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Matteo Ricci and His Process of Evangelization

Joel Cassady

Christ told his followers in the Great Commission, found at the end of Matthew's Gospel, to, "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (28:19-20). As European countries sought imperial expansion during the 15th -17th centuries, Christian missionaries, armed with this charge of Christ, sought to bring the Gospel to the world by joining the expeditions. Wherever they landed, Christian missionaries of Europe were faced with the difficult task of bringing the message of Jesus Christ to cultures that they knew nothing about. Often, these cultures approached religion and morality from an entirely different perspective than their European visitors. One example of such a diverse encounter was the kingdom of China. Starting with Francis Xavier, Jesuit missionaries adopted new techniques to try to spread Christianity throughout China and the rest of Asia. One of the most famous missionaries to China was the Jesuit priest, Matteo Ricci. The purpose of this paper is to present the Jesuit's method of evangelization, fully embodied in Matteo Ricci, and then to explore its possible impacts on evangelization and missionary work today.

Asian Christianity can be dated back all the way to the Apostle Thomas. Indeed, when Portuguese explorers arrived in India, they found the tomb of St. Thomas, venerated by "heretics"¹ – Nestorian Christians who were already present in Asia. There is also evidence that there were Christians in China at least 8 centuries before the arrival of the Portuguese Jesuits.² However, by the 17th century, these early Christians had all but died out.³

¹ Conti, Nicolo. "Testimony of the Italian Traveler Nicolo Conti (1415-1439)," in *A History of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, 1450 - 1990*, edited by Claus Koschorke, Frieder Ludwig and Mariano Delgado, 3-6. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2007, 3.

² Ricci, Matteo. "Matteo Ricci on the Remnants of Chinese Christianity (1605)," in *A History of Christianity in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, 1450 - 1990*, 6. Ricci's Journals were translated into Latin and published by fellow Jesuit, Fr. Nicola Trigault, in 1615.

³ Ibid.

Though the Portuguese had already made trade contact with China, the Jesuit priest St. Francis Xavier is usually attributed with trying to establish the first Jesuit missionaries in China. In his *Journals*, Ricci, tells us that, "Xavier was the first of the Society of Jesus to realize the aptitude of the innumerable people of this vast empire for absorbing the truth of the Gospel, as he was also the first to entertain the hope of spreading the faith among them."⁴ Xavier directed most of his early attention on the Japanese. However, as Ricci says, "whenever they were hard pressed in an argument, they always had recourse to the authority of the Chinese...they commonly asserted, that if the Christian religion was really the one true religion, it surely would have been known to the intelligent Chinese and accepted by them."⁵ He decided then that if he were to convert the Japanese, he would first need to convert the Chinese.

The first hurdle Xavier had to overcome was the fact that foreigners were forbidden to enter China except for officially appointed legates.⁶ He hoped to return to India and arrange for the Viceroy and Bishop of Goa to send an embassy to the Royal Court. If he could join this embassy, he planned to "announce the Gospel to the Chinese; publicly if allowed to and secretly if not."⁷ However, his plan did not go through, and given that both foreigners and the locals who sponsored their trips into China were punished if caught, Xavier had a difficult time finding help into the Chinese kingdom. Xavier would eventually pour the rest of his life into this project, dying after 11 years of missionary work in the Orient on 2 Dec. 1552, with "his last prayer still absorbed in contemplating the conversion of [the] China"⁸ in which he never set foot.

Trigault tells us that, "any attempt to win [the Chinese] over was sheer waste of time, like trying to whiten an Ethiopian."⁹ That did not stop Xavier

⁴ Ricci, Matteo. *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matteo Ricci, 1583-1610*. Translated by Louis J. S.J. Gallagher. New York: Random House, 1953, 117.

⁵ Ibid., 117 – 118.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid., 127.

⁹ Ibid., 131.

from trying, nor did it stop his successor, a man of equal passion by the name of Alexander Valignano, who set up base at the Portuguese port of Macao in 1578. Father Valignano was eventually joined by two Italian priests, Michele Ruggeri and Matteo Ricci.

