not only in the temples, which are full of them, for in
some of them several thousand have been set up, but also in private
homes, where there are a great number, kept in a special place conse-
crated to them. In the squares, streets, mountains, ships and public pal-
aces, one sees nothing but such abominations.41

Beginning with the desultory description in Marco Polo’s Il Milione (“The
Million,” later known as the Travels), idolatry was the most common charge
made against Chinese religion, referring to practices as dissimilar as ancestor
worship, geomancy, alchemy, and chanting the name of the Amitabha.42 In
the nearly three hundred years between Polo’s putative last visit and the
arrival of the Jesuits, the interpretive equipment of foreigners had become
comparatively sophisticated; “idolatry” was no longer generically applied.
For the Jesuits “idolatry,” “idol worship,” and “sect of the idols” were all
terms strictly referring to Buddhism, with an occasional exceptional applica-
tion to Daoism, all signaling heresy. It was more than heresy that disturbed
Ricci, who denounced Sai-chi (one of his terms for the Buddhists), abbots
and acolytes alike, for their inability to abide by the monastic injunctions of
sexual abstinence.43

The Jesuits may also have felt that Buddhism was not sufficiently “other.”
Buddhism, beginning with its monasticism, had much “in common with the
Indo-European and Near Eastern sources of Catholicism.”44 Moreover, the
space carved by Buddhism in the Chinese religious landscape was marked by
claims of doctrinal purity and the necessary supersession of local practices,
arguments very like those that the Jesuits used on behalf of Christianity. In a
sense, by representing themselves as Buddhists the fathers were not suffi-
ciently differentiated from other religious traditions including (perhaps more
importantly) the Franciscans who were, at the same time, presenting them-

46 Jesuits, Confucius, and the Chinese

Jesuits, Confucius, and the Chinese 47
selves as *heshang* in their proselytizing work in the Chinese countryside. Thus, "the shift to representing missionary work as ru learning involves a many-layered differentiation from several not-quite-others [Buddhists, Franciscans] by identification with the group that historically does constitute a more convincing other."45

In the end, for the Jesuit missionaries in China the real sign of their cultural assimilation was their abandonment of the indigent trappings of the Buddhist cloister for the resplendent robes and headdress of the "literati."46 After the spring of 1595, the Jesuits wore the apparel of ru, assumed the official, academic designation *xucai* (licentiate), and even called themselves both *ru* and *daoren*, "men of the Way."47 In doing so, they effectively transformed themselves again, from Buddhists into ru. To reason that the Jesuit embrace of ru culture is an example of accommodationism does not endorse their choice as "appropriate" but reflects a conclusion that the missionaries reached on native ground, a choice that has influenced centuries of subsequent scholarship. From this gradually acquired political perspective, the official ru tradition and the administrative vernacular at which they were becoming increasingly fluent provided the only real conduit to power for the Jesuits. Perhaps it was the legacy of Xavier as carried out by Valignano, but the Jesuits, particularly Matteo Ricci, knew that the mission could not succeed without the imprimatur of high-ranking dynastic officials, if possible the emperor (huangdi) himself.48

There were other troubles, too, which their superiors in Rome had learned of, though these problems were not specifically related to their becoming Buddhists—for example, a nocturnal raid on the Shaozhou mission in July 1592 by local youths that necessitated a desperate retreat from the compound, during which Ricci seriously injured a leg.49

Taken together, such difficulties might have been sufficient to recommend other kinds of strategies. But, above all, it seems that in Buddhism, the fathers found no "voice" or, rather, there was little fidelity in the Buddhist translation of Jesuit self-conception. With time and continued work in the Chinese language and on selected native texts, Ricci and his cohort were compellingly drawn toward a second accommodationist strategy, that of becoming scholar-officials. In this second incarnation as *ru*, the Jesuits seemed to find their voice.

Conversion to the Order of the Literati (Rut)

Invention is an enterprise of trial and error, as any history of great inventors or scientific discoveries demonstrates. In this sense of invention we can interpret the Jesuits' first native experiment as Buddhists, and in so doing we would not be unfaithful to Ricci's own perception of their Buddhist trans-
Jesuits. What is explicit in these pleasing parallels are the mechanisms of meaningful projection that operate in any observer’s overcoming of the strangeness of the other through the act of naming. At the interface of the European and the non-European, as Henri Baudet has observed, “the European’s images of non-European man are not primarily, if at all, descriptions of real people, but rather projections of his own nostalgia and feeling of inadequacy. . . . They are judgments on himself and his history.”

In identifying ru as the principal religious order in China, the Jesuits, then, articulated their own best self-image, but in a context where the living cultural artifacts were Chinese. The essential “truth” of the Jesuits’ reductionist representation was assuredly confirmed by what the prelates perceived as the formal identity of ru culture and Jesuit culture. The world Ricci and his brethren had left had been one in which academic degrees were conferred with religious ceremony and the university calendar was punctuated with Christian feast days and saintly observances, so the new world he beheld of Chinese imperial and academic regalia—the official cult to Kongzi and the Hanlin Academy—was a familiar fusion of the sacred and the secular.

Ruggieri, but to a much greater extent Ricci, found the superficial features of these ru reassuring, especially the nature and degree of their academic training—as well they should have, for they were, in a sense, enjoying the comforts of their own projections. Indeed, pointing to the ardent solidarity of scholar-officials, their collective literary accomplishment (evident in their successful completion of the metropolitan examination), and their disproportionate influence in matters cultural and political, Ricci described ru as a “legge,” or law. This same term, legge, was used of the Society of Jesus, indicating that the early Jesuit missionaries understood ru by analogy with what they knew best, their own order. In the Latin summary of his catechism, Tianzhu shiyi (Real Significance of the Heavenly Master), Ricci refers to the Society of Jesus as nostri legem, or “our Order,” and an identical reference, nostri legis, is used throughout the Storia. Given, too, that the language to which they devoted themselves was mandarino (the language of ru scholar officials), the conceptual links between the Jesuits and the Chinese were fated to be forged along ru official lines. Ricci, Ruggieri, and the director of the East Indies missions, Vallignano, read the surface similarities of ru and the Jesuit order as formal evidence of substantive likeness and presumed that ru doctrine had shaped, as did Christianity in Europe, the language, laws, customs, and literature of the empire.

Given that Jesuit life in China was increasingly circumscribed after 1592, remaining entirely within the culture of scholar-officials, all of them men bearing the official title of ru, one would expect that the features of this culture colored every perception. As a result, the presumption of identity with ru could hardly have seemed fortuitous to Ricci and his cohort who, in his estimation, “lived in amicable intercourse with the nobles, the supreme magistrates, and the most distinguished men of letters in the kingdom.”

The Jesuits—who, by their own admission, spoke “the native language [i.e., guanghua] of the country,” set themselves “to the study of their [Chinese] rites and customs,” and devoted themselves “day and night to the study of their books”—found in ru a term whose apparent ubiquity was evidence of a single thread binding the fabric of Chinese culture, a thread that also bound the fathers and ru.

