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From Rites to Insights: Lessons from the Chinese Rites Controversy for Cross-Cultural Philosophers

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From Rites to Insights

Lessons From the Chinese Rites Controversy for Cross-Cultural Philosophers

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Abstract

From the early seventeenth century, Catholic missionaries in China started to pose difficult questions, the most central of which were (1) how one was supposed to denote the Christian God, using Chinese terms, and (2) what Chinese rites—especially those relating to Confucius and deceased ancestors—Catholics were allowed to partake in. On account of serious disagreement about the appropriate responses to these questions, the missionaries in China were divided into two groups. On the one hand, accommodationists were mostly in favour of Chinese rites, while 'abolitionists', on the other hand, were largely against them. Eventually, certain missionaries submitted these questions to the Holy See. At different times, however, this religious authority provided answers in accordance with the views of both groups. This caused great confusion and even greater division, as a result of which a debate emerged within the Catholic Church, now referred to as the Chinese Rites Controversy. Finally, in the early eighteenth century, the Holy See officially prohibited all Catholics to engage in virtually all Chinese rites. As a result, most Christians were expelled from the Chinese empire. This had huge ramifications for the Catholic mission in China, and for Sino-Western relations more generally. Since intercultural philosophers seek to embrace inclusion and equality, and to promote cross-cultural understanding, this thesis will explore what insights may be drawn from a historical revaluation of the Chinese Rites Controversy for intercultural philosophers. The following views will be put forward. Based on an inquiry into several papal decrees, it is fruitful for cross-cultural philosophers to be cautious of the way in which language is used,

because language can (a) be problematic when one is formulating, evaluating, or responding to questions, and (b) show what perspective one is situated in. Furthermore, the importance of inclusion, precision (as opposed to generalisation), and practical considerations will be discussed. On the basis of an investigation of a discussion between a Chinese emperor and a Catholic Bishop, some (both beneficial and harmful) dialogical attitudes will be discussed, as well as a principle of how comparative research could be conducted, and the importance of having a critical mentality towards the way in which one (a) makes sense of one's sources of information, (b) makes judgements about and (c) interprets matters in another culture. Furthermore, the ever-presence of sociopolitical factors and power structures will be talked about. Moreover, it will be argued that it is important to develop a sensitivity to intonation and non-discursive modes of communication.

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Introduction

From the early seventeenth century, the evangelical mission of Catholic missionaries in China had become firmly established. In 1659, the Sacred Congregation for Propagating the Faith gave them the following instruction.

> Do not try to persuade the Chinese to change their rites, their customs, their ways as long as these are not openly opposed to religion and good morals. What would be sillier than to import France, Spain, Italy, or any other country of Europe into China? Don't import these, but the faith. The faith does not reject or crush the rites and customs of any race, as long as these are not evil. Rather, it wants to preserve them. […] Admire and praise what is deserving of praise. What is not praiseworthy need not be heralded with flattery. The prudent thing would be either to withhold judgement, or at least not to condemn hastily and rashly. What is evidently evil should be removed more by signs of disapproval than by words. Eliminate evils gradually, seizing the opportunity when minds are ready to receive the truth.[1]

However, little more than three decades later, this sentiment would reverse when an authoritative figure, Charles Maigrot de Crissey (1652-1730), wrote that "they should take care, with all zeal and diligence they can, to do away with these pagan rites entirely. Gradually the rites, which the Catholic Church has devoutly prescribed for the dead, should become the practice of the Christians for Christians."[2]

How could this happen? How could an initial encouragement to allow most Chinese rites change into a directive to prohibit virtually all of them? Or, to put it differently, how could

[1] Sure, *100 Roman Documents*, 6-7.
[2] Ibid., 52.

the general accommodationist attitude turn into an 'abolitionist' one? Even though these questions are highly interesting, the focus of the current thesis will not be on answering them. But then, what will be its centre of attention? The response to this question will crystallise after examining the relevance of the Chinese Rites Controversy, the dispute that arose on account of wide-reaching disagreements among missionaries. To put it bluntly: why should one wish to study a debate of some three hundred years ago?

According to Paul Rule, "[t]he legacy of the Chinese Rites Controversy is still with us."[3] In the same vein, Richard P. Madsen argues that "the basic issues he [Matteo Ricci] raised four hundred years ago about the compatibility of Chinese rites with Catholic practice are still very much alive."[4] In fact, he continues, "[w]hat may be occurring in the 1990s […] is a new Rites Controversy."[5] Finally, he concludes the following.

> The old Rites Controversy sprung up in the fertile soil of a period of great political and cultural transitions: in China, from the Ming to the Qing Dynasty and in Europe, from the Renaissance to the Modern Era. We are now entering another era of great political and cultural transition, both for China and for the world—perhaps the greatest since the seventeenth century. We should not be surprised if this provided fertile soil for another painful, but potentially spiritually invigorating Rites Controversy. *Perhaps the study of history will help us avoid the worst mistakes of the first* [emphasis added].[6]

This thesis will be a response to Madsen's concluding remark. Its central question will be what insights may be drawn from a historical revaluation of the Chinese Rites Controversy for cross-

[3] Rule, "Towards a History of the Chinese Rites Controversy," 266.
[4] Madsen, "The Catholic Church in China Today," 271.
[5] Ibid., 275.
[6] Ibid., 277.

cultural philosophers. The following views will be put forward. Based on an inquiry into several papal decrees, it is fruitful for cross-cultural philosophers to be cautious of the way in which language is used, because language can (a) be problematic when one is formulating, evaluating, or responding to questions, and (b) show what perspective one is situated in. Furthermore, the importance of inclusion, precision (as opposed to generalisation), and practical considerations will be discussed. On the basis of an investigation of a discussion between a Chinese emperor and a Catholic Bishop, some (both beneficial and harmful) dialogical attitudes will be discussed, as well as a principle of how comparative research could be conducted, and the importance of having a critical mentality towards the way in which one (a) makes sense of one's sources of information, (b) makes judgements about and (c) interprets matters in another culture. Furthermore, the ever-presence of sociopolitical factors and power structures will be talked about. Moreover, it will be argued that it is important to develop a sensitivity to intonation and non-discursive modes of communication. To put this hypothesis to the test, this thesis is divided in a threefold manner. First, in order to acquire insights from the Chinese Rites Controversy, historical information about it is called for. Therefore, a reconstruction will be given of important events leading up to, causing, and eventually 'worsening', this debate. Second, several papal decrees will be examined in detail to discover ways in which the questions, information, and decisions they contain could be problematic in a cross-cultural context. Third and last, the focus will be on one of the most decisive encounters during the Chinese Rites Controversy: the discussion between Kangxi and Maigrot. What may be learnt from the way in which the Chinese emperor is recorded to have questioned this Bishop?

In this thesis, the subject matters of various disciplines will be discussed. This interdisciplinarity is justified, because if cross-cultural philosophy does not per definition require an interdisciplinary approach, it must be emphasised that the Chinese Rites Controversy

is itself already a highly multidisciplinary debate. After all, missionaries active during the Chinese Rites Controversy asked questions like how specific Chinese rites are best described, how reliable Chinese historical records are, how the European name for the Christian God should be translated into the Chinese language, or how compatible (Neo-)Confucian philosophy is with the Catholic religion. Thus, in a sense, they were forced to engage in what would now be considered different disciplines, such as anthropology, history, linguistics, philosophy, sociology, and theology.

If the reader was not yet convinced that it is fruitful to practise intercultural philosophy, let the following suffice for the purpose of this thesis. Intercultural philosophers have often sought to reveal that mainly Western (post-)Enlightenment philosophies are tainted with racist and Eurocentric elements. It might be added that intercultural philosophers have also tried to disclose other forms of discrimination (e.g. against predominantly oral modes of transmission or non-discursive forms of communication) and other forms of hegemony[7] (e.g. Sinocentrism). To some degree, the quest of intercultural philosophers may, therefore, be summarised as an attempt to contest discrimination and hegemony by embracing inclusion and equality.

Let us now produce a historical narrative about the Chinese Rites Controversy by discussing important events relating to it.

A Historical Reconstruction

Already in 1994, Rule stated that "there is no account [of the Chinese Rites Controversy] which attempts to tell the full story, from the early seventeenth to the early eighteenth centuries; to examine the missiological, sinological and ecclesiological dimensions;

[7] Franz M. Wimmer, for instance, argued that "[i]t is not only *Euro*centrism that has to be opposed, even if this type of centrism is the most efficient and criticisable. Exclusivistic, culturally based centrisms remain problematic in any case." Wimmer, "Intercultural Philosophy – Problems and Perspectives," 121.

and to evaluate its contemporary import."[8] The applicability of this statement does not seem to have changed much in the last thirty years. On top of that, when one wishes to examine the primary sources (e.g. decrees, letters, and treatises) appropriately, one must be familiar with quite a few languages (e.g. Chinese, French, Italian, Latin, Manchu, Portuguese, and Spanish). This is because relatively few of these writings have been translated into English or even been made public in their original language.[9] Moreover, considering the wide diversity of themes involved, one must also feel confident to employ methods of various disciplines (e.g. anthropology, history, linguistics, philosophy, sociology, and theology). As John W. Witek beautifully captured it, the Chinese Rites Controversy "is similar to a kaleidoscope whose multiple colors cannot be viewed at one glance."[10] Since relevant sources of information are largely fragmentary and unpublished, and given that highly multilingual and interdisciplinary knowledge is required, it is difficult to provide an exhaustive account of the Chinese Rites Controversy as described by Rule.[11] Nevertheless, a brief historical reconstruction will be given of the key events leading up to, causing, and eventually 'worsening', the dispute now referred to as the Chinese Rites Controversy.

