Matteo Ricci, translated by Thierry Meynard, S.J.

Le Sens réel de "Seigneur du Ciel." Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2013, Pp. lxxix + 650. Pb, 39 euros.

The *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 [True meaning of the Lord of Heaven] (first edition 1603, Biblioteca Casanatense, MS 2136, second and more widely circulated edition 1607, Hangzhou, found in ARSI Japonica-Sinica I, 44, etc., modern edition Taipei, Xuesheng shuju, 1965), a catechism written in classical Chinese by the Italian Jesuit missionary Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) with the help of several Chinese literati, was arguably the most influential religious text produced by the Jesuit China mission (1583–1773). The new French-Chinese bilingual edition by Thierry Meynard, one of the world's leading authorities on the intellectual history of the Jesuit China mission, is an excellent introduction to this landmark document, presented here as a bridge between cultural traditions. The publishing house Les Belles Lettres, well-known for its bilingual editions of Greek and Latin texts, has issued the translation as part of "Bibliothèque chinoise," a series started in 2010 and intended to bring Chinese texts into the curriculum of world historical literature. Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi* is the first text by a non-Chinese author to be translated in this series. This lends support to the editor's assertion—a plain fact which has yet to be accepted as common wisdom—that "Chinese has for a very long time been a language of civilization surpassing ethnic ties" (lxvi) and European input has been "an integral part of the Chinese intellectual tradition" (back cover).

This edition is the first modern French translation of Ricci's text. Its significance for the thriving field of Jesuit studies in France goes without saying, since the only other French translation dates from the eighteenth century and is entirely devoid of scholarly apparatus. For Anglophone readers, too, Meynard's new edition presents several important contributions, even if it is unlikely to replace Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu's 1985 English translation (St. Louis: Institute of Jesuit Sources). In fact, Meynard attempts to insure continuity for scholars studying Ricci's text by retaining Lancashire and Hu's paragraphing. Meynard's long introduction to the content, historical background, and legacy of *Tianzhu shiyi* represents the general historiographical renewal in the field of Jesuit China studies during the past three decades, characterized by a more systematic use of Chinese primary sources and a revival of interest in the topic in mainland China in the post-Mao era. While Meynard agrees with Lancashire and Hu in presenting *Tianzhu shiyi* as shaped by the dual context of Catholic expansion in East Asia and the late-Ming intellectual renewal in China, his analysis of the Chinese context is substantially richer. Likewise, while Meynard's assessment of Ricci's theological positions generally agrees with that presented in the English edition, he also analyzes Ricci's reception by contemporary mainland Chinese intellectuals, whose works were written after 1985 and have not yet

been translated into Western languages. One may find it disappointing, however, that the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Chinese reaction to *Tianzhu shiyi* is reviewed all too briefly, and that the later missionary controversy around Ricci's use of Confucian language in preaching Christianity is only fleetingly mentioned. But this can be compensated by the extensive scholarship extant on both topics, for which Meynard offers a well-selected bibliography.

This new French edition conveniently presents the Chinese text and the annotated translation on opposite pages, as in the English edition. It expands on the English edition, with Meynard's original translation of the prefaces by Ricci's Chinese interlocutors, as well as the comments on the work in the imperial collection *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 [Complete library of the four treasures], in line with his emphasis on *Tianzhu Shiyi* as part of the Chinese tradition; the English edition included only Ricci's own preface. The footnotes are far more extensive than those in the English edition, indicating the textual variation between different editions of *Tianzhu shiyi*, and providing welcome aid for grasping the many cultural references Ricci draws from both Chinese and European traditions, as well as the theological and philosophical questions at stake. Readers with backgrounds in either Sinological or Jesuit studies should equally appreciate the full quotations Meynard provides from Confucius and Mencius as well as Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas, where Ricci often only elusively hints at them. These and other aids for scholarly research are a substantial improvement over the English edition.

Interestingly, while Meynard systematically points out Ricci's misunderstanding of Chinese traditions, Ricci's misrepresentations of Europe does not receive an equally critical reading. Take, for instance, Ricci's statement that "a country neighboring mine used to have [...] thousands of sects. Later on, literati from my country instructed the people by appealing to reason. [...] Today everyone follows a single doctrine, that of the Lord of Heaven." Meynard's footnote explains only that Ricci "seems to refer to the work of the Jesuits [...] in the Germanic states, then divided between Catholics and Protestants" (30). Yet as scholars such as Erik Zürcher has pointed out (Erik Zürcher, "China and the West: the Image of Europe and its Impact," in *China and Christianity: Burdened Past, Hopeful Future*, eds. Stephen Uhalley Jr. and Wu Xiaoxin [Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe, 2000], 43–61), for understanding *Tianzhu Shiyi* in its seventeenth-century context, it is also worthwhile to observe that this idealized representation of a united Catholic Europe was, for Ricci and later Jesuits, a deliberate strategy to enhance the credibility of their religious message.

Meynard's translation is overall faithful, elegant, and reader-friendly, which does full justice to this fruit of collaboration between Ricci and a group of top literati of late Ming China. When dealing with difficult Chinese philosophical

concepts for which no exact European equivalent exists, he rigorously follows the established conventions of contemporary French sinology, providing references to the latest studies and translations in French of the relevant text, and the original Chinese terms in parentheses. This is applied systematically throughout the book, disregarding a few inconsistencies. For example, there is no reason why, in a single sentence, the “five flavors” are followed by original Chinese terms but the “five organs” are not: the gap between the traditional Chinese medical notion of “*xin* 心” and the anatomical “heart” is much wider than that between “*suan* 酸” and “acid” (16–17).

As Meynard notes himself, the translation of *Tianzhu Shiyi* into a Western language also poses a special challenge, for it was, in a sense, originally translated from a Western language itself. Therefore, the translation should ideally fulfill two contradicting aims: reconstituting the European term Ricci had in mind, while also conveying the estrangement that a seventeenth-century Chinese reader would have felt facing an alien concept. Meynard’s choice—perhaps the best possible—is to use the European term in the main body of the translation, while systematically explaining in footnotes whether the Chinese translation was a neologism or an extant Chinese term invested with a new meaning. There are, however, a few omissions, one of them being the Scholastic categories of “substance” and “accident.” Meynard only mentions that Ricci was the first to introduce this logical distinction into Chinese. Yet the sinologist Jacques Gernet, in his pioneering work *China and the First Christian Impact* ([first French edition Paris: Gallimard, 1982]; [English translation: Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985, 243]), has famously judged inadequate the neologisms Ricci crafted, *zilizhe* 自立者 (which Gernet translates literally as “that which is established to itself”) and *yilaizhe* 依賴者 (according to Gernet, “that which depends [upon something else]”)—and based on this assessment, he argued that Scholastic thinking is embedded in Indo-European languages and therefore untranslatable into Chinese. Readers would have welcomed reflection on this influential thesis from the translator who has just made the original historical document available to the Francophone world.

But the significance of Meynard’s translation of *Tianzhu shiyi* lies first and foremost in its allowing this fundamental text of the Jesuit China mission to speak for itself, beyond the world of sinologists. With a rising awareness of the global dimension of early modern Catholic missions, researchers are increasingly confronted with primary sources requiring knowledge in an array of languages, including many non-European languages such as Nahuatl, Tamil, or Manchu. We can only hope that this excellent example of translating primary sources will be widely emulated, making more

historical materials accessible to researchers of different backgrounds and enhancing dialogue between them.

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