More than this, through their insistence that the country had, in essence, but one language, the fathers were engaged in the production of a singular China. Although this invention was at odds with the reality around them, it was representative of the new reality they formed in conscious alliance with the native society on which they now depended, ru, and symbolized the Jesuits’ elevation from the quotidien of multiple dialects the mastering of which would have been essential to their success as local Buddhist priests:

Even in the various provinces of China the spoken language differs so widely that their speech has little in common . . . . Besides the various dialects of the different provinces, the province vernacular so to speak, there is also a spoken language common to the whole empire, known as cuonhua [guanhu], an official language for civil and forensic use. This national language probably resulted from the fact that all the magistrates, as we shall explain later on, are strangers to the provinces which they govern, and to avoid the necessity of obliging them to learn the dialects of the provinces, a common speech was introduced for transacting government business.

In this particular instance, Ricci articulates the view of a late Ming official and assumes a uniform culturalist definition of Chinese sex characteristic of a growing number of Chinese elites in the early seventeenth century. And while such a singular image was critical to the missionaries’ maintenance of ecclesiastical support, it proved even more important later to the lay and clerical devotees of the Clavis Sinica, and ultimately to the practitioners of modern sinology. But here, on Chinese ground, for the Jesuits to articulate such an official definition of Chineseness was to admit membership, or the aspiration of membership, in a community narrowly defined by a culture that excluded Buddhist monasticism and whose sumptuary recognition was conferred in their assumption of the title xiucai (cultivated talent).

For the Chinese cultural conservatives drawn to the Donglin Shuyuan, (Eastern Forest Academy), with which the Jesuits had a tenuous connection through several of their converts, Buddhism’s foreignness was perceived as an infection, one weakening the original vitality of Chinese culture. The militant restorationism of the Jesuits is reminiscent of the fundamentalist

50 Jesuits, Confucius, and the Chinese
critique of political institutions put forward by Gu Xiancheng (1530–1612) of the Donglin Shuyuan. A scholarly controversy has arisen as to whether their anti-Buddhist sentiment stemmed from Jesuit alignment with the Donglin or was reached somewhat independently. Those who explain it as the result of direct intellectual ties between the two groups, including Father Henri Bernard, point to a remark found in Daniello Bartoli’s history of the Jesuits written in 1663. “There had been founded in Vusue [Wuxi] . . . a famous academy of Literati, who used to gather to discourse either on the moral virtues, or on the means most appropriate and useful for the government of the people. . . . Our doctors Leo [Li], Paul [Xu] and Michael [Yang] [the celebrated converts Li Zhizao (d. 1630), Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), and Yang Tingyun (1537–1627)] presided at some of them. The Fathers approved of the institute because of the great profit which the faith drew from it.”

The greater weight of the evidence does not corroborate Bartoli’s claim. Instead it suggests that the Jesuits’ anti-Buddhist sentiments were not the result of Donglin partisanship so much as the fathers’ own appropriation of an indigenous revulsion against Buddhism, first evident in the nativism of the Southern Song period (1127–1279 C.E.). In this act of appropriation they made explicit the self-constituting status of their native textual community and the growing influence on them of a ru restorationist ideal.

Their awareness of native ru preeminence grew more keen the longer the mission operated in China, for the fathers’ influential Chinese associates, we are told, found the Buddhist guise to be unacceptable. The conscious courting of favor with the powerful as opposed to the weak is unmistakable in Ricci’s recollection (taken from the Storia) of Chinese response to their second incarnation as ru:

Our friends were very pleased with us, seeing that they could use many more signs of respect to us than they used to their bonzes. Although from the first we were regarded very differently from the ministers of the idols, in view of the great difference in virtue between them and the fathers, nevertheless the ordinary people made little distinction between us and the bonzes.

Access to political authority was indispensable to Jesuit success in a preceptorial system such as that of late imperial China. As the political mechanisms of the preceptor, the emperor, were in the hands of scholar-officials, it made little sense to pursue the approbation of “the ordinary people.”

The status conferred upon the Jesuits by imperial approval greatly enhanced their contacts among scholar-officials and, therefore, increased the likelihood of conversions of those among whom Father Visitor Valignano felt the Jesuits should circulate. Further, since Ricci and his followers were dra-

tically reinterpretting classic works in a manner hospitable to Christianity—work that was begun during their enculturation apprenticeship, as it were, as Buddhist monks—the social consequences of such reworking were significant. In the end, only the emperor could galvanize the political forces necessary to construct an alternative context within which the classics could mean what the Jesuits said they did. This dependence on Chinese officialdom, along with the desire to convey their teaching to the preceptor, became increasingly explicit in the seventeenth century and, as I explain in chapter 2, reflected a parallel relation at home between the Jesuits and European monarchies.

In these ways and for these many reasons, the fathers became ru. To Ricci, who must have encountered the term everywhere he turned in books and travels, ru would have appeared multifaceted. To the Chinese as well as Chinese-speaking foreigners of sixteenth-century China, the term ru designated at least descent from Kongzi. It was, however, used to represent a great deal more, being a strikingly polysemous symbol referring to any or all of the following: [1] the imperial cult and the diverse rituals of legitimacy, such as the feng and shan sacrifices; [2] examination candidates; [3] members of shuyuan [private academies]; [4] scholar-officials [metropolitan, provincial, and local]; [5] self-conscious local sodalities of scholarship, meditation, and worship, such as the hongshe [lodge of wondrous remembrance]; [6] gentry—unsuccessful examination candidates, landholders, merchants—whose conscious pursuit of civility was marked by the term; [7] the practice of ancestor worship and the privilege of “central place” as such rites reproduced traditional hierarchy; [8] the orthodoxy of the Hanlin Academy and the official doctrines of the state, and [9] “the State Family Romance.” These referents might be better visualized as a stratigraphy in which certain layers of significance were closer to the surface and more accessible to the observer. Thus, even for the indigenous observer, not all meanings would have been available at any one time, constrained as they were by contemporary currency. In the late Ming period ru might elicit immediate associations with 4, 6, and 8. Given the common Jesuit rendering of “litteratorum secta” for ru, it appears that the fathers appropriated a favored native definition.

However, rather than take its many meanings as specific to certain practices of an earlier age, Ricci and his fellow Jesuits in effect, and perhaps not by intention, simply reduced all the significances of ru to a single symbol, in the same way they resolved the multiple vectors of Chinese vernacular into the single language of guanzhu. Instead of seeing a history of plural episodes, the Jesuits took ru tropologically, as a metonym. Therefore, even if the various meanings of the term were known to them, they would have been read in the manner in which they understood the presence of God: as diverse man-
manifestations of a single substance. In this fashion a new theology appropriate to this singular missionary community—not Buddhist, but "Confucian" and Christian—emerged.

Theology: The Sino-Jesuit Textual Community

In its second sense, accommodationism can be understood theologically as an effort to make explicit the common religious ground the Jesuits presumed they shared with the native Chinese. This common ground was what Ruggieri, who was more inclined toward Christian-Buddhist than Christian-Confucian accommodation, called the "prophetic intimations of the Christian religion." This shared religious foundation was also the place where the Jesuits constructed a textual community eclectically pred of Jesuit Christianity and Chinese religious practice and so unique that it could only be called a cult (something that will become especially evident in the subsequent chapter).