To better understand the context in which the controversy emerged, let us first explore important events during the roughly one hundred years prior to it.

[8] Rule, 249.

[9] As an illustration, I was greatly interested in Antoine de Beauvollier's *Eclaircissements sur les controverses de la Chine* (1702). However, the only manuscript of this text is located in the Archive Jésuites in Paris. I contacted them, asking whether there is a digitised version of this most interesting document. Unfortunately, they were forced to respond to this question negatively. After all, they wrote, "le manuscrit contient plus de 629 pages."

[10] Witek, "Eliminating Misunderstandings," 209.

[11] One may argue, as does Rule, that, in fact, no one is ever able to provide such an account: "[n]o history, of course, is final, immune from revision, whether through the discovery of new data, or the new perspectives of later generation, or most commonly both." Rule, 249.

Trade or Faith?

In the beginning of the sixteenth century, the first Portuguese traders reached the shores of the Chinese empire.[12] The arrival of these men with "high noses and deep-set eyes," who "wore white turbans and dressed like Muslims," does not appear to have been too peaceful.[13] Therefore, according to different reports, they caused anxiety among the Chinese.[14] Later, during the reign of emperor Wan-li (r. 1572-1620), Dutch men also engaged in trade with China. The Dutch may have been given a warmer welcome, because they were not described as negatively as the first Portuguese traders. Even so, it is clear that, initially, both the Portuguese and the Dutch came to China for commercial reasons, rather than religious ones.[15] In other words, with regard to the encounters between the Europeans and the Chinese during the sixteenth century, it appears to be the case that trade came first and religion second. Undoubtedly, these early experiences must have influenced the way in which Europeans were to be thought of in later centuries. At times, the Chinese must have had difficulty, for instance, distinguishing pirates from traders, traders from missionaries, and genuine missionaries from false ones.[16]

In 1582, during the reign of the same emperor Wan-li as the one who traded with the Dutch, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) became the first Jesuit missionary to reach China, arriving at

[12] More specifically, Fernão Pires de Andrade and his men were some of the first Portuguese to reach China. It is said that this Portuguese captain established the first European trading post in China. Li, *China in Transition*, 3.
[13] According to two early seventeenth century scholar-officials, Chang T'ing-yü (and others) and Huo Ju-hsia, the Portuguese kidnapped people of good family, annexed a neighbouring country, and peddled men and women as slaves. Since these claims seem prejudiced and biased, their historicity is debatable. Nevertheless, it is clear that the Portuguese did not receive too warm a welcome. Ibid., 3-8.
[14] Ibid., 3-9.
[15] Around 1743, P'an Ssu-ch'ü, then the inspector-general of Kwangtung province, presented a memorial to the imperial government, in which he argued that "[t]he reason why these [Portuguese] foreigners have come to reside in China is to practice trade and make a profit [… but t]hey also entice ignorant people to join their church." Similarly, according to Chang T'ing-yü and others, "[t]he people in Macao asked the purpose of their visit, and the Hollanders replied that they merely wished to trade with China and that they had no piratical intentions." Nevertheless, they were not oblivious to the religion the Dutch adhered to: "[a]ll the people in Holland believe in a religion called Christianity." Ibid., 8-13.
[16] In his private notes, Kangxi admitted that "it has been hard to distinguish the real missionaries from other white men pretending to be missionaries." Spence, *Emperor of China*, 81-82.

the Portuguese establishment in Macau. This was thirty years after the Jesuit Francis Xavier (1506-1552) had passed away just before he could enter the mainland of China, and eleven years after Ricci had joined the Society of Jesus.[17] Ricci would become the most famous European missionary in China, and would be generally respected by the Chinese as the archetypal and ideal kind of missionary.[18] He sought to integrate into the Chinese culture by learning the language(s), studying Chinese classical literature, and accommodating most Chinese rites. In fact, many later (mainly Jesuit) missionaries admired and tried to imitate his way of spreading the Catholic faith in China. However, when Ricci entered China in Macau, contact between this enormous empire and foreign 'visitors' (including both traders and missionaries) was still severely restricted. An important reason for this appears to have been precautious behaviour on the side of the Chinese, resulting from the frequent piracy of their merchant vessels. Even though the rather negative first impressions the European traders had made on the Chinese during the earlier years of the sixteenth century cannot have been the only reason, it may well have been one of the reasons for this severe commercial restriction. After all, there is never a second chance to make a first impression. In any case, this is why it took Ricci three decades before he would reach Beijing, the capital city of this large empire, where he became an adviser to the imperial court. Hitherto, this 'Forbidden City' had been inaccessible for foreigners.

The Controversy

When, during the first half of the seventeenth century, the Catholic mission had become more firmly established in China, missionaries started to pose various difficult questions, which

[17] In 1534, Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556) had founded the Society of Jesus in Montmartre, together with six other students of the University of Paris. Six years later, the Catholic Church had recognised the Jesuits as an official religious order when Pope Paul III (r. 1534-1549) had issued *Regimini Militantis Ecclesiae* (1540). Ricci joined the Society of Jesus in 1571.

[18] As will become clear, Kangxi, in the early eighteenth century, "finally told the Westerners that they must follow Ricci's interpretations of the Chinese Rites." Spence, 81.

may all be subsumed under two general ones. As George H. Minamiki put it, "[a]t issue was the problem of [1] how Western man was to translate into the Chinese language the concepts of the divinity and other spiritual realities and [2] how he was to judge, on a moral basis, the ceremonies performed by the Chinese in honor of Confucius and their ancestors."[19] To put it differently and more concretely; after a while, Catholic missionaries in China started to question (1) how, using Chinese terms, the Christian God should be denoted satisfactorily, and (2) whether or not Chinese rites—with a special emphasis on those relating to Confucius and deceased ancestors—were compatible with the teachings of Catholicism, and if so, which ones and to what degree. Surely, if certain Chinese rites contradicted the teachings of Catholicism, European missionaries as well as Chinese converts should not be allowed to take part in them. These two questions caused great disagreements among the missionaries.[20] David E. Mungello summarised the two opposite positions these disagreements gave rise to in the following way. On the one hand, Jesuits—or 'accommodationists' more accurately[21]—generally "argued that the indigenous Chinese terminology for God did not taint the Christian God with pagan associations," and "believed that the rites to ancestors had an essentially social and moral significance which did not violate the monotheistic nature of the Christian God. Certain, though not all, rites to Confucius were allowed by the Jesuits on the grounds that they were more civil than religious in nature."[22] On the other hand, "a large array of groups including the Franciscan, Dominican and Augustinian orders as well as secular priests […] argued that the native Chinese terminology for God and the Chinese rites to ancestors and Confucius did violate the teachings

[19] Minamiki, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, ix.
[20] In fact, virtually all papal decrees pertaining to the Chinese Rites Controversy could not stop blaming these disagreements for hindering the effectiveness with which seeds were sown by the workers of the vineyard.
[21] According to the first misunderstanding formulated in the *Éclaircissements* of the Jesuit missionary Antoine de Beauvollier (1657-1708), those missionaries in China who were not a member of the Society of Jesus did not necessarily always disagree with 'the Jesuit accommodation policy' on all points, even though they were often portrayed in this manner. Witek, 193-195.
[22] Mungello, "An Introduction to the Chinese Rites Controversy," 3.

of Christianity."[23] Eventually, members of these two clashing parties formulated specific questions, the responses to which they disagreed about, and submitted these to the religious authority. As a result, the Holy See made its first judgement on the Chinese Rites Controversy in 1645. By approval of Pope Innocent X (r. 1644-1655), Catholics were, henceforth, prohibited to participate in sacrifices made to Confucius and deceased ancestors. However, this decree had only taken into consideration the information and questions provided by the Dominican Juan B. Morales (1597-1664). Therefore, wanting to represent the accommodationist point of view (the adherents of which must have felt defeated), the Jesuit Martino Martini (1614-1661) provided the Holy See with new information and questions. This is why, in 1656, the previous papal decision was, in a sense, reversed under the authority of Pope Alexander VII (r. 1655-1667). From now on, Catholics were allowed to engage in certain ceremonies in honour of Confucius and deceased ancestors. Again, only the input of one of the two opposed perspectives—in this case Martini's—was taken into account. Given that these two papal decrees seemed to contradict one another, but were still equally authoritative, they must have given rise to great confusion among the Catholic missionaries in China and enlarged the already existing disagreements.

In 1661, in the midst of this 'missionary chaos', Kangxi (1654-1722)—then still only a young boy—became the new Chinese emperor. His reign would become the longest one in Chinese history ever, because it would take 61 years before he breathed his last. During his reign, Kangxi showed immense trust in (especially Jesuit) missionaries. He promoted them to high functions at the royal court and did not fail to take advantage of their knowledge in mainly scientific and musical areas. Furthermore, he seems to have had personal relations with them, and even entrusted them with the education of his sons.[24] In this sense, therefore, one should

[23] Ibid., 3.