Ricci was born just short of two months before Xavier died, on 16 Oct. 1552, in Macerata, Italy. His early schooling was by the Jesuits, and later he was sent to Rome at the age of seventeen by his father to study law. While studying at the prestigious Collegium Romanum, he studied under the great scientist Christopher Clavius, and was well versed in mathematics and a variety of the natural sciences, including astronomy and cartography.¹⁰ However, he soon abandoned his legal studies for religious pursuits. He joined the Society of Jesus on 15 Aug. 1571, and completed his studies in Philosophy and Theology in 1577. He left Portugal and arrived in Goa, India, in 1578 and arrived at the Portuguese colony of Macao in April 1582, about three years after Ruggeri.

Valignano decided quickly that if his missionaries were going to have any success in China, they would have to master the Chinese language, something no other missionaries had done.¹¹ He maintained Xavier's stance that the most appropriate way to preach the Gospel to the Chinese was through literary and scholarly means¹² and adopted a missionary approach that broke significantly from the conquistador method.¹³ Valignano desired to gain converts through "his principles of adaptation, equality, and friendship with the governing class."¹⁴ This accommodation style of missionary practice¹⁵ was to prove fundamental to success in China.

Ruggeri and Ricci immersed themselves in the Chinese language and culture. Ruggeri was fundamental in helping to establish relations with the Chinese early on, but after they established a mis-

sion house in Chaoking in September 1583,¹⁶ Ricci became the primary leader for the Jesuits' Chinese mission.

Simply getting access into China was a task in and of itself. The next step was trying to bring Christianity to the Chinese people. Though, as mentioned above, there were already traces of Christianity, along with Islam and even Judaism, within China, the Chinese had three other religions that dominated their culture: Buddhism, Taoism, and Confucianism. Ricci viewed the Buddhists as the priestly class of China, and in an effort to become a part of it, he shaved his head and beard, and donned the dress of a Buddhist monk.¹⁷

In the very beginning, Ricci gained audiences with the intellectuals and authorities¹⁸ primarily through the presentation of gifts of scientific instruments and knowledge from Europe. These consisted of clocks, maps, mathematics, and astronomy.¹⁹ Ricci produced the first map for the Chinese that provided them with a perspective of how their country sat in relation to the rest of the world. When he finished it, he presented it to the prefect of Chaoching along with a clock he had made locally, and the prefect was so pleased he had the map printed and distributed the copies amongst his friends.²⁰

It was through the gifts and teaching of these sciences that the missionaries first gained the trust of the Chinese. Again, referring to Ricci's *Journals*: "In order that the appearance of a new religion might not arouse suspicion among the Chinese people, the Fathers did not speak openly about religious matters when they began to appear in public."²¹ Early on, when not meeting with officials, their primary tasks were to continue to study the Chinese culture and language.

¹⁰ Corradini, Piero. "Matteo Ricci's Approach to Chinese Civilization." *Dialogue and Alliance* 4, no. 2 (1990), 54.

¹¹ Introduction to Ricci, Matteo. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shib-i)*. Edited by Edward J. S.J. Malatesta. Translated by Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen S.J. St. Louis: The Institute of Jesuit Sources, 1985, 5.

¹² *Ibid.*, 11.

¹³ Chung, Paul S. "Mission and Inculturation in the Thought of Matteo Ricci." In *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium*, edited by Paul S. Chung, Kim Kyoung-Jae and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, 303-328. Eugene, OR: Puckwick Publications, 2007, 304.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 305.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 306.

¹⁶ Rouleau, F.A. *Ricci, Matteo*. in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, Vols. XII: Qat-Scr, edited by Editorial Staff at The Catholic University of America, 470-472. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967, 471.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ An important note to make is that in ancient China, many of the ruling class were the literati, the scholars of the time. This impressed Ricci (Chan, Chung-Yan Joyce. "Commands from Heaven: Matteo Ricci's Christianity in the Eyes of Ming Confucian Officials." *Missiology: An International Review* XXXI, no. 3 [July 2003], 274) and called to mind the ideal laid out in Plato's *Republic* (Corradini, 59).

¹⁹ Introduction to Ricci, Matteo. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shib-i)*, 7.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ Ricci, Matteo. *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matteo Ricci*, 154.