Brian Stock uses the term "textual community" to describe societies of heretics and reformers in eleventh-century Europe. Such societies "demonstrated a parallel use of texts, both to structure the internal behaviors of the group’s members and to provide solidarity against the outside world." I use the term to describe microsocieties organized around, and justified by, a specific text or texts, whose members share a common understanding or agreement about the broad significance of the text: to organize or discipline group conduct, thus creating solidarity; to provide scope and dimension for the living of an individual life; to adjudicate rival claims to truth; and to establish a basis for the reform of contemporary practice or belief. One impulse for the formation of textual communities is the religious one, and such groups often resemble what is familiar to us as cults. The organization of individuals into such a textual community is usually the consequence of some perception or experience of a larger incongruity such as that caused by sudden social dislocation or willful abnegation of the conventional practices of society.

The emergence of such textual communities is common to an age in which archaic ritualism is eclipsed. Ancient rites can no longer be preserved simply in unmediated performance, hence, appeals to ancient precedent to authorize contemporary practice can only be advanced through a complex process of refraction through texts. In other words, to make a claim of legitimate descent from the exemplar of a particular tradition requires citation of text instead of performance. Indeed citation of text is performance, and as these communities employ texts to reproduce lives on the example of an inspired predecessor, texts become persons. The essential marginality of these groups causes them to be especially cohesive. Their cohesion is nurtured through the use of texts as scripts, the truth and effectiveness of which are often displayed in the life of an exemplary figure. Finally, textual communities are not only recipients of texts but also producers of them. The communal life of such groups is underwritten by engagement in a continuous normative exegesis that is necessary to defend their claims and that serves to historicize the community.

The Jesuits, in their cultural accommodation to Chineseness, conform particularly well to this model of a textual community. They produced a hybrid theology that moved them to identify themselves as a Chinese religious enclave. The monotheistic teachings of "Confucius" were predicated as a preexistent, "true" message which it was the Jesuit mission to recover. God's ubiquity was not in question, only the particular evidence of his presence among the Chinese. And all evidence pointed to his presence among the ru, or rather, as we shall see later, the genuine ru, Ricci's "i veri letterati" (the true literati).

As the fathers explored the conceptual parallels in Jesuit and ru discourse, they presumed the compatibility of the natural theology of the Chinese construed as "il lume naturale" and their own revealed theology, believing that the presence of divine light among the Chinese prefigured a subsequent embrace of Christianity. Any differences perceived by the Jesuits were simply the differential effects of a single divine light.

Recovering the homologies between Chinese beliefs and their own meant for the Jesuits that they would again preach among the Chinese, this time in alliance with the men of God they believed the "order of the literati" to be. However, such "preaching" would be written rather than spoken, given the fathers' oft-noted struggles with pronunciation, and so would resemble the auctor rhetoia of their training at the College of Rome. Having constructed a Chinese identity as ru by reading their books and wearing their clothes, Ricci and his fellow missionaries began to sermonize a Christianized ru doctrine advocating the resurrection of the true teaching of Kongzi, in the contemporary spirit of restorationism. And this they did with a vengeance, it would seem, denouncing China's other sects with a convert's zeal. Even the structural similarities identified in Buddhism—like its trinitarian conception—that had been so critical to the Jesuits' first effort to become Chinese were now perceived as the work of Lucifer.

From Ricci's analysis of the two other major Chinese sects— an analysis based on the conventional condemnation of Islam's false trinity—we learn something of the passion of the fathers' commitment to their "legge de' letterati." Speaking of the Buddhists and Daoists, he says: "Both of these sects feign their trinity, in order to show clearly that the father of all falsehoods, who is the author of all this, has not forsaken the superb pretension of wishing to be the same as his Creator." Here, on the common ground of
"the order of the literati," the scions of the house of Confucius and the Society of Jesus met. Here, too, at least conceptually if not politically, their missionizing strategy would come to fruition.

There was yet another dimension of theological compatibility, intranscultural rather than cross-cultural. Ricci's brand of apologetics was the mirror image of an early patristic tradition, that of the saints who had worked among the pagans at the time of the early church, a reductionist approach with its invention of formal and essential likenesses. Ambrose, the bishop of Milan (d. 397 C.E.), had similarly lent the imprimatur of his office to the popular but heterodox celebrations at the graves of martyrs that became the cult of the saints. The result of the bishop's indulgence was that in time the cult was reorchestrated with Ambrose as the celebrant. Thus the church appropriated pagan practice and practitioners.65

This approach, as set out in Paul's sermon to the Athenians, was to engage the natural religion of the pagan with the gospel. Apologetics—like the mission's first catechism, Tianshu shiliu (Veritable Record of the Heavenly Master), and the second catechism authored by Ricci, Tianshu shiyi (The Real Significance of the Heavenly Master)—were drafted to reconcile natural theology and revealed theology on the ground of what John Henry Newman later called "the divinity of Traditionary Religion."66 Ricci's emphasis on the proto-Christian natural theology of the Chinese as represented in "Confutius" and "la legge de' letterati" was fully consistent with this venerable missionary practice. While it is difficult to judge his success in terms of converts, there is little doubt that this approach gained him a wider audience.

Through their translation of ru texts, just like the translation of themselves into Buddhist costume earlier, the fathers believed they discovered lines of filiation in native belief. "During these last years," Ricci reflects, "I have interpreted with the aid of good teachers not only the Four Books (Sishu) but also the Six Classics (Liujing), and I have noted many passages in them which favor the teachings of our faith, such as the oneness of God, the immortality of the soul, the glory of the blessed, etc."67 Theological complementarity was borne out by the hallowed texts of the Chinese.

Alessandro Valignano's urging that the fathers align themselves with China's "homes lettrados" was founded not so much on a premise of theological compatibility as it was on the assumption that ru were men of respected social status and lettered influence. But, these ru, along with other Jesuit missionaries and Catholic converts, could not help but be swayed by Ricci's insistence that ru was the original teaching of Confucius, the cultural backbone of Chinese civilization, and the "key"68 to the ancient vault of Chinese monotheism. And Matteo Ricci demonstrated this belief through one of Confucius's own texts, Lunyu:

The fundamental duty of spirits is to execute the will of the Heavenly Master to supervise the transformations. They do not possess absolute power over the world; thus Zhongni said, "By respecting spirits, the lordling [junzi] keeps them at a distance." With reference to happiness, prosperity, and the forgiveness of sin, the ability to grant them lies not with spirits, but with the Heavenly Master.69

The belief in theological similarity, of which the Jesuits thought there was empirical evidence, would remain unassailable in most missionary circles for over a century, furnishing critical justification for their enterprise and especially their native literary activity.