[24] In his personal notes, Kangxi wrote, for example: "[Johann Adam] Schall [von Bell (1591-1666)] died in prison, but after I had learned something about astronomy I pardoned his friend [Ferdinand] Verbiest [1623-1688] in 1669 and gave him an official position, promoting him in 1682. In 1687 I let the newly arrived Jesuit [Jean de]

not be surprised that, in 1692, Kangxi issued the Edict of Toleration, thereby legalising the spread of the gospel in his empire. Unfortunately, however, it would not take much longer than a year[25] before Kangxi—with quite an unusual attitude of tolerance and open-mindedness—would feel betrayed by Charles Maigrot de Crissey (1652-1730). To some extent forced by the still substantial disagreements among missionaries to make a decision, in the hope to restore unity among them, this Vicar Apostolic of Fujian Province issued *Mandatum seu Edictum* (1693), a decree in which he forbade any Catholic in the entire Fujian Province to denote the Christian God with any Chinese term other than *Tianzhu* (Lord of Heaven); to display tablets inscribed with the Chinese characters *Jingtian* (Worship Heaven) in churches or to use tablets in honour of deceased ancestors in private homes; to take part in solemn sacrifices to Confucius or deceased ancestors; to tolerate the worship of Confucius or deceased ancestors (as decreed by Pope Alexander VII in 1656), because what Martini had submitted to the Holy See was dishonest; and to disseminate false ideas about Chinese philosophy, theology, rites, or classical literature.[26] As Claudia von Collani put it succinctly, "[t]he importance of his [Maigrot's] role in the Chinese Rites Controversy cannot be overestimated."[27] The veracity of this statement becomes even more evident when one reads *Cum Deus optimus*, which was issued under the authority of Pope Clement XI (r. 1700-1721) in 1704. This decree was the result of a thorough and careful investigation, conducted by the Sacred Congregation, and was essentially an extensive evaluation of the edict Maigrot had issued in 1693. Although the members of the Sacred Congregation formulated the questions and responses in a more nuanced manner than

Fontaney [1643-1710] and the others come to Peking, although they had come to China illegally on a Chinese merchant vessel and the Board of Rites had recommended their deportation; and throughout the 1680's I discussed Western skills in Manchu with Verbiest […]. In the early 1690's I often worked several hours a day with them [i.e. Antoine Thomas (1644-1709), Jean-François Gerbillon (1654-1707), and Joachim Bouvet (1656-1730)]. […Thomas] Pereira [1646-1708] taught me to play the tune *P'u-yen-chou* on the harpsichord and the structure of the eight-note scale, [Teodorico] Pedrini [1671-1746] taught my sons musical theory […]." Spence, 72-73.

[25] Kangxi's edict was published on March 22, 1692; Maigrot's edict was issued on March 26, 1693.

[26] Sure, 8-10.

[27] Collani, "Charles Maigrot's Role in the Chinese Rites Controversy," 149.

Maigrot had done eleven years earlier, it is interesting to note that, still, the conclusions reached in both decrees are almost identical. The only exception was that, albeit under restricted circumstances, Catholics would be allowed to use tablets in honour of deceased ancestors in private homes. Moreover, no decision was made about the validity of the decree that was issued by approval of Pope Alexander VII in 1656. The huge difference, however, was that the decisions issued in 1704 now applied not only to the Fujian Province, but to everyone involved in the entire Catholic mission in China.[28]

In the following year, Charles-Thomas Maillard de Tournon (1668-1710) entered China. In the words of Francis A. Rouleau, this papal plenipotentiary "arrived at the Peking Capital on 4 December 1705 and was welcomed by the mighty K'ang-hsi Emperor with honours never before accorded a visiting dignitary."[29] Perhaps, Kangxi welcomed Tournon in this extraordinarily royal fashion by virtue of his great admiration for the Pope. Given that Tournon was the Pope's representative, it may well have been the case that Kangxi treated Tournon as if he were the Pope himself. Still within the same month, Tournon was invited to the royal court to have a private conversation with Kangxi himself. Since Tournon was quite ill, Kangxi "would even meet the Patriarch half way, something no oriental potentate had ever imagined doing for a prince of the blood royal, let alone for a foreigner from the 'Great West Ocean.'"[30] Kangxi wanted to know why Tournon had undertaken such a long, arduous, and even dangerous journey to China, but Tournon would not give a clear answer. Nevertheless, Kangxi, his officials, and the Peking Jesuits all like-mindedly suspected that Tournon had been sent by the Pope to resolve the already long-lasting Chinese Rites Controversy. Due to Tournon's initially enigmatic and eventually rather obstinate behaviour, "[w]ithin a matter of

[28] Sure, 10-24.
[29] Rouleau, "Maillard de Tournon," 264-265.
[30] Ibid., 309. One may wonder whether Tournon was aware of the fact that uncommon privileges were bestowed upon him. In any case, it might reveal that, despite being the emperor of an enormous empire, Kangxi must have had a relatively humble character.

months the royal benevolence gradually changed to suspicion, then to acts of irate truculence, climaxed at last by what amounted to a curt dismissal from the country."[31] Maigrot and Tournon did not stop 'causing disturbances' and did not relent in their quest to abolish the Chinese rites. Therefore, in December 1706—a year after Tournon had arrived in China—Kangxi decided that "[i]f new Europeans arrive they are to come to Beijing immediately to receive permission to remain in the empire. Other Europeans currently resident in China are to be expelled by the local officials if they lack permits."[32] More specifically, using the introductory words of Rule and Collani, "any missionaries who wished to stay in China must receive a *piao* or residence permit which would be issued on condition that they promised to follow the practices of Matteo Ricci, that is, the Jesuit practice regarding the Chinese Rites."[33] As a response to this drastic[34] measure, Tournon issued his (in)famous Nanking Regula in the first month of the next year. Even though *Cum Deus optimus* (1704) had not yet reached China and Tournon did not know its precise contents, Tournon commanded all missionaries to be loyal to the Holy See and the decree it had (supposedly[35]) issued three years earlier.[36] He also provided all missionaries with instructions as to how they were to respond when interrogated by the Kangxi or his officials. If, ideally, all missionaries followed his orders, all given responses would be perfectly unanimous. This must have made the Chinese emperor furious, because four months later, Kangxi proclaimed: "[i]f Europeans persevere in following the

[31] Ibid., 265.
[32] Stumpf, *Acta Pekinensia II*, 256.
[33] Ibid., 4.
[34] As harsh or unfair as this measure may seem, Kangxi does reassure the readers of his private notes that, "[i]n the past, both Buddhists and Taoists have been made to fill out certificates, and the superiors in the various temples have to register their monks—they are not allowed to chant or beg for alms or set out their sacred images in the streets of Peking, and may not act as exorcists for patients suffering from seizures without getting official permission." Spence, 84.
[35] Jesuits in service of Kangxi repeatedly put Tournon's authority and integrity into question. (In part, this might have been due to the slow and ineffective communication between Rome and China.) After all, the Jesuits had to take Tournon's word for his claims that the Pope had sent him to China as a plenipotentiary and that the Holy See had forbidden Catholics to take part in the superstitious sacrifices to Confucius and deceased ancestors.
[36] Tournon did know *that* the Holy See was going to abolish the Chinese rites before he left for China, but he was not aware of the way in which and the degree to which the Holy See was going to do so.

teaching of Li Madou [i.e. Matteo Ricci], they will still be able, under my protection, to preach the Law; if however they follow the rule of Yan Dang [Maigrot], I will regard these my [sic] subjects of the Middle Kingdom as rebels, and I declare that I will absolutely prohibit the practice of their Law."[37]

Finally, in 1715, the papal decisions that had been issued in 1704 under the authority of Pope Clement XI were reaffirmed by approval of the same Pope in the decree called *Ex illa die*. When, six years later (1721), Kangxi managed to get his hands on a Chinese translation of this papal decree, he was so infuriated that he henceforth forbade any European missionary to preach: "[f]rom now on, Westerners should not be allowed to preach in China, to avoid further trouble."[38]

On December 20 the following year (1722), Kangxi passed away, and was succeeded by Yongzheng (r. 1722-1735), his fourth son. Yongzheng would, in turn, be succeeded by one of his sons, Qianlong (r. 1735-1796), who would sit on the throne for almost as long as his grandfather had.

(When) Did It End?

Some have argued that the Chinese Rites Controversy came to an end during the reign of Kangxi's grandson when, in 1742, *Ex quo singulari* was issued under the authority of Pope Benedict XIV (r. 1740-1758).[39] Since no decree had ever contained such severe prohibitions of the Chinese rites for any Catholic in China, it had disastrous consequences for the Church's entire mission to China, and for Sino-Western relations on the whole. But although this decree might have put an end to the Chinese Rites Controversy in a formal sense, the larger questions

[37] Stumpf, 499-500.
[38] Li, 22.
[39] Others maintain that the Chinese Rites Controversy ended when the Society of Jesus was dissolved as a result of the decree *Dominicus ac Redemptor* (1773), issued under the authority of Pope Clement XIV (r. 1769-1774).

that had surrounded the main questions of this debate had obviously not disappeared. According to Mungello, for instance, "[o]n its most general level, the Rites Controversy posed the question whether it is necessary to change a culture in order to adopt a foreign religion. Specifically, it asked whether the Chinese who adopted Christianity also had to adopt Western culture."[40] Evidence for the fact that this most general question remained relevant is the decree that was issued in 1939 by approval of Pope Pius XII (r. 1939-1958), in which the Catholic Church reversed her position on the rites question. From now on, every Catholic would (again) be allowed to engage in virtually all ceremonies in honour of Confucius and deceased ancestors, by virtue of their civil character. Moreover, the oath all missionaries had to take ever since 1742 was nullified.