Ricci eventually discovered that the best way to enter into dialogue with the Chinese was not as a Buddhist monk, a class looked down upon by government officials and prominent people.²² The class with the most influence was the Confucian literati, and it was not long before Ricci studied their philosophy thoroughly and gained appreciation for the ethical values regarding the state and the family that are at the heart of Confucianism, believing it to be more similar to Christianity.²³ “In his study of the *Analecets*,” Peter Chung tells us, “Ricci became convinced that Confucius had taught about a reverence for Heaven, apart from idolatry. Along with reverencing Heaven, Confucius also articulated an emphasis on human ethical morality, which is inherently good.”²⁴ Ricci also viewed Confucianism as a “perfect expression of ‘natural law.’”²⁵

The Chinese were quite literate, particularly the Confucian officials Ricci was associating with. In order to make a lasting impact on the Chinese, Ricci and his colleges determined that they would have to utilize publications.²⁶ Their first year in China, they went to work translating the Ten Commandments. This was so well received, that pamphlets containing the Lord’s Prayer, the Hail Mary, and the Creed soon followed.²⁷

One of Ricci’s first tasks was to decide how to translate the Christian understanding of “God” for the Chinese. Confucianism provided Ricci an excellent source. In early Confucian writings, the word *Shang-ti* is often used as a term for deity, and is often translated as “Lord on High,” or “Sovereign on High.”²⁸ There is the possibility that this referred to an ancestor or a group of ancestors, underneath which were lesser spirits or gods that typically corresponded to elements such as the sun, moon, wind, rain, mountains or rivers.²⁹ A change in dynasty introduced a new term, *T’ien*, that translates to “Heaven,” and was used interchangeably with *Shang-ti*.³⁰

²² Chan, Chung-Yan Joyce. “Commands from Heaven: Matteo Ricci’s Christianity in the Eyes of Ming Confucian Officials.” *Missiology: An International Review*, 274.

²³ Chung, Paul S. “Mission and Inculturation in the Thought of Matteo Ricci.” In *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium*, 306.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 306-307.

²⁵ Introduction to Ricci, Matteo. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T’ien-chu Shib-i)*, 9.

²⁶ *Ibid*, 7.

²⁷ *Ibid*.

²⁸ *Ibid*, 33.

²⁹ *Ibid*.

³⁰ *Ibid*, 34

There were complications for using both terms. *Shang-ti* was adopted by Taoism, which both Ricci and the Confucians both spoke strongly against; and *T’ien* fell short of adequately expressing the Christian God. The term decided upon was *T’ien-chu*, which translated means “Lord of Heaven.”

³¹ Though a term that refers to a deity in Buddhist writings, the missionaries adopted this term freely and it remains the official term for God in the Catholic Church in China today.³² In his writings, however, Ricci often used both of the traditional Chinese terms for God, as well as the new *T’ien-chu*.

One of Ricci’s greatest writings was *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*. A primary focus of Confucians was the task of self-improvement of an individual’s moral character over the course of one’s lifetime. Ricci focused extensively in *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* “from beginning to end...to expound the nature of self-cultivation.”³³ The work is written as a dialogue between a Chinese scholar and a Western scholar, and Ricci was able to connect Confucian principles with Christian ones. One example of this is filial piety, “the most treasured cultural value of the Chinese people,”³⁴ which he connected to the relationship between humankind and the Lord of Heaven. Section 115 states:

Our parents give us the various parts of our bodies, and we ought, therefore, to be filial towards them. Our sovereign and his ministers give us land, places to live, trees and animals so that we can practice filial piety towards our elders, and instruct and nurture our children. We ought therefore to honor them as well. But how much more should we honor the Lord of Heaven who is the great Father and Mother, the great Sovereign, the first Cause of all first ancestors, the One from whom all sovereigns derive their mandate and the Producer and Sustainer of all things?³⁵

Though the Chinese were distant from the Europeans and the scholastic ideas found in Ricci’s writing (“the first Cause”), one can see how the Chinese value of honoring ancestors and authorities for the gifts

³¹ *Ibid*.

³² *Ibid*, 34-35.

³³ *Ibid*, 22.

³⁴ Chan, Chung-Yan Joyce. “Commands from Heaven: Matteo Ricci’s Christianity in the Eyes of Ming Confucian Officials.” *Missiology: An International Review*, 276.

³⁵ Ricci, Matteo. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T’ien-chu Shib-i)*, 127.

each person possesses can be transferred to honoring God for all these and more.