Accommodation was made possible by, but also eventuated in, a fervent belief in the ineluctable presence of God. To believe, as the Jesuits did, that all cultures were moments of God's presence, enabled them to deduce Chinese belief in God, in a Tianshu (Heavenly Master). Thoroughly tautological, belief in the reducibility of all difference to monotheistic identity was both the inception and the culmination of accommodation.

Ricci's Chinese catechism, the Tianshu shiyi, is a textual portrait of this inspired tautology, for it is in this work that he tried to establish a logical ground for the Jesuits' unitary theistic conception. Having secured such ground the fathers would inculcate the fundamentals of Christian doctrine—original sin, Christ as savior, the Ten Commandments, papal infallibility, the immortality of the soul, and so on. The underlying reductive apprehension of single cause with multiple effects is nowhere more apparent than in the hortatory exchanges between the xishi (Western scholar) and the zhongshi (Chinese, or ethnic, scholar) that make up the text. In this excerpt from the dialogues, the Western scholar effortlessly resolves the world's manifold difference into a theistic unity, saying:

The individual originations of things are assuredly dissimilar, but the Lord who is the universal source of things is without second. Why? The reason is that the Lord who is the universal source of things is He from whom the many things come forth, who provides the virtuous natures of the many things, and whose superlative virtue cannot be superseded.70

The ontological presumption here was, in Ricci's day, an unquestionable datum of faith corroborated by science; however, the real issue for him as a missionary among the Chinese was whether these untutored but potential Christians indicate any awareness that the Christian God was the primum mobile. From Ricci's perspective this was hardly an issue, though, for no less a figure than "Confutius" himself displayed just such an awareness in his acknowledgment of shangdi.
Ricci felt certain he would find evidence of Chinese belief in the one God, if we give any credence to the few confessional remarks found in his introduction to the catechism. He presumed, or rather imagined, the existence of a Chinese natural theology even before he had left Lisbon for Goa in 1578. He confesses that:

I, Dou [Matteo], left my village as a young man and roamed the world, [only] to find that ideas which poison men's minds reached to every corner. I thought that the Chinese, as they were the people of Yao and Shun and the followers of the Duke of Zhou [Zhou Gong] and Zhongni [Kongzi], certainly could not deviate from the Heavenly principles and the Heavenly doctrines and become infected [with poisonous ideas].

Ricci's mission in China was necessary to uncover the "real significance of the Heavenly Master" concealed in the ancient culture of the Chinese. Whether artful or ingenuous, as a narrative device, the testimony placed Matteo Ricci, the interloper, squarely within the mythic history of Chinese antiquity out of which Chinese cultural identity was formed, wherein the institutions of the imperium were shaped by the loving hands of sage-king exemplars and passed down to the Duke of Zhou and to Kongzi.

Father Ricci's hypostasis of a single, eternal Chinese doctrine virtually identical to the Christian is startling because it is made in Chinese. It is not offered to shame a European audience for its misplaced cultural arrogance, as were the panegyric accounts of Chinese statecraft from the likes of Voltaire in subsequent decades. Rather, it would appear that Ricci believed he could chaste the Chinese by an appeal to their apotheosized heritage. Whether his suggestion that China once possessed an unalloyed Christian belief was a rhetorical exercise or he genuinely believed the Chinese to be unique among the world's peoples in their pure preservation of "the Heavenly principles and the Heavenly doctrines," what is significant in his testimony is that China provided a spiritual answer for Ricci. Either as the last refuge of an unslaved belief in the omnipotence of Heaven, whose existence would confirm his own faith, or as a former dwelling place of the truth that had been obscured by time and heresy, China--as Ricci saw it--was in need of his personal intervention. The clever manner in which Ricci conveys salvation as implicit in Chinese culture distinguished him from so many of his colleagues and explains the accomplishments of accommodationism.

The Jesuits' belief in China's theological compatibility with Christianity was, therefore, structured tropologically, in a manner invisible to them, like a preapprehension guiding their organization of experience, whether in Europe or in China, and undergirding the literary construction of a unique, hybrid canon. Most importantly, in the effort to demonstrate this theologi-cal compatibility by proof, men like Ricci remade the canon of the "Sacred Faith" in the image of their new native embodiment.

Constructing a Sino-Jesuit Canon

Although I have distinguished them for the purposes of exposition, the theological and the literary dimensions of accommodationism were mutually reinforcing and complementary in the same way that Scripture and apostolic tradition are in Christianity, in that one learned the creed from the reiterative reproduction of traditional practice while appealing to the sovereignty of Scripture to justify the creed. The third sense of accommodationism, its literary sense, refers to the Jesuit practice of canon formation, in which Chinese texts were selected and organized into a system of relations with other [Western] texts dear to the critics.

This canon, a heterogenous assemblage of Western and Chinese inspirational texts, was the scriptural complement to the apostolic tradition of Jesuit accommodationism. Here my use of "apostle" to describe Jesuit accommodationists is not just metaphor. Father Philippe Couplet [1622–1693] refers to the Jesuits who preceded him in the Missions of the Indies and to those who assisted him in the preparation of the Confucius Sinatum Philosophus as apostolum gentium. The favored Chinese texts were Lunyu, Zhongyong, Daxue, and Mengzi—in other words, the Four Books. These were the first works the missionaries translated, and although they were cursory familiar with the Five Classics [wu jing], the Four Books remained the center of their curriculum. The Zhongyong [Doctrine of the Mean] and the Daxue [Great Learning] were found to be particularly inspiring: as many as six partial and complete translations of them were produced by the missionaries between 1588 and 1687. However, the Jesuit fathers read and organized the texts in a manner peculiar to them and clearly inconsistent with the canonical tradition of their study passed down from the texts' original compiler, Zhu Xi. Instead of reading the Four Books according to Zhu's prescription, "take the Daxue to begin, followed by the Lunyu, the Mengzi, [and] the Zhongyong," Ricci and his fellow padres read the Lunyu first, then the Daxue, followed by the Zhongyong and the Mengzi.

Not unlike twentieth-century Chinese intellectual historians and philosophers in the West, the Jesuits were spiritually aroused by the mystical vision of sociocosmic harmony found in the Daxue and the Zhongyong. Accorded the same esteem as other "ethnic" texts such as the works of Plato, Aristotle, Euclid, Epictetus, Lucretius, and Ptolemy, the Four Books took their place alongside cherished works like the Bible, the New Testament, St. Augustine's City of God, St. Thomas Aquinas's Summa Theologica, and St. Ia-
natus of Loyola’s *Spiritual Exercises*, in forming something approaching a hybrid canon of revealed literature.77

Under Ricci’s aegis and with the assistance of Xu Guangqi and Li Zhizao among others, the Jesuits made a number of the Western texts dear to them available to the Chinese. The *Jiaoyu lun* (Treatise on Friendship) of 1595, perhaps Matteo Ricci’s best-loved work, was a translation of a heterogenous collection of sayings on friendship from numerous authors that he had committed to memory. Ten years later the *Ershiwuyan* (Twenty-five Sayings) introduced the Chinese to Epictetus in the form of a chrestomathy of his works. Shortly after, Epictetus’s wisdom was followed by a Chinese rendering of Panudes’ work on Aesop under the title *Qiren shijian* (Ten Discourses of a Strange Man). Lastly, the *Jihe yuanben* (The Elements of Euclid) was Ricci and Xu Guangqi’s translation of Clavius’s recension of Euclid’s *Elements*.