A Comparison of Decrees

Having become familiar with the most important events relating to the Chinese Rites Controversy, let us now look at some papal decrees more closely in order to explore what lessons cross-cultural philosophers may learn from them.

In doing cross-cultural philosophy, translation is a hugely important issue. Souleymane Bachir Diagne, for example, even goes as far as to say that translation should be regarded as one of its methods.[41] Steven Burik, Robert Smid, and Ralph Weber also argue for the importance of translation, albeit in a different way: "one of the major tasks of effective comparison is to leave behind, as much as possible, the lingering presumption of Western priority in the history of comparative philosophy. This presumption can take many forms and is found, for example, in the exclusive, excessive, or inappropriate use of Western

[40] Mungello, 3.
[41] Diagne, "Translation as Method," 89-95.

philosophical categories, or in the words and phrases chosen for translation efforts."[42] Even so, the problem(s) of translation will not be discussed in this thesis, in view of the fact that its scope as well as its author's knowledge of the Latin and Chinese language is (severely) limited.

Question the Question

As has been stated before, the decisions in the decrees of 1645 and 1656 seemed to contradict one another. This is because the former prohibited most rites relating to Confucius and deceased ancestors, while the latter permitted many of them. Still, since both decrees were issued with the same religious authority, all Catholic missionaries were obliged to obey the two equally. Surely, this must have caused great confusion. But how could it happen that, in these two decrees, seemingly opposed conclusions were reached? To answer this question, let us first look at the way in which the questions were formulated in the respective decrees. The focus will be on the question about the rites concerning the receiving of degrees more specifically.

As Ray R. Noll noted, in 1645, "only the information provided by Morales" was taken into account.[43] Likewise, in the next decade, the Holy See was "forced to make their evaluation with only the information presented to them […] by Martini."[44] The questions of the two missionaries were recorded in the following manner.

> [Morales:] The question is, whether those who are or will be Christian governors and scholars, when they are summoned, may go into Confucius' temple, offer or assist at such a sacrifice, genuflect before the altar, partake of something from those idolatrous sacrifices and oblations.[45]

[42] Burik, Smid, and Weber, "Epilogue," 241-242.
[43] Sure, 1.
[44] Ibid., 5.
[45] Ibid., 2.

> [Martini:] May Christian scholars perform the ceremony for the receiving of degrees, that takes place in a hall of Confucius?[46]

These questions themselves already contain at least two striking ambiguities. First, should the places devoted to Confucius be called 'temples' or 'halls'? This same question applies to the rites relating to deceased ancestors. Do these take place in "temples […] dedicated to grandparents and ancestors,"[47] or rather in "halls of their ancestors,"[48] as Morales and Martini described them respectively? Second, should this rite be referred to as a 'sacrifice' or as a 'ceremony'? When one examines the information Morales and Martini provide to elucidate and contextualise their questions, even more discrepancies become apparent.

> [Morales:] All scholars, when they receive their degree, have to enter the temple of Confucius, genuflect, and make an offering of candles and incense before his altar.[49]
>
> [Martini:] All who are to receive degrees proceed together into a hall of Confucius. […] There before the name of the philosopher they all bow together and perform the ceremonies that are customary among the Chinese. They do not offer anything at all.[50]

When one receives their degree, is one expected to genuflect or to bow? Since the verb 'to genuflect' often denotes worship, it has quite a strong religious connotation. In the same vein, is one supposed to genuflect before Confucius' altar or bow before his name? Instead of merely concentrating on the contradictions, however, let us explore what the questions and information Morales and Martini submitted to the Holy See could have in common.

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[46] Ibid., 5.
[47] Ibid., 2.
[48] Ibid., 6.
[49] Ibid., 2.
[50] Ibid., 5.

As Noll sees it, as opposed to Martini, Morales presumes "the rites to be religious [and] describes them in religious terminology."[51] Nowadays, the 'religious' is often contrasted with the 'non-religious', 'civil' or 'political'.[52] It might equally be argued, therefore, that Martini assumes the rites to be civil, describing them in civil terminology. Thus, the fundamental disagreement between Morales and Martini is centred around the question whether the character of the rites was religious or civil. This is in accordance with the answers the Holy See provided.

> [1645:] As the case is presented, Christians may not pretend to participate.[53]
>
> [1656:] According to what was explained above, the Sacred Congregation ruled that the aforesaid ceremonies should be permitted to Chinese Christians. The celebration seems to be merely civil and political.[54]

But why was it important to argue that the rites were either religious or civil in nature? The following biblical passage might well epitomise the answer to this question: "[a]nd God spoke all these words, saying: [… y]ou shall have no other gods before Me. You shall not make for yourself a carved image—any likeness *of anything* that *is* in heaven above, or that *is* in the earth beneath, or that *is* in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them nor serve them."[55] In other words, if, on the one hand, the rites are religious, the sacrifices are made to a

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[51] Ibid., 1.

[52] The term 'nowadays' is used deliberately, because one may wonder whether, during the seventeenth and early eighteenth century, the distinction between the 'religious' and the 'civil' was as strict and explicit as it is today. In this light, Zhe Gao argues that to impose this dichotomy on seventeenth and early eighteenth century texts about the Chinese Rites Controversy is a 'hermeneutical anachronism', because "the modern binary distinction between 'religious' and the 'secular' [or 'non-religious', 'civil', or 'political'] existed neither in the minds of the Chinese nor those of European Catholics in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries." Gao, "Not About Religion," 332-334.

[53] Sure, 2. It is interesting to note that, compared to the decisions in later decrees, these decisions are presented in a relatively careful manner: 'as the case is presented' and 'according to what was explained'.

[54] Ibid., 5.

[55] Exodus 20:1-5 (NKJV).

god other than the God the Bible speaks of. If this is the case, the rites are highly incompatible with what the Catholic Church teaches about monotheistic worship. This means that Christians should not be allowed to take part in these heretical activities. If, on the other hand, the rites turn out to be civil, the ceremonies performed in honour of Confucius and deceased ancestors are not in conflict with the teachings of Catholicism. In this case, it is no problem for Christians to engage in them.

In any case, whether the rites were, in fact, religious or civil, it is clear that Morales and Martini had different perspectives, and that they largely represented the points of view of the 'abolitionists' and the accommodationists respectively. Even though they addressed the same Chinese rites, the information and questions they submitted to the Holy See were as good as diametrically opposed. As a result of these different descriptions, and due to the fact that in both decrees only one perspective was taken into consideration, the 'idolatrous sacrifices' were prohibited in 1645, but the 'seemingly civil and political ceremonies' were permitted in 1656.

What important insights may be drawn from this for cross-cultural scholars? First, language may not always be used in a neutral way. One might even argue that language can never be employed entirely neutrally. Burik, for instance, goes as far as to say that "there is no such thing as objectively approaching a text from another culture. We each bring our own interests and ideas into any comparison […]. While we should make every effort to avoid distorting the meaning of a text, this should come together with the equal awareness of the fact that we always interpret and that we can never find *the* meaning anyway."[56] Still, language is important in cross-cultural contexts, because, Burik continues, "[i]t is inevitable to write in a certain language, but one can both acknowledge its shortcomings *and* its necessity."[57] Furthermore, as Jaap van Brakel and Lin Ma argue, "[i]n comparative philosophy awareness

[56] Burik, "Comparative Philosophy without Method," 207.
[57] Ibid., 208.

of the mutual recognition of human practices cannot be based on direct observations but depends on descriptions in language. Usually, such descriptions are dependent on interpreting the language of X [i.e. of that which is being interpreted] and X's community."[58] In the same vein, Burik advances that "the 'correctness' of an interpretation is dependent to a large extent on the perspective of the interpreter."[59] This might be one of the reasons why, from a postcolonial point of view, John McLeod stated that "[i]t is vital that we take into account the cultural specificity of writers when we read them, and consider the dynamic relationship between a writer and the culture(s) about which he or she writes."[60] Therefore, the manner in which one articulates one's view might well be indicative of the perspective one is situated in. Brakel and Ma call this 'hermeneutic relativity', which amounts to the fact that "[i]nterpretation is constrained by the background of Y [the interpreter]."[61]

Second, different perspectives, as well as their corresponding presuppositions, appear to lead to different questions. Burik, Smid, and Weber, for example, put forward that "different perspectives generate different priorities."[62] Moreover, "comparative philosophy is […] largely driven by interest. Although anything can be compared with anything, this does not mean that we should compare just anything. Interests, however, are relative to the people pursuing them. Nothing is intrinsically interesting."[63] Since different perspectives may lead to different questions, it is commonly fruitful to (try to) include dissimilar perspectives. Furthermore—and this is a third insight—different questions, in turn, may yield different responses. To put it differently, the way in which a question is formulated greatly influences the manner in which it is responded to. According to Arindam Chakrabarti and Weber, this applies not only to the way in which a question is formulated in a certain language, but also to the language in which

[58] Brakel and Ma, "Necessary Preconditions," 43.
[59] Burik, 206.
[60] McLeod, *Beginning Postcolonialism*, 4.
[61] Brakel and Ma, 32.
[62] Burik, Smid, and Weber, 250.
[63] Ibid., 253.

this is done. This is because "[t]he language in which we conduct philosophy does determine—though less deeply than we sometimes tend to think in a postmodernist deconstructionist vein—which questions make sense and which do not."[64] For this reason, it is important to assess to what extent the way in which a question is phrased could be problematic.