Ricci also connected the Confucian understanding of humanity to the Christian notion of love.³⁶ He says that humanity is the most important of virtues, and explains humanity as fulfilling Christ's commandments: "The definition of humanity can be summed up in the following two sentences: Love the Lord of Heaven, for He is supreme; and love others as you love yourself for the sake of the Lord of Heaven."³⁷

In looking at these connections Ricci made, we can see that Ricci essentially saw Confucianism as a pathway to Christianity, and he was successful in bringing the Chinese to viewing Christianity as providing a new component to their Confucian faith.³⁸ Chung-Yan Joyce Chan, in exploring Ricci's success in China, proposes that:

the unique message of Christianity embedded in the belief of the existence of a Supreme God of the Universe, skillfully presented by Ricci in a culturally acceptable style, perfected the teaching of classical Confucianism... Ricci's message introduced the literati to transcendent help that goes beyond human limitations and weaknesses in the pursuit of moral ideals.³⁹

Chan shows us the relation between Confucianism and Christianity that Ricci brought to light. In much the same way as the patristic fathers viewed Greek philosophy as laying a foundation that allowed the Greco-Roman culture of the time to accept Christianity, Confucianism laid a similar foundation in China.⁴⁰

Ricci's efforts at bridging a gap between Confucianism and Christianity, between Chinese and European cultures, were very successful. However, it did not happen without criticisms both back home and also abroad.⁴¹ For one, Ricci was forced

to "make some revision of Catholic doctrines to accommodate some of the Confucian ideas, in order to reach concordance with Confucian thought."⁴² According to Chung, there were two primary points of contention: first, in regards to his practice, Ricci "was accused of paying too much attention to the Confucian elite instead of pushing the missionary cause forward"; in regards to his theory, he was accused of "sully[ing] the purity of Christianity" by integrating it with Confucianism.⁴³ Other criticisms come from Michael Loewe, who says:

The grand strategy of the Jesuit missionaries was not successful, despite some notable cases of conversion and the considerable contribution that they made to Chinese culture. The failure was due mainly to irreconcilable differences of intellectual outlook and to the inherent dangers of the tactics that were adopted... By their tactics of accommodation, their tolerance of Chinese rites, and their deliberate search for evidence of Christian principles in traditional pre-Christian texts, the Jesuits may well have made a grave long term error.⁴⁴

In regards to converts, Lowe later says, "Some of the conversions that the fathers achieved [were] undoubtedly sincere; the validity of some must remain open to question."⁴⁵ According to Lowe, it is because of the strategy of accommodation – which some would argue was the primary reason for Ricci's success – the validity of some of the conversions amongst the Chinese is suspect.

Another criticism of Ricci, from a modern perspective, comes from Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen, S.J., who, in their translator's introduction to *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, say that "Ricci did not really grasp the central ideas of the various Chinese schools of thought of his day, or their historical background."⁴⁶ This was particularly evident in his treatment of Buddhism and Taoism, both of which Lancashire and Kuo-chen claim can be understood by Christians "as similar to those of... the negative approach to God in scholastic philosophy and theology."⁴⁷ There is also evidence that

³⁶ Chung, Paul S. "Mission and Inculturation in the Thought of Matteo Ricci." In *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium*, 314.

³⁷ Ricci, Matteo. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shib-i)*, 375.

³⁸ Chan, Chung-Yan Joyce. "Commands from Heaven: Matteo Ricci's Christianity in the Eyes of Ming Confucian Officials." *Missiology: An International Review*, 277.

³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁰ Introduction to Ricci, Matteo. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shib-i)*, 9.

⁴¹ Chung, Paul S. "Mission and Inculturation in the Thought of Matteo Ricci." In *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium*, 316.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Ibid., 317.

⁴⁴ Loewe, Michael. "Imperial China's Reactions to the Catholic Missions." *Numen* 35 (Dec. 1988), 204.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 205.

⁴⁶ Introduction to Ricci, Matteo. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shib-i)*, 47.