Through translation of their cherished texts, it would appear that “Jesuit missionaries accommodated Western learning to the Chinese cultural scene,”78 as David Mungello has observed. It may be more appropriate in light of this missionary canon to reverse Mungello’s characterization and say that the Jesuits accommodated Chinese learning to the Western cultural scene. But the accommodative urges that gave rise to canon formation deserve even more subtle judgment, for the fathers did more than this. They made the texts of one Chinese scriptural tradition known in the West in terms their interested audience could understand, and in the process produced a distinctively eclectic canon. This, then, was the foundation of their cultural hybridity, textual evidence of the unique self-constitution of the Jesuits on new native ground.

Rather than “accommodating” Western learning to Chinese culture, the Jesuits manufactured a new mode of discourse that bestowed privileged status upon certain Chinese texts. Passages from Chinese works were indexed to passages from any of those texts formative of Jesuit understanding, as in Ricci’s gloss on ren [humaneness] from a passage in the commentaries on the *Yijing*: “The meaning of ren can be summed up completely in the following two sentences: Love the Heavenly Master as there are none above Him; for [the sake of] the Heavenly Master, love others as you love yourself.”79 Excerpts from Chinese and Western texts pass through the sieve of a preferred Jesuit intellelction. In this instance Matthew 22:34–40, Mark 12:28–34, and Luke 10:25–28 are used to gloss the most important of Chinese virtues.

Such indexing was certainly not the cynical casuistry that Jacques Gernet contends it was. The fathers were aligning their native scripture with that of the Chinese; there could be no greater symbol of respect. The hermeneutics here reveals more than the Jesuit presumption of theological compatibility with which we have become familiar. Indeed, the first translations of Chi-
rudiments of Chinese, because the fathers were reading these texts for evidence of visible manifestations of God. They were engaged in an endeavor to recover a lost truth, their textual labors were a hermeneutics of belief.

Something of this intimate relation of community and texts is evident in Ricci's correspondence, for it underscores that as he deepened his commitment to the study of the Chinese classics, he abandoned his Buddhist identity. In the fall of 1592 he informed General Acquaviva that the missionaries were now distinguishing themselves from the *bonzes*. From this time through October 1596, when the first draft of the *Tianzhu shiyyi* was completed, and indeed until the end of the next century, the Jesuits devoted themselves solely to exegesis and translation of the Four Books. In 1595 Ricci took up the study of the classics, informing Acquaviva in another letter, of November 4, “I have noted down many terms and phrases in harmony with our faith,” here speaking of specific places in the *Shi jing*, *Shang shu*, *Yijing*, and *Li jì* where he had found evidence of a primordial monotheism.

These passages were then used in the production of a new text, the *Tianzhu shiyyi*, which was to be taken as a contribution in the tradition of Chinese classical commentary, not only as a catechism. In the second chapter, “An Explanation of the Erroneous Views of the Heavenly Master among Today’s People,” the Western scholar, Ricci’s *doppelgänger*, comments:

In the [Record of] Rites it is said: “When all these points are as they ought to be, the Sovereign on High will accept the sacrifice,” and continues: “The Son of Heaven himself ploughs the ground for the rice with which to fill the vessels, and the black millet from which to distill the spirit to be mixed with fragrant herbs, and for services of the Sovereign on High.” The Oath of Tang says, “The sovereign of Xia is an offender, and as I fear the Sovereign on High, I dare not but punish him.” And it says: “The great Sovereign on High has conferred even on the inferior people a moral sense, compliance with which would show their nature invariably right. But to cause them tranquilly to pursue the course which it would indicate, is the work of the sovereign.” In the “Metal-Bound Coffin” [Chapter of the *Shang Shu*] the Duke of Zhou says: “And moreover he was appointed in the hall of the Sovereign to extend his aid to the four quarters of the empire.” . . . Having examined the ancient books, therefore I know that Sovereign on High and Heavenly Master are only different in name.43

By the time Ricci had run off this serial citation of ancient Chinese evidence of the Heavenly Master, he had been converted to the order of the literati, styling himself a defender of its canon. Through the formation of this canon and its personal transmission to successive generations of Jesuit missionaries, a textual community was organized that would endure for nearly a century following Ricci’s death. The exegetical principles of the canon were spelled out in the Jesuits’ presumption of the implicit theism of “il lume naturale,” the natural light of divine reason to which all phenomena could be reduced.

Invisible to the Jesuits, this presumption, or rather apprehension, is visible to us in the “fiction effect” of those texts produced by them to represent their accommodative other. The manner of their invention is clear because from our vantage there was no such religious similarity linking *ru* doctrine and the fathers’ own Christianity. What is also visible to us, and was probably felt by the fathers, are the lines of interpretive difference that run like veins through their self-constituted intellectual/spiritual community reflecting the growing tension between the local necessity to accommodate and the ever-insistent demand of the Vatican for the demonstrable sovereignty of the Christian word abroad. The tension was most evident in missionary equivocation concerning the religious character of the “order of the literati” and their worship of Confucius; their representation of China was contested, but in many ways it was their vision that has endured to underlie Western scholarship on China.

Politics and Polyphony in Accommodationist Representation

In all the emphasis on Jesuit-Chinese similitude, differences inevitably appeared, not so much between the representation and the reality, but between the Jesuit interpretations from which the representation of theological similarity was drawn. Interpretive difference was most salient when the Jesuits undertook descriptions of native religious behavior or attempted to evaluate the religious character of the three principal traditions, particularly that of their favored *legge de’ letterati*.

For instance, near the beginning of the first book of De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas [Of the Christian Expedition among the Chinese], Father Nicolò Trigault’s Latin rendering of Ricci’s *Storia* published in 1615, we read a declaration, common among the early fathers in its encomium for “Confutius,” but curious for what it does not say:

The most learned of all Chinese philosophers was named Confutius. This great and learned man was born five hundred and fifty-one years before the beginning of the Christian era, lived more than seventy years, and spurred on his people to the pursuit of virtue not less by his own example than by his writings and conferences. . . . Even the rulers, during the past ages, have paid him the highest homage due to a mortal. He was never venerated with religious rites, however, as they venerate a

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god. They gratefully acknowledge their indebtedness to him for the doctrines bequeathed to them, and even today, after so long a lapse of time, his descendants are held in the highest esteem by all.66

The effect of this reading is an equation of “Confutius” and “Chineseness” that was increasingly common to Jesuit interpretation the longer their stay among the Chinese, as well as critical to the conceptual foundation of chinoiserie in both its English and French incarnations. The reducibility of China to “Confutius” and his “law of the literati” implied here is made explicit later in the fifth chapter when Ricci, the narrator, and Trigault, the translator, say, “The sect of the literati belongs to the Chinese and in this kingdom is the most ancient... This sect governs the republic, abounds in books, and is renowned above all others.”67 We might consider, as we did above, whether such colossal reduction was purely a Jesuit fiction, or an appropriate representation of what they beheld but could not know was a preexistent Chinese fiction.