A concrete cross-cultural instance where a question's formulation may be considered troublesome is the following. Some have asked in what ways African feminism is a decolonising force. But this question itself may already presuppose several things. One might ask, for instance, whether African feminism is to be regarded as a decolonising force at all. As summarised by Olayinka Oyeleye, Oyeronke Oyewumi is not convinced that this is the case, because "precolonial Yoruba people did not do gender."[65] Accordingly, a binary conception of gender, according to which women are inferior to men, is not indigenous to Yoruba people. Rather, this idea was imposed upon them by colonialists. Therefore, instead of a decolonising force, African feminism might well be a product of colonialism. In short, then, this question seems to have been formulated from a considerably 'Western' perspective, and may not do full justice to the ones the question is essentially about, namely Yoruba people.

Be Specific

Having discussed the rites concerning the receiving of degrees, let us now further scrutinise the information Morales and Martini provided about the Chinese rite(s) relating to deceased ancestors.

According to Morales, "[e]verywhere in China temples are built and dedicated to grandparents and ancestors. In every one of them members of the same family gather twice a year."[66] Martini would respond to this that while it is true that "[t]wice a year all the relatives

[64] Chakrabarti and Weber, "Global Post-Comparative Philosophy as Just Philosophy," 173.
[65] Oyeleye, "Feminism(s) and Oppression," 349.
[66] Sure, 2.

gather in this hall," Morales is addressing only one of three ways in which the Chinese honour their deceased ancestors.[67] Furthermore, insofar as 'everywhere' implies that everyone has an ancestral temple, Morales' comment is mistaken, because "[o]nly persons of high station or wealth relatives have them."[68] "With great display of ceremony," Morales continues, "they offer solemn sacrifices to their ancestors. […] They offer meats, wine, candles, incense, goats' heads, etc."[69] Martini remarks that, again, only "[t]he more affluent of these offer meats, wines, candles, and incense. Poorer people […] do not offer them anything."[70] Then Morales claims that "[t]hey place a picture or statue of their deceased parents or grandparents on the altar beautifully adorned with candles, flowers, and incense. Present at this sacrifice is one who acts as priest, and his assistants."[71] Martini, in turn, argues that this description is not correct, because "[w]ithin [halls of ancestors] there is just an image of a distinguished ancestor. Then on steps, some higher than others, tablets are arranged to a span's height. On these the names of all the deceased in that family are inscribed, their rank, their dignity, their sex, their age, and the date of their death, even of infants and of girls."[72] Rather, 'the altar beautifully adorned with candles, flowers, and incense' is part of a different rite: "when someone dies, whether a Christian or a pagan, they always prepare a sort of altar in the home of the deceased. They place on it an image of the deceased, or a tablet on which the name of the deceased is inscribed. They decorate the altar with incense, flowers, and candles. Behind the altar they lay the body of the deceased in a coffin."[73] Next, Morales states that "[p]rostat[ing] before their altar they say many prayers, asking for health, a long life, abundant harvests, large families, economic success, and to be delivered from all evils."[74] In response to this, Martini repeats that, once more, this does

[67] Ibid., 6.
[68] Ibid., 6.
[69] Ibid., 2.
[70] Ibid., 6.
[71] Ibid., 2.
[72] Ibid., 6.
[73] Ibid., 5.
[74] Ibid., 2-3.

not happen in the halls of ancestors: "[a]ll who enter those homes to mourn, genuflect three or four times before the inscribed tablet, or before the image of the deceased. They lie prostrate, their heads touching the floor. They carry candles and incense to burn on the altar, or rather before the tablet or image of the deceased."[75] Notice that Martini does not mention anything related to prayers. Finally, Morales says that "[t]his sacrifice also takes place in their homes, and at the cemeteries, but with less solemnity."[76] As for the 'sacrifice' that takes place 'in their homes', Martini notes that, apart from the different rite that was just mentioned, sometimes deceased ancestors are honoured in private homes, because "[p]oorer people are not able to have these halls. They keep the tablets of their deceased at home, either in a special place, or even on the altar where saints' images are kept, for lack of space, because the house is small. They do not venerate these tablets. They do not offer them anything. They are there because there is no room for them anywhere else. The Chinese ceremonies described above take place only in a hall for the deceased. If they do not have a hall, they omit the ceremonies."[77] With regard to "what takes place at the graves of the deceased," Martini asserts that this rite, too, is different from the one performed in ancestral halls: "[i]n accordance with Chinese law these [graves] are all in the mountains, away from cities. Children or relatives come to these at least once a year around the beginning of May. They tidy up the graves, uproot the weeds and grasses that have sprung up. They weep, they wail, they genuflect, as was stated in the first way. They set out cooked foods and wine. After they have finished weeping, they eat and drink."[78] Interestingly, there is no mention of any sacrifice.

What insight may a cross-cultural scholar draw from this? To summarise, in Martini's eyes, Morales falsely generalises three different rites and mispresents them as one. In doing so,

[75] Ibid., 6.
[76] Ibid., 3.
[77] Ibid., 6.
[78] Ibid., 6.

Morales seems to be paying no attention whatsoever to intracultural differences among the Chinese, such as those between the poor and the more affluent. Here, it is appropriate to quote the words of the French Jesuit missionary Antoine de Beauvollier (1657-1708). In 1702, he wrote that "[n]othing is more capable of deceiving a casuist in Europe about events that occur in Europe itself than to propose to him a general case without entering into all the details of the circumstances."[79] Later, Beauvollier argues that this applies all the more to events that occur outside of Europe. Thus, whether one's opinion is more in line with Morales' view or Martini's perspective, one must be careful to generalise specific cases to avoid misrepresenting them. Rather, taking Beauvollier's advice to heart, one should strive to be as specific and exact as possible. As Douglas L. Berger once advanced, "[t]he more specifically focused a comparative study is, with respect to definite thinkers, texts, timeframes, themes, and so forth, the more informative and illuminating […] a comparative study will be."[80] Still, it must be noted that, in the words of Burik, Smid, and Weber, "[o]ne cannot compare without generalizations; one cannot even translate or interpret without generalizations, and claiming to do so only obscures those generalizations. But what is important for us is that the content of these generalizations need not be static or absolute; they can be provisional, historicist, and contextual. While our efforts should avoid as much as possible anything that would distort the ideas of the 'other', this must come with the realization that objectivity itself is not something we can expect to reach."[81]

Experience Matters

Let us now examine Maigrot's edict of 1693 (*Mandatum seu Edictum*) and the Holy See's evaluation of this report issued in 1704 (*Cum Deus optimus*). In particular, let us compare

[79] Witek, 191.
[80] Berger, "Lessons from Intercultural Philosophy," 138.
[81] Burik, Smid, and Weber, 248.

the responses given in these two documents to two specific issues, namely the Chinese terms that should be used to denote the Christian God, as well as the tablets inscribed with the Chinese characters *Jingtian* (Worship/Revere Heaven).

With regard to the Chinese term(s) with which the Christian God should be denoted, Maigrot wrote the following.

> Leaving out the European names which cannot be expressed in Chinese except in some barbarism, we decree that God should be called *Tien Chu* (*Tianzhu*, Lord of Heaven), a name established by long usages. Two other Chinese words—*Tien* (*Tian*, Heaven), and *Xang Ti* (*Shangdi*, Emperor supreme)—should be avoided completely. Let no one say that what the Chinese understand by these words—*Tien* and *Xang Ti*—is the God whom we Christians worship.[82]

Although, in his edict, Maigrot had not formulated any questions, in the decree of 1704, the Holy See formulated four questions Maigrot appeared to be responding to.

I. Should European names for God be rejected (to refer to God in China)?
II. Should the words *Tian* (Heaven) or *Shangdi* (Supreme Emperor) be rejected as referring to God?
III. Should God be called by the name *Tianzhu* (Lord of Heaven)?
IV. Would it be permissible to say that the Chinese by the aforesaid names, *Tian* and *Shangdi*, understand the God Christians worship?[83]

[82] Sure, 9.
[83] Ibid., 11-12. I have slightly altered the formulations of the original questions to make them easier to read. In doing so, I have done my best to remain faithful to the original.

In spite of the fact that specific questions were formulated to matters Maigrot's earlier decisions presupposed, the responses given by the Holy See in 1704 to these questions still did not deviate from the decisions in the earlier edict, though it must be noted that the answer the Holy See gave to the second question is more nuanced than Maigrot's decision.