⁴⁷ Ibid.

he misunderstood the Confucian intellectuals' views on the motivation of good conduct, as well as the Buddhist views of reincarnation.⁴⁸

Finally, Ricci is often critiqued, fairly or unfairly, for his Western European scholastic bias in theology, especially in regards to his dismissal of the other religions of Buddhism and Taoism.⁴⁹ Chung is particularly critical of Ricci's theological bias:

If Ricci believed that God revealed Godself through the name of *T'ien* or *Shang-ti* in ancient Chinese culture, should he not have taken more seriously God's universal reign for all, rather than sorting out wisdom and natural reason in Chinese classics as the independent points of connection for consonance with God? Instead of rationalizing Chinese Confucian philosophy as independent natural revelation, should he not have deemed such wisdom (together with Buddhism and Taoism!), more dynamically, as analogical witnesses to God in light of God's reconciliation in Jesus Christ with the world? Ricci's understanding of Jesus Christ reveals a dysfunctional view of mission, so that his attempt at accommodation centers only on theism in Christian-Confucian relations [cites Hans Kung, *Does God Exist?: An Answer for Today* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1980) 513 – 515].⁵⁰

While it is important to recognize his missionary shortcomings, it would be wrong to let them significantly undermine Ricci's successes. Chung says that, "Ricci's legacy will remain a springboard for his followers to improve upon his limitations in terms of engaging the wisdom of other religions."⁵¹ Even if he failed, from a 21st century perspective, in his "view of mission," Ricci was important in bridging European and Chinese cultures. Lowe admits that one of the positives to come from Ricci and the other Jesuits' work was that it brought Chinese culture to mainstream Europe.⁵²

Ricci's demonstration of the compatibility between the Chinese concepts of *T'ien*, "Heaven," and *Shang-ti*, "Sovereign on High," and the Christian

understanding of God is highly praised.⁵³ Lancashire and Kuo-chen even go so far as to say, "This demonstration is the greatest merit of *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* and Ricci's most important contribution to the Chinese-Christian dialogue. His spirit is that which should animate those who wish to create a Chinese Christian theology."⁵⁴

In response to the issue of sincerity in regards to the Confucian literati's conversions, Chan points out that association with foreigners in sixteenth century China was a dangerous thing that could even carry with it the charge of treason.⁵⁵ "Why," she asks, "would someone who held a high position in the imperial court risk their future and the lives of their loved ones for some strangers?"⁵⁶ Chan also mentions that associated with conversion was behavioral changes amongst the literati who adopted Christianity.⁵⁷ Acknowledging a change in faith is one thing, but one's actions are often much more indicative of a true change, and Ricci's Christianity seemed to inspire that change.

In judging Ricci's success, one must also acknowledge the environment in which he worked. According to Chan, "The chaotic Chinese political situation created urgency for reform, which opened tremendous opportunity for new ideas."⁵⁸ But the job of introducing the Chinese to Christianity still required the right man, and Ricci was that man. Practicing what Chung calls a "model of evangelism, based on friendship,"⁵⁹ Ricci went to great pains to identify himself with the Chinese people, and they acknowledged the kindness and respect with which he approached his missionary work. Titles such as, "Blue-eyed and with a voice like melodious bell," and "Doctor from the Great West," as he was referred to by the Chinese, show the respect and admiration the Chinese people had for Ricci.

Ricci's efforts got him access into the Imperial city of Peking in 1598, and later in 1601 he was granted residence there.⁶⁰ He presented gifts to the

⁴⁸ Ibid, 47-49.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 49.

⁵⁰ Chung, Paul S. "Mission and Inculturation in the Thought of Matteo Ricci." In *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium*, 325.

⁵¹ Ibid, 324.

⁵² Loewe, Michael. "Imperial China's Reactions to the Catholic Missions." *Numen*, 205.

⁵³ Introduction to Ricci, Matteo. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T'ien-chu Shib-i)*, 52.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Chan, Chung-Yan Joyce. "Commands from Heaven: Matteo Ricci's Christianity in the Eyes of Ming Confucian Officials." *Missiology: An International Review*, 282.

⁵⁶ Ibid.

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁵⁹ Chung, Paul S. "Mission and Inculturation in the Thought of Matteo Ricci." In *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium*, 319.

⁶⁰ Rouleau, F.A. Ricci, Matteo, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 471.