Why shouldn’t Ricci, in other words, have conceived of “Confutius” as a controlling metaphor of Chinese culture? There was much to support such a view: there was an imperial cult dedicated to Kongzi and an imperial academy training and placing titular followers of his tradition, and “he” had authored almost all of China’s classics. For the Chinese, Kongzi was already so exalted as an imperial icon, and the pervasive presence of his doctrine among the literati conditioned the Jesuits to take the tradition attributed to him on analogy with their own sacred faith, which was the spiritual backbone of European institutions.

But in this account of the rites to “Confutius,” the early missionary practice of exalting natural theology as the seed of the true religion is explicit. Observation and imagination are delicately interwoven in this account; however, the accuracy displayed in some of Ricci’s observations does not make the account any less fictive. His words do convey a rough, empirical familiarity with many observable items of contemporary Chinese culture: Sima Qian’s chronology in his essay “Kongzi shijia” from the Shi ji, the imperial ceremonies held annually in honor of Kongzi, the popular genealogical fiction of Kongzi as patriarch, the popular cults honoring him, and the rites of local worship critical to the choreography of daily life in private academies (shuyuan).68 Still, in spite of the trenchant character of his observations and the breadth of his reading, Ricci emphatically denied the religious aspect of the ceremonies in honor of Kongzi. His perception, it would seem, was less accurate than his reading, given his insistence on the secular character of the state cult. A less charitable interpretation, like that favored by such recent scholars as Gernet, claims that Ricci created a deliberate inaccuracy, because it was useful for his purposes.69

The oversight did not prevent Ricci from articulating a metonymic conception of “Confutius” in which his “Chinese philosopher” and the latter’s following represented China. Ricci says as much in his discussion of China’s principal sects, forcefully conflating ethos, empire, and sect in his assertion that “this sect [the sect of the literati] rules the republic,”70 and “all the territory [of China] is governed by the literati.”71 Through figurative reduction Ricci forged a union between the visible (the ineluctable symbolism of the state, the bureaucracy, and the religious sects) and the invisible (the dead “Confutus”), establishing the reality of “Confutius” as the exclusive symbol of China’s archaic natural religion, in the visible manifestations of China.

In this clever part/whole relationship, then, the order of the literati (ru), the Chinese state, and the emperor were seen as effects of “Confutius,” virtual equivalents that permitted one to represent the other. The symbolic integrity of this reduction was inviolable so long as one shared the tropic predisposition to metonymy.72 And it was this strategy supplemented by ecclesiastical order that internally reinforced the Jesuit interpretation in spite of its contradictions while transforming the Chinese reality it authoritatively represented, as in the account of Confutus’s secular veneration above.

The Jesuits’ unwillingness to identify the religious aspects of the state cult was the result of both political and tropological considerations. It is not difficult to understand why the fathers might have read heathen practices out of the state cult, for then their involvement with the cult would amount to apostasy and subject them to censure at the hands of Inquisition authorities. To admit that Confutus was worshiped as a god or even an ancestor was to brand the Chinese, despite the quality of their civilization, pagan. Prominent features of the everyday in China, such as ancestor worship, ritual sacrifice, mortuary rites, geomancy, and numerology, simply could not, from the perspective of church authorities, be accommodated within accommodationism, and so a transformation of the text of Chinese life was assimilated to the inventive equivalence of “Confutus” and “Cina.” This modification did not occur at the point of Ricci’s apprehension, however. Instead, it was introduced posthumously as a supplement to the original narrative, as the space narrowed between the marginal Chinese missionary community and papal authority.

Comparison of Trigault’s Latin translation with Ricci’s original Italian manuscript shows that an emphasis on the secular character of the imperial and regional cults was added by Trigault in the translation (see figure 3). In contrast with Trigault’s rendering, Ricci’s original is explicit in its account of both the animal sacrifice and the incense burning that mark celebratory worship of Confutus (whom he calls “Confutio”) “in every city and academy at which the literati congregate”: 

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Oltra di ciò, in ogni città e scuola, dove si congregano i letterati, per lega antica vi è il tempio del Confutio molto sumptuoso, dove sta la sua statua e il suo nome et titolo; et tutti i novilunii et plenilunii e quattro tempi dell’anno i letterati gli fanno una certa sorte di sacrificio con profumi et animali morti che gli offriscono, se bene non riconoscano in lui nessuna divinità, né gli chiedono niente. E così non si può chiamare vero sacrificio.

[Besides this, in every city and academy where the literati congregate, in accord with ancient law, there is a most sumptuous temple to Confutio, where one finds his statue, his name and title, and at every new moon and full moon (as well as) four times a year the literati perform a certain kind of sacrifice with incense, in which dead animals are offered to him, even though they do not recognize in him any divinity, nor do they ask him for anything. Thus, it cannot be called a true sacrifice.]

Trigault’s “translation” eliminates an entire paragraph from the original, taking Ricci’s temporizing over the religious quality of such practice—“the literary offer up to him [Confutio] a kind of sacrifice with incense and dead animals, although they acknowledge no divinity in him and ask nothing of him”—and converting it into a blanket assertion of the secular quality of the cult.

So Ricci, it turns out, never misrepresented the state cult. At least he did not distort it in the manner cited above, because he was not the “author” of the passage in question. His superiors, having encountered Ricci’s history without mediation, were undoubtedly discomfited by the “pagan” religious character of Kongzi’s popular appeal. The original text of the Storia must have been especially unsettling to Catholic authorities: it was not seen outside the Vatican until 1911, when Father Pietro Tacchi Venturi published the first volume of his Opere Storiche.

Moreover, the very passage redacted out of Trigault’s translation permitted an expressly secular reading of the state cult had already been crossed out in Ricci’s handwritten manuscript. Lines are drawn through the four lines in the Italian original containing a description of the animal sacrifice offered to “Confutio” (figure 6). Was this the act of Ricci or Trigault? Regardless, the politics of representation is explicit, as is the fact that Trigault managed here in his translation to defer to higher authority while maintaining fidelity to his deceased colleague’s depiction of the national worship of Kongzi. Thus, disentangling the foreign narrative from what it signified becomes extraordinarily difficult when one is reminded, as one is here, of the unstable quality of the received text, or of the many layers that constitute a text assumed to be homogenous.

Ricci and his followers navigated a very narrow passage between what they observed and what they believed it meant, gauging the interpretive risks noted above and being mindful of censorial superior authorities who did not want Christian truth compromised by pagan ritual. No matter how consistent with Ricci’s accounts later Jesuit interpretation seemed, the volatility of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century religious politics (to wit, the rites and terms controversy) effected subtle shifts in the manner and content of Jesuit representation of the Chinese. The fathers held in common their membership in the Society of Jesus and in the Mission of the Indies; however, such solidarity was not purchased at the expense of creativity. Their interpretations of China were not monolithically uniform.