> If to the Chinese leaders—the savants, that is—those words [*Tian* and *Shangdi*] mean nothing other than a power of the sky residing in the sky itself, the same words could mean the corporeal and visible sky, or anything else whatever. Missionaries ought not to use them at all. They should not give the pagans reason for thinking that the God Christians worship is nothing but the corporeal sky, or its power.[84]

Notice that it is not asserted that the Chinese terms *Tian* and *Shangdi* necessarily denote the corporeal sky or a power of it. Rather, the argument appears to be that if these two terms could, in some cases, denote something other than the Christian God, they must not be used. This is an important nuance, because it might well reflect two different attitudes to the same question. In contrast to this 'abolitionist' view, accommodationists would argue that any Chinese term should be allowed insofar as it can denote the Christian God, even if it could, in other cases, refer to something else.

As for the tablets inscribed with the Chinese characters *Jingtian*, Maigrot made the following decision.

> We strictly forbid displaying in any church a tablet on which are inscribed these two words: *Caelum Colito* (*King Tien* [*Jingtian*], Worship Heaven). […] In our opinion all

[84] Ibid., 21.

those tablets, especially those that include the words *King Tien*, cannot be held innocent of idolatry.[85]

The Holy See argued that Maigrot responded to the question as to whether (I.) "it [could] be permitted for a tablet to be displayed in Christian churches inscribed *King Tien* (Caelum Colito)."[86] The nature of this question is the same as the one whether the Chinese term *Tian* refers to the Christian God, because, as reported in the decree of 1704, "[t]he reason for the doubt[ing whether such a tablet should be used] is because the aforesaid word *Tien* is presently taken by educated Chinese for the material sky."[87] Therefore, "anticipating a negative response," the question (II.) "whether it could at least be permitted with an explanation—and what explanation" was added.[88] Again, the Holy See's responses to these two questions are as good as identical to the corresponding decisions in Maigrot's edict of 1693.[89]

Thus, in evaluating Maigrot's edict of 1693, the Holy See formulated specific questions to which Maigrot's earlier decisions were supposed to be responses. The precision and exactitude of these questions indicate that the investigation had been fairly thorough and careful. Furthermore, Maigrot wrote that "we have not deliberately bypassed anything that might help us get at the truth, either from Chinese sources, or from whatever commentaries we could get along this line written in a European language, or from conversation with learned men."[90] In the same vein, the Holy See reported that "[e]verything was looked into with diligent care, seriously and exactingly. There was also a full description of the circumstances of the case."[91] (But, as has become clear, 'descriptions of the circumstances' are not often neutral, if,

[85] Ibid., 9.
[86] Ibid., 12.
[87] Ibid., 12.
[88] Ibid., 12.
[89] Ibid., 21.
[90] Ibid., 8-9.
[91] Ibid., 11.

of course, they ever can be.) In addition, "[t]he aforesaid responses were for a long time discussed carefully and looked into thoroughly in other previous congregations likewise held in the presence of his Holiness [Pope Clement XI]."[92] Consequently, one should call into question neither Maigrot's sincerity nor the integrity of those who evaluated his edict. Finally, in the *Cum Deus optimus* (1704), it is stated that "[b]oth sides of the controversy were listened to."[93] As has been argued, it is indeed important to include different perspectives. Even so, inclusion by itself may not be sufficient. With regard to cross-cultural philosophy, Chakrabarti and Weber, for instance, speak of 'exclusionary inclusion', which "acknowledges, say, 'African philosophy' as philosophy, and thus is inclusive, but it labels it at the same time as something other than philosophy proper and therefore also excludes it."[94]

According to the decree of 1704, "[t]hese questions [submitted by Maigrot in 1693] were first submitted to theologians and experts chosen for this, and then discussed and resolved in a General Congregation of the Holy Roman and Universal Inquisition."[95] To anticipate the question as to who these 'theologians and experts' were, it is specified that Pope Innocent XII "assigned four expert theologians to the task: namely, Fr. John Mary Gabrielli, […] Fr. Nicholas Serrano, […] Fr. Philip of St. Nicholas, […] and Fr. Charles Francis Varesio."[96] Since relatively little seems to be documented about these four men, one may wonder whether they maintained similar views or had different perspectives. In case their positions were alike, certain presuppositions about the provided information and questions might not have been uncovered. Likewise, it is uncertain who the 'General Congregation' consisted of. Nevertheless, it is likely that the members of this congregation had not been to China themselves. Otherwise, the following remark might not have been added.

[92] Ibid., 24.
[93] Ibid., 21.
[94] Chakrabarti and Weber, 160.
[95] Sure, 11.
[96] Ibid., 11.

> That useful questions be proposed and that certainty be established honestly about the circumstances of the case, His Holiness ordered Fr. John Francis a Leonissa to be present, a member of the Order of Friars Minor of the Reformed Observance. He was Bishop of Beirut and Vicar Apostolic of Hu-Quang [Huguang = Hunan and Guangdong]. After spending many years in China he came back here, a credible eye-witness of what goes on in those regions, and well informed about the Chinese Rites.[97]

Furthermore, Pope Clement XI "had several times discussed these matters with the Bishops of Beirut and Rosalia, and with Vicars Apostolic of China, now sojourning in Rome. He also listened to whatever Frs. Francis Noel and Gaspar Castner, procurators of the Society of Jesus and apostolic missionaries of China, were able to, or wanted to, bring up in these controversies."[98]

But, in the end, the one(s) who eventually made the decisions in 1704 were the Pope and quite some cardinals, advised by a few expert theologians. Interestingly, most of them had probably never set foot in China. In this sense, therefore, it seems that, frequently, decisions were made *about*, yet *without*, Catholic missionaries and Chinese Christians. As Ray R. Noll put it:

> The central authorities in Rome, the decision-makers, namely the Popes (twenty-six of them in the 300 years of the controversy) along with the Cardinals in the Holy Office and in the Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith were enormously handicapped

[97] Ibid., 11.
[98] Ibid., 24. Francis Noel (1651-1729) and Gaspar Castner (1655-1709) might not have been as familiar with Chinese matters as other Jesuit missionaries, because they had not stayed in China for an extraordinarily long period of time: whereas Noel had spent some fifteen years in China (1687-1702), Castner had resided in China for some seven years (1696-1702).

> since they stood completely outside of the culture and had to rely on the testimony of the missionaries who were themselves embroiled in the controversy, clearly unable to step outside of their own hermeneutic circles.[99]

In the decree of 1704, it was even admitted that "[d]ifferent reports were made to it [the Sacred Congregation] at different times. The answers it gave were always based on the supposition that the reports were true. But it has never been in the habit of declaring whether these reports were true or false."[100] Another part of the evidence for the claim that the decision-makers were quite disconnected from those about whom the decisions were made is the fact that it seems to be the case that, as has been argued, the responses the Holy See provided in the decree of 1704 were to a large extent a reiteration of the decisions Maigrot had made more than ten years earlier.

At least one important insight may be drawn from this. Whenever one is making a decision about or for a certain individual or community, their experience is an essential factor to take into consideration. The issue of experience has been relevant especially for ethnophilosophers; that is, for those who have sought to systematically reconstruct indigenous philosophies. A good example would be the reception of Placide Tempels' *Bantu Philosophy*. Even though Tempels definitely took into consideration the experience of those he wrote about, some have still received his book in quite a critical manner. Paulin J. Hountondji, for instance, accused Tempels of generalisation by speaking of "the philosophy of the Bantu in the singular."[101] Furthermore, it has been pointed out that Tempels' descriptions of the experience of Bantu people have been used to justify certain political ends. Angela C. M. Roothaan summarises this critique as "the accusation that Tempels was only interested in the spiritual

[99] Ibid., vi.
[100] Ibid., 23.
[101] Hountondji, *Struggle for Meaning*, 88.

well-being of the Africans and not in their material well-being, thus implicitly legitimising the colonial system."[102] Moreover, given that Tempels assumed the position of a spokesperson, the extent to which he succeeded in accurately representing the experience of the Bantu people he lived among has been put to question. Whereas Hountondji asserted that "[w]hat was presented as a 'Bantu philosophy' was therefore not really the philosophy of the Bantu but of Tempels, the Belgian missionary,"[103] Wim van Binsbergen states that even if Tempels' descriptions resemble his own views more, the reconstruction and representation of a local culture's philosophy is never an entirely one-sided endeavour, because "[t]he ethnographer situates her pronouncements in a social process, in the encounter and dialogue between the ethnographer and the people she is writing about."[104] It is not an enormous leap to apply similar objections and remarks to those Europeans who wrote about matters relating to the Chinese Rites Controversy.