Emperor, but Ricci never met the Emperor face to face.⁶¹ On 11 May 1610, Ricci died and was buried just outside of Peking on land that was designated by the Emperor for such purposes and for a new mission house for the Jesuit missionaries.⁶² The land also received imperial consecration.⁶³ F. A. Rouleau reports that, “Known throughout the realm as Li Mat’ou, this missionary scholar from the West became and has ever remained the most respected foreign figure in Chinese literature.”⁶⁴ Known not only as “an eminent teacher of the Christian religion,” but also as a “prominent professor of physics, mathematics and geography, as a learned philosopher of Chinese and of extraneous doctrine, and as a prominent commentator on Confucius...Some of his Chinese compositions, which he accomplished alone... are included in the official index of the best Chinese writings of all time.”⁶⁵

After his death, the mission continued on, but conflict began to arise regarding Ricci and his fellow Jesuits’ accommodation techniques. The Chinese got along well with their Jesuit friends, but they clashed starkly with the institutional church. Papal decrees came out in 1704 from Pope Clement XI and later in 1742 by Pope Benedict XIV.⁶⁶ They first banned *T’ien* and *Shang-ti* as designations for God, and instructed Chinese Catholics not to follow “traditional Chinese rites that did not conform to Catholicism...offering sacrifices to Confucius, as well as to ancestors, was declared idolatry and superstition; Confucius himself was denounced as a public idolater and a private atheist.”⁶⁷ The second decree fully condemned the Chinese rite, “and opposed the Jesuits’ mission of acculturation definitively.”⁶⁸ In many ways, this was a moot point, as the edict of toleration of Christianity issued by the Emperor in 1692⁶⁹ was revoked in 1724, banning Christianity from the country.⁷⁰ It was not until 1939 that Pope

Pius XII overturned the decree of 1724, allowing Chinese Christians to practice Chinese rites.⁷¹

Despite the criticisms and the struggles between the Chinese authorities and Church authorities, Ricci “was successful in opening the doors of China to Christianity.”⁷² His concern for a foreign culture as a missionary practice was not a new concept (Gregory the Great implored his missionary Augustine to keep what was good of the Anglo-Saxon culture),⁷³ and the strategy of accommodation was not solely his plan for China. However, Ricci’s approach to both can be an example for today’s missionaries. Ricci completely immersed himself in the Chinese culture, and demonstrated a genuine respect for the culture and people of China. Even in his criticisms of religions such as Buddhism or Taoism, Piero Corradini says he “never showed any contempt for the doctrines he was refuting. For this reason, he was highly appreciated even by his adversaries.”⁷⁴

It is often said that actions speak louder than words. Just as a changed behavior on behalf of converted Chinese literati could be used to indicate a genuine conversion, it would seem that Ricci’s actions truly supported the Gospel he preached. Though all people should witness to their faith in this way, it would seem this is especially the case for missionaries. This, combined with the fact that Ricci not only translated Christianity into the Chinese language, but into the Chinese philosophical and religious languages as well, no doubt demonstrated to the Chinese people his commitment to them. Their response was that a growing number converted to the faith Ricci preached. At the time of Ricci’s death, about 2,500 Chinese had converted.⁷⁵ In 1700, there were upwards of 200,000 Catholics in China.⁷⁶ Today, there are approximately 8 million Catholics in China loyal to Rome,⁷⁷ due in large part to the efforts of Ricci and the other Jesuit missionaries, and those that followed after. Corradini has it right in saying of Ricci, “He was a forerunner of our times, and the present dialogue between western and Chinese scholars is a clear demonstration that Ricci’s approach to China was the correct one.”⁷⁸

⁶¹ Introduction to Ricci, Matteo. *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T’ien-chu Shib-i)*, 10.

⁶² Ibid.

⁶³ Rouleau, F.A. Ricci, Matteo, in *New Catholic Encyclopedia*, 472.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Preface to Ricci, Matteo. *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matteo Ricci*, xxi.

⁶⁶ Chung, Paul S. “Mission and Inculturation in the Thought of Matteo Ricci.” In *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium*, 322 – 323.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Ibid. 323.

⁶⁹ Neill, S. *A History of Christian Missions* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1964), 189-190.

⁷⁰ Chung, Paul S. “Mission and Inculturation in the Thought of Matteo Ricci.” In *Asian Contextual Theology for the Third Millennium*,

323.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Ibid, 318.

⁷⁴ Corradini, 58.

⁷⁵ Chung, 322.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ BBC Article.

⁷⁸ Corradini, 59.