The reasons for the missionaries’ plurivocal responses to the strange world they struggled to comprehend were not entirely due to the unstable politics of the Vatican. There was coercion from the Holy See, this was evident to all and never taken lightly.44 But, as I will show in the following chapter, it was the interpretive consensus of a unique textual community of missionaries that held greater claim on the mechanisms of Jesuit representation. This community evolved through successive deployments of prelates and like a...
living palimpsest produced a more comprehensive articulation of their invention, that preserved the invention as it safeguarded their community.

In this instance what Ricci appropriated as legge de' letterati was reappropriated by his translator, Trigault, in the word "Literatorum" and the phrase "Literatorum Secta." And it was the latter's redaction, not Ricci's account, that was expediously completed for ecclesiastical authorities and made available to an interested European audience. Obviously, Trigault "translated" the original text in a period much more sensitive to the potential heresy of Ricci's accommodation and, consequently, widened or narrowed the interpretive field of selected passages so as to make his senior colleague's testimony unimpeachable. By identifying ru as secta and not legge, Trigault chose to stress the sect-like character of this group, thus putting them par with the more obvious sects of Buddhism and Daoism, yet mitigating the preeminence they displayed in Ricci's account as legge de' letterati. However, at the same time, he tried to deliver the ru tradition from a purely religious significance by insisting on the Latin term "literatorum secta" rather than "legge de' letterati" as its equivalent. Editing of this kind would be considered censorship by some—and Trigault has been pilloried for this tampering—but I would like to suggest that it is not necessary to treat such an emendation as a perversion of the Storia. Instead, Trigault's editing should be understood as an elaboration of Ricci's text, one that preserves its message while concealing the full extent of Jesuit accommodation to the Chinese and their practices.

First, by drawing out the sectarian character of ru while branding Confucius as the generic symbol of genuine Chinese culture that he was for Ricci, Trigault merely said explicitly what his predecessor had implied. Secondly, even if Trigault altered Ricci's manuscript under duress, he transformed the highly charged passages in a manner that would elude prosection, thereby preserving the integrity of the Jesuit tradition of accommodation. Given the central place of Confucius and Confucianism in subsequent accommodationist compilations such as the Confucian Sinarum Philosophus, Trigault, in salvaging most of the letter but all of the spirit of Ricci's work, may be solely responsible for the continued development of accommodationism in the seventeenth century.

Ricci, therefore, did not so much displace religion as redefine it, emphasizing its character as an ethical system governing all of Chinese social and political life without neglecting to mention the full range of observances in honor of Kouzi. And yet the only conceptual likeness Ricci could consistently draw of ru was a religious one. He deemed them legge, as his own order was called. Furthermore, he acceded in the designation of Confucius as "shengren," a term he in turn employed to describe the Christian saints. For the early Jesuits, Confucius did more than dispense a needed patronage. They
imagined him in a very special relationship with them, as a holy man who bequeathed the inspirational texts, the Four Books.97 For this reason the communal life of the Jesuits under Ricci’s tutelage was underwritten by engagement in study and exegesis of the Four Books, which they took as a record of the scripture of Confucius containing visible manifestations of God.

These inspired scholarly endeavors took the fathers far beyond the identification of parallels between themselves and ru. Indeed, as we have seen, they became ru. It is in considering this Jesuit conversion to ru, and not the baptism of Chinese,98 that we may draw closer to an understanding of the function of Confucius and the power of his claim on this community. From this local, late-sixteenth-century metaphorical conduit, the Jesuits, with significant native conceptual assistance, became Chinese while being seen at home as the mediating interpreters of a China the meaning of which was to be found in Confucianism.

The Joint Invention, “Confucius”

As we have seen, in order to “cross over” the Jesuits had to borrow generously from the cultural products of the Chinese in order to invent a self-conception consistent with this foreign world. And, most importantly, such invention had to be sustained by Chinese generosity and embrace. This required, as Ricci and his superior, Alessandro Valignano, knew, mastering the language. Nevertheless, Ricci also knew, in contrast to so many others—especially his superiors—that even a decade of laborious linguistic exertion could not secure passage from the Jesuits’ known world to the Chinese unknown. Getting around among the Chinese was more a problem of conceptual logistics than accomplished linguistics, and neither would have been achieved without the fortuvious help of natives, both lettered and unlettered. This essential “jointness” of the Jesuit enterprise was evident in their earliest efforts to convey the Santa Fede (Sacred Faith) to the Chinese through catechism.

The Tianzhu shilu (Veritable Record of the Heavenly Master), composed by Michele Ruggieri, was the first of two catechisms prepared by the Society of Jesus for devotional work among the Chinese. This primary educational text was completed in 1584 and was also the first Western work written in Chinese that was printed in China using woodblock technology. Between 1579 and 1581 a preliminary draft was prepared in Latin, perhaps because Ruggieri, like most neophytes, lacked the confidence or sufficient skill to compose in a language he had just begun to learn, and, by some accounts, learn poorly.99 The draft, Vera et brevis divinarum rerum expositio, was produced at a time when mission activities were confined to Goa and Macao.

this text was alternately drafted in Macao and Canton and printed in Goa, not in Zhaoqing.

There was something very appropriate about the circumstances of the catechism’s production—composed in Latin and printed in India for use in China—that made it the emblem of an era in transition. The Latin draft and its ensuing Chinese version, which was completed with the assistance of Matteo Ricci, symbolize the tentativeness with which the mission at first undertook the task of assimilation. This catechism, in both Latin and Chinese, was the first text generated in China at the initial interface of the two cultures, and thus stands as a limit or a backdrop against which an early evidence of Confucius should be visible.100

Though the Vera et brevis expositio, according to Ricci, was organized as “a dialogue between a Gentile and a Father from Europe,” neither of whom would seem to have reason to invoke the name of the Chinese sage, it contains two mentions of “Confusius”—apparently the first textual documentation of the Jesuits’ earliest Latin name for Kongzi. Yet even Ricci’s brief characterization is less than accurate, for Ruggieri plotted the catechism as a dialogue between an “Ethnicus Philosophus,” or ethnic philosopher, meaning a non-Christian, and a “Sacerdos Christianus,” or Christian priest. “Ethnic” philosophy in some sixteenth-century circles was understood as a reference to the Greeks, specifically Plato and Aristotle. Here I believe “ethnic” should be taken as a designation for the non-Christian other, a term maintained in the nineteenth century by Goethe and Hegel, both of whom deemed those religions other than Christian “the ethnic religions.” In this way, “ethnicus” can be used to describe religions as various as Greek and Etruscan, or even Chinese. Clearly it refers to a non-Christian, yet one would have to read through at least seven chapters of the catechism to discover that the “Ethnicus Philosophus” is, in fact, Chinese. This kind of ethnic and/or identity confusion can be seen in the catechism’s first Chinese edition, where Ruggieri concluded his preface with the remark, “guoseng shu” [written by a monk from India].101

In chapter 7 Ruggieri employs the dialogue to introduce two divine laws—to believe in the one God, and “not to do unto others what you do not want them to do unto you.” Both protagonists, native and foreign, here debate the ancient sage’s uncanny awareness of these laws:

Ethnicus Philosophus:
Illud posterius caput ego Confusij nostri libris traditum recognoeco; prius vero nequaquam abs expositumuisse miror.