But, one may remark, scholars seem to make decisions only insofar as they give arguments and interpretations for or against other scholars' claims. What, therefore, does 'making decisions' mean in an academic cross-cultural context? This question might point to a more structural issue: to what extent are practical considerations taken into account in academic research? This includes, for example, an awareness of possible sociopolitical ramifications or (mis)appropriations of a theory one suggests. With regard to the Chinese Rites Controversy, the Jesuits repeatedly stressed that prohibiting most Chinese rites would at least be extremely detrimental to, and at most be the end of, the entire Catholic mission in China. This is not merely indicative of their anxiety, but rather seems to show that practical considerations were taken into account insufficiently. To put it more concretely, the Jesuits continuously argued that if the Holy See forbade Chinese Christians to attend rites relating to

[102] Author's translation of Roothaan, "Inleiding: Bantoe-filosofie begrijpen," 27.
[103] Hountondji, 89.
[104] Binsbergen, *Intercultural Encounters*, 495.

the receiving of degrees, they would either have to give up on their desire or moral duty to become a politician or scholar in the Chinese empire or they would have to renounce their Christian faith; and practice had taught that Chinese Christians tended to opt for the latter. Similarly, if the Holy See prohibited Chinese Christians to attend rites relating to their deceased ancestors, or disallowed them to display tablets in honour of their deceased ancestors, it would amount to asking the Chinese to betray their families or even their empire. Thus, it seems that the Holy See highly underestimated the fundamental way in which the Chinese rites were ingrained in their society.

In short, the strict prohibitions on Chinese rites for all Catholics made it virtually impossible for Chinese citizens to become and remain a Christian, and as good as unachievable for missionaries in China to continue to spread the Catholic faith. (Even so, it must also be admitted that, during the Chinese Rites Controversy, inclusive decision-making was incredibly difficult. The communication system between Rome and China, for instance, was not great, to say the least.) Thus, for those who start to study, or are studying, matters of another culture, it is wise to take into account practical considerations. Let us revisit this issue later.

An Emperor's Insights

Since it has become clear that, especially in cross-cultural contexts, inclusion is important, let us include a significant Chinese voice, which has undoubtedly had tremendous influence on the way in which the Chinese Rites Controversy developed. On January 18, 1721, Kangxi wrote that

> the Westerners are petty indeed. It is impossible to reason with them because they do not understand larger issues as we understand them in China. There is not a single Westerner versed in Chinese works, and their remarks are often incredible and

> ridiculous. […] their religion is no different from other small, bigoted sects of Buddhism or Taoism. […] From now on, Westerners should not be allowed to preach in China, to avoid further trouble.[105]

If, after reading this excerpt, the reader were told that this should convince them of Kangxi's incredible patience, relative humility in character, proportionate modesty in making judgements, unusual open-mindedness, considerably critical mentality, extraordinary sharp-mindedness, remarkable intelligence, and exceptional knowledgeability, the reader would most likely not see the evidence for these claims. Rather, if the reader based their judgement exclusively on this passage, Kangxi seems to have been quite hot-headed, somewhat arrogant, and fairly prone to making generalisations. Still, as represented by other extracts, Kangxi's character was more in accordance with the positive descriptions.

One of these other fragments is the conversation between Kangxi with Maigrot. Since, in the words of Collani, this meeting "was undoubtedly one of the climaxes of the Rites Controversy in China," let us focus on this particular encounter.[106] The discussion Kangxi had with Maigrot and others[107] took place on August 2, 1706, and was recorded in the *Acta Pekinensia*. This conversation may be divided into five themes: (1) Kangxi shows Maigrot that his knowledge of Chinese matters is limited; (2) Kangxi stimulates Maigrot to be aware and critical of his sources of information; (3) Kangxi admonishes Maigrot for the swiftness of his judgements; (4) Kangxi encourages Maigrot to be conscious of his hermeneutic, and, finally; (5) Maigrot is quite obstinate, but eventually admits his ignorance. The reason for this thematic division will crystallise shortly.

[105] Li, 22.
[106] Collani, 161.
[107] The others were Appiani, Guéty, and Angelita, as well as Thomas, Pereira, Parrenin, Barros, and Beauvollier.

Ye of Little Knowledge

To make the conversation between Kangxi and Maigrot more natural to read, a few short passages have been omitted. Furthermore, small remarks about the setting of the discussion have been made cursive. The discussion between Kangxi and Maigrot starts in quite a casual manner.

[Kangxi:] Do you understand the Chinese characters?

[Maigrot:] *Liao, liao*, (that is, a very little).

[Kangxi:] Have you read the *Sishu* [*Four Books*]?

[Maigrot:] Yes.

[Kangxi:] Have you memorized what you have read?

[Maigrot:] No.

[Kangxi:] You have read them but not committed them to memory?

[Maigrot:] It is not the custom in Europe to learn something by heart.

His Majesty spoke slowly, distinctly, and clearly, yet was not sufficiently understood by the Most Reverend Lord; so, he ordered Fr. Parrenin to come closer and to act as his interpreter.

[Kangxi:] Can you not recite a few words of the *Sishu*?

[…]

[Kangxi:] Do you read our books?

[Maigrot:] I have known them for a short while.

[Kangxi:] Can you read for me the large characters that are opposite you suspended above my head?

[Maigrot:] The first character is *hua*; the second *yin*: the third I don't recognize; the fourth is *wo*.

> [Kangxi:] Aren't you mistaken? The first is *hua*, that you got right; the second is *yan* not *yin*; the third is *yun*; and the fourth is *ge* not *wo*. So it reads: *Hua yan yun ge*. Now tell us what the words mean.
>
> [Maigrot:] I don't understand them.[108]

According to this passage, Maigrot is not entirely ignorant of Chinese language and literature. Even so, it portrays Kangxi as showing Maigrot that his knowledge of Chinese matters is severely limited nevertheless. But why should Kangxi's observation that Maigrot's knowledge of Chinese matters is limited concern cross-cultural scholars? One reason could be that this relative ignorance of another culture might not be confined to Maigrot. Kangxi's observation could motivate a cross-cultural scholar to reflect upon their own possession and acquisition of knowledge of matters pertaining to another culture. In doing so, they may discover that Kangxi's remark might apply to anyone who wishes to conduct any type of cross-cultural research. It might well be the case that whenever one starts to study, or is studying, matters of another culture, their understanding of these matters is, at least initially, considerably restricted. According to Burik, a similar case could be made on a methodological level. After arguing for a methodological pluralism, he writes that "the realization of the impossibility of one methodology or one method should lead to an *intellectual humility* [emphasis added] or awareness of the always already embedded presuppositions of whoever is doing comparative philosophy. We cannot be objective. We should not try, and one of our strengths lies in acknowledging the fundamental limitations of what we do."[109]

[108] Stumpf, 76-77.
[109] Burik, 219.

Question Thy Sources

The conversation continues. In the following excerpt, it is recorded that Maigrot's knowledge about Chinese matters is not only limited, but also considerably mistaken and misinformed. Kangxi seems to try to find the reason why Maigrot has come to maintain several erroneous views on various Chinese matters.

> [Kangxi:] I see that I have a problem today. If you were able to write down your interpretations, I would give you an immediate answer. But what way can I begin to deal with you now, since you neither read nor write (Chinese)? What am I to write? I can't even speak to you since you don't understand a word. Ba Duoming (Father Parrenin), tell him this: the writings which you recently submitted to me are full of errors. Here is just one which I bring to your attention. You cite there the *Yueling* in the book called *Liji* [*Book of Rites*]. But you are mistaken. Confucius is not the author of that treatise but another man whose name is Lü Buwei, who is very far from being one of our sages; moreover, we admit there is much that is reprehensible in his teachings. It is for the elegance of his style that we honour him, attaching no value to what he taught. We preserve his works only on account of their style.[110]
>
> [Maigrot:] I am aware that that treatise was not written by Confucius but by Lü Buwei; but, it was included among the sections of the books of the *Liji*, which is part of the teachings of the Literary Sect.
>
> [Kangxi:] How did you come to know this?
>
> [Maigrot:] I read it in a large work the title of which is *Xingli daquan*.
>
> [Kangxi:] In what part of that book? Quote the text.

[110] When analysing Krishnachandra Bhattacharyya's argument for why there should be reverence for the Indian classical traditions, Jonardan Ganeri suggests that an appropriate term for 'honouring someone for the elegance of their style' is 'aesthetic sympathy'. Ganeri, "Why Philosophy Needs Sanskrit," 145.

[Maigrot:] I do not recall the place or the text.

[Kangxi:] I remind you again that whatever remains of the writings of this man is not valued by us except for the polished elegance of his brush. But I have told you all this: I have already said that all that you recently submitted to me is full of errors.

[Maigrot:] What I wrote there are the exact expositions which I have found in books.

[Kangxi:] What sort of an answer is that? On your own admission, and from my experience that you do not understand the books, it follows that you are not speaking from your own knowledge but from what others say, others whom you are following.

[Maigrot:] That is quite true. For I was not the one who first found the objections that I made against these points; those who taught me the language when I first arrived in China also taught me that all these are worthless.

[Kangxi:] If this is so, they are equally as ignorant as you are. Why do you allow yourself to be imposed upon? Let us suppose that I say that everything you have submitted to me in writing is true—what would you conclude from that? And if I say that all those things are false, and that you have been basely deceived—what conclusion would you draw from that?[111]

Here, Kangxi asks Maigrot at least three interesting questions in quite a direct manner. First, Kangxi asks Maigrot: "[h]ow did you come to know this?" In this way, Kangxi seems to stimulate Maigrot to be aware of his sources of information. Who told Maigrot that Lü Buwei, rather than Confucius, is the author of the *Yueling*? Second, again, Kangxi is not deceived by the shallowness of the knowledge Maigrot was said to possess[112] when Kangxi tells Maigrot: "you are not speaking from your own knowledge but from what others say, others whom you

[111] Stumpf, 78-79.