That latter point I recognize as handed down in the books of our Confusius, [as for] the first point, I truly marvelled that it had been pronounced by him at all.
we now know that Ruggieri was more accomplished in Chinese than we have been led to believe by his confreres; indeed his skills with the language were adequate enough to permit him by 1581 to compose rudimentary Chinese verse, one example of which bears the phrase, "du sishu" [study the Four Books].

But the Latin text had been completed by 1581 and thus Ruggieri had only to understand a modicum of Chinese, Portuguese, or pidgin to converse with his interpreters and servants. I believe that one of these functions, either in sympathy or skepticism, introduced him to Kongzi's celebrated dicta on humaneness and reciprocity. When considered in light of the conditions surrounding the Jesuits' Chinese neologism for God, Tianzhu [Heavenly Master], such joint construction seems very likely. Tianzhu, the Chinese name for the Christian God, was in fact the gift of a Chinese convert, a certain "Cin Nicò" in Ricci's account, who, when left as caretaker of the Zhaoqing compound in the fall of 1583, erected a spirit tablet above an incense-festooned altar on which he had inscribed the characters "Tianzhu." The god who protected the grounds of the mission from baleful influences had to be appeased even in the absence of the normal celebrations of the cult. And so "Cin" produced the proper accoutrements of local cult worship and paid tribute to the Jesuits' God.

As the Jesuits had yet to offer a Chinese nomination for their God, "Cin"'s invention was immediately appropriated by Ruggieri and employed in his Chinese translation of the Decalogue, or Ten Commandments. In Chinese the complete title of the original version of the Decalogue is "Zuchuan Tianzhu shijie" [The Ancestrally Transmitted Heavenly Master's Ten Admonitions]. Explicit in the very title of this translation is the hybrid semiotics that characterized Jesuit self-conception among the Chinese. Thus, even the fathers' presentation of the Decalogue as "ancestrally transmitted" conformed to the preexistent native logic of the religious rite of ancestor worship, according to which "Cin" had conducted sacrifice to Tianzhu—a single god, double understandings.

Imagine, returning now to the catechism, that the exchange between the ethnic philosopher and the Christian priest occurred very much as it was recorded, like so many of the real conversations Matteo Ricci worked into his later catechism, the Tianzhu shijie. From a brief account of Ruggieri's first years of Chinese study at Macao contained in Father Francisco Pires's memoir, Pontos do que me alembrar o anno de 790 Nosso Pe Geral Everado ao Pe Pero Gomez, we learn that there was an early Chinese convert whose assistance in preparing a Chinese catechism had been secured in 1579. It would not be unreasonable to presume that this person was the model for the Ethnicus Philosophus. In the Vera et brevis expositio, the Christian priest explains the second Divine Law, only to have his prospective catechumen
retort, "That last point I recognize as handed down in the books of our Confucius." But the text goes beyond this recognition of comparability in principle to bestow even greater esteem on "Confucius."

Piling on more evidence for the close identity of "ethnic philosopher" and "Christian," Ruggieri, in his rebuttal qua sacerdos christianus, admits that "Confucius" knew of the One God—that ultimate principle, knowledge of which was radiated by the light of nature. It is this revelation that startles the ethnic philosopher, Ruggieri's interlocutor, prompting the response, "I truly marvelled that this first point had been propounded by him at all." And here we can discern the influence Ruggieri's presentation of Paul's Epistle to the Romans in which both messages, the Christian duty of mutual love and the presence of God among the unanointed, are found. Moreover, in the portrait of "Confucius" as the ancient Chinese bearer of these essential truths, particularly his possession of naturae lumine, we may also recognize the apologetic imagination of Ricci.

Though Ruggieri was the principal "author" of the catechism, in this one very significant exchange he gave textual form to the imaginative construction of his silent partner, Ricci. Thus the textual evidence of the Latin construction of "Confucius" recalls the Jesuits' Chinese manufacture of God as Tianshu: both inventions began in Chinese impulses conceptually reappropriated by the fathers to represent the native religious culture that was being represented to them. In Jesuit eyes the existence of a Chinese term revealed to them that there was indeed an implicit awareness of the One God among the Chinese. For "Cin," however, this was not invention so much as a symbolic transaction wherein a new god was appropriated into a preexistent understanding of spirit worship and sacrifice to local tutelary deities.

It was as if Ruggieri, hoping to make contact with another soul, shouted his familiar divine laws into the darkness before him and back came a response. In both instances of fabrication, that of "Cin Nich"'s Tianshu and that of Ruggieri's "Confucius," the text preserves a moment of joint invention of the sort that Roy Wagner has identified as inevitable in cultural encounter: the outsider "invents a 'culture' for people and they invent 'culture' for him."110 The representation of the native through translation was impossible, then, without a mutual, coordinated construction by both Chinese and Jesuits. The fact that both parties were responsible for the invention of Tianshu and "Confucius" did not mean, however, that their relations were transparent and unmediated. What it meant was that they saw themselves through the prism of their respective representations of the other. The culture of the Jesuits and that of the Chinese were like two circles partially overlaid and partially separate; what joined the circles at their points of intersection were inventions like la legge de' letterati, naturae lumine, Tianshu, and above all Confucius.

The difficulty of determining responsibility for the invention of Confucius is exacerbated, then, by more than just the centuries that lie between the sinified fathers and ourselves. As we have seen, the work of the mission, much like Chinese imperial history, was voluminously documented: in letters to superiors, friends, and colleagues; paraphrases and translations in various languages of scriptural Chinese works; memoirs of missionaries; publications by the mission in China; and commissioned [Whig] histories of the Christian evangelical project. That what is perhaps the earliest textual reference to "Confucius" occurs only now in this account tells us something about the nature of Jesuit experience in China, as well as our approach toward understanding it. The problem is not one of scarce materials; indeed the archival mass is huge, and many later works have effaced the contributions of earlier ones, like overlapping tracks in the snow. One cannot be certain of retracing one's steps but can only follow someone else's path in returning. The problem is one of conception—the assumption that the Jesuits are more like us and less like the Chinese they lived among and that texts, alone, are determinative of the true.

Thus we must be aware that the text does not take priority over context, just as literacy does not negate orality. Text—what is preserved in the records of the mission—and context—the social, intellectual, and cultural circumstances within which these records were produced—are mutually essential to understanding. This is not a relationship of priority so much as one of complementarity, and, in the case of the Jesuits, this critical complementarity points, counterintuitively, to a community more like the Chinese and less like us. We will see in the next chapter that the texts produced by the Jesuits in China were written registries of sense made among them as a community of indigenous interpreters. What these texts meant for the Jesuits in situ and how they were received by ecclesiastical and lay authorities in Europe in the decades following the missionaries' native self-constitution in China are matters to which we now turn.