[112] The phrase 'was said to possess' is used consciously, because, as will become clear, Tournon had introduced Maigrot to Kangxi as an expert on Chinese matters before the discussion between the latter two even was to take place.

are following," something Maigrot does not deny. Thus, Kangxi appears to encourage Maigrot not only to be aware of his sources of information, but also to be critical of them. After all, not every source of information is reliable. Third, Kangxi asks Maigrot: "[w]hy do you allow yourself to be imposed upon?" This question is followed by two hypothetical scenarios, by means of which Kangxi seems to invite Maigrot to think for himself about the information others provide him with.

At least three insights may be drawn for those who start to study, or are studying, matters of another culture. First, one should always be aware of one's sources of information. Second, one should always be critical of one's sources of information. Third, one should always evaluate the information one acquires. Heinz Kimmerle appears to make a similar argument when he advocates for 'a methodological kind of listening', or, as he describes it himself, for "listening […] guided by a certain methodology."[113] His argument is as follows.

> It is necessary to practise some kind of *epoché*, that means of keeping understanding in a provisional state. Listening and understanding are uncoupled in a certain sense. What I hear must not immediately be given a definite place in my horizon of understanding. It is advisable to listen twice or for a third time, before this place is determined. And also then I have to be prepared to change my mind in respect of what I thought to have understood.[114]

Thus, it is advisable to not claim to have understood a certain matter as soon as one has heard about it, but rather to keep one's mind open for possible corrections. However, thinking for oneself about the information one receives about matters of another culture also entails that, in

[113] Kimmerle, "Dialogues as Form of Intercultural Philosophy," 69.
[114] Ibid., 69-70.

evaluating the information one receives about matters of one's own culture, one is as critical as when one assesses the information one acquires about matters of another culture. It is precisely on this point where Kangxi accused Maigrot—and the Holy See more generally—of hypocrisy. In his private notes, Kangxi observed that

> Westerners venerate their own saints because of their actions. They paint pictures of men with wings and say, 'These represent heavenly spirits, swift as if they had wings, though in reality there are no men with wings.' I do not find it appropriate to dispute this doctrine, yet with superficial knowledge Maigrot discussed Chinese sanctity. He talked for days, with his perverse reason, his poorly concealed anger, and fled the country when he could not get his way, a sinner against the Catholic teaching and a rebel to China.[115]

In this way, Kangxi argues that the harm inflicted by the Chinese Rites Controversy was not only caused by misinformation, but also by hypocrisy on the part of those who issued the decrees in which numerous Chinese rites were prohibited for all Catholics. To put it more concretely, Kangxi pointed out that if the Holy See understood the Chinese rites relating to Confucius and deceased ancestors as acts of worship (instead of veneration), this is a matter of misinformation. In this case, missionaries or other Catholics living in China must have provided the Holy See with false information. However, the Holy See also prohibited the veneration of saints like Confucius and of deceased ancestors. According to Kangxi, this is insincere, inconsistent, and hypocritical, because "Westerners [also] venerate their own saints because of their actions." On what ground, Kangxi would ask, did the Holy See prohibit Chinese Christians to venerate their saints and deceased ancestors, if, at the same time, it

[115] Spence, 80.

allowed European Christians to revere theirs? Accordingly, from Kangxi's point of view, the papal decrees were evidence of a double standard. In other words, in deciding whether Catholics in Europe and China were allowed or prohibited to venerate saints and deceased ancestors, the Holy See failed to apply the same standard of judgement. For those who start to study, or are studying, matters of another culture, then, it is important to be as critical about the information one receives about matters of one's own culture as about the information one acquires about matters of another culture.

Thou Shalt Not Judge

Let us resume the discussion where Kangxi presented the two hypothetical scenarios. How did Maigrot react to Kangxi?

> [Kangxi:] Let us suppose that I say that everything you have submitted to me in writing is true—what would you conclude from that? And if I say that all those things are false, and that you have been basely deceived—what conclusion would you draw from that?
>
> *The Most Illustrious Lord hesitated before he answered; but, after he had thought about it for some time in silence, he answered:*
>
> [Maigrot:] The things I noticed then do not seem to be in accordance with our religion.
>
> [Kangxi:] In order to know whether they are in agreement or not, you need first of all to understand them, and it is quite clear that you do not understand those things which you have caused to be written.
>
> [Maigrot:] I understand them to some extent.
>
> *With a smile the Emperor replied:*
>
> [Kangxi:] To some extent! That is, you do not even half-understand them, and so with the slight understanding that you have, how can you make a definitive judgment about

them? If I had only a slight understanding of your affairs and wanted to take control of them, what would you have to say about me?

[Maigrot:] With the little knowledge that I have, that is how it appears to me.

[Kangxi:] What are you saying? Before you understand something thoroughly you are going to make a decision about it? You have not learned to write, and you do not know how to read (Chinese); where did you get this knowledge of our books? While you are deficient in this knowledge, are you in the meantime going to make rash judgments? In our books you cannot discern truth from falsehood, true doctrine from figures of speech, or a recognized author from one who is not recognized; so, what authority have you to make a pronouncement about our beliefs?

In reply to all this, His Most Illustrious Lordship could not utter a single word.[116]

Again, Kangxi makes at least three interesting remarks. First, he tells Maigrot that "[i]n order to know whether they [i.e. Christianity and Confucianism] are in agreement or not, you need first of all to understand them." This is strikingly similar to something Kangxi would say almost fifteen years later, during a conversation with Mezzabarba and others: "if you wish to speak on Chinese matters, you must read all of the Chinese classics and be thoroughly familiar with Chinese literature. Only then can you argue with me in a convincing manner. I cannot read any Western language; that is why I have always refrained from discussing anything Western."[117] Whether Kangxi has truly 'always refrained from discussing anything Western' is, of course, debatable. Even so, it must be admitted that, surely, being slow to make judgements about matters of which you know little is a noble ideal to strive after. Second, Kangxi asks Maigrot: "with the slight understanding that you have, how can you make a definitive judgment about

[116] Stumpf, 79.
[117] Li, 20.

them?" Thus, Kangxi admonishes Maigrot for the swiftness with which he appears to make his judgements. Third, Kangxi poses Maigrot a rather rhetorical question: "[b]efore you understand something thoroughly you are going to make a decision about it?" Kangxi is astonished that, considering the little knowledge Maigrot has about Chinese matters, he is willing to make quite definitive judgements about it at all.

What insights may be drawn from this for those who wish to conduct cross-cultural research? First, Kangxi proposes that one can know whether or not any one matter is compatible with any other matter if and only if one understands both of them. Burik, Smid, and Weber summarise that every comparison involves four aspects: two things that are being compared, that by which these two things are being compared, and the one who is comparing these two things with respect to a third thing. They do admit that "[d]ifferent practitioners of comparative philosophy usually lay different emphases on the importance and role of the comparativist in this endeavor, and they stress the comparanda in different ways."[118] Here, it might be good to ask two related questions: what does Kangxi mean when he speaks of 'understanding', and in what way are the two things being compared? Kangxi seems to be talking about 'understanding' in quite a holistic sense; that is, about understanding another culture as a whole. Academic comparative research, however, often tends to be more reductionist: it often amounts to comparing only certain arguments and interpretations about specific matters of two different cultures, instead of comparing entire cultures or traditions. Consequently, Kangxi's proposal would mean that academic comparative analyses can yield only relatively humble conclusions, if they can yield any meaningful conclusion at all. After all, it takes a significant amount of time to become familiar with a (radically) different worldview. In this sense, therefore, Maigrot's position—namely that "[w]ith the little knowledge that I have, that is how it appears to me"—might be a more desirable one for cross-cultural scholars to assume than the position

[118] Burik, Smid, and Weber, 252.

Kangxi promotes. But it is not only useful to ask in what way, but also on what level, two things are being compared. Jonathan O. Chimakonam and Amara E. Chimakonam, for instance, argue that cross-cultural philosophy "demands not only a method but a method of methods. Moving to the foundation, we encounter logic. […] in cross-cultural philosophies, any attempt at crossing the border must be done carefully, first, in deference to the logics of the philosophical traditions involved, and second, in deference to the logic that subsumes the logics of the comparata. A rash and insensitive move can trigger the alarm of the logic of one of the traditions."[119]

Second, whenever one starts to study, or is studying, matters of another culture, one might want to be slow to judge it. Kangxi does not seem to be speaking of making judgements simpliciter, but rather about making *decisive* judgements in a Kimmerlean sense, as was discussed above. In a somewhat similar fashion, François Jullien argues for the following.

> In contrast to the ideal of liberty that has carried European thought, I regard *availability* as a disposition that refuses to have to choose between possibilities so as not to deprive itself of any possibility. […] Availability is keeping one's position open, which means not to have a fixed position: to accommodate all possibilities, to remain in what is otherwise called the *com-possible*. Any determination, as one knows, is at the same time deprivation.[120]

Once again, one might also ask what the judgement is about. Is it a holistic judgement about a certain culture as a whole, or is it a rather reductionist judgement about a specific matter of a certain culture?

[119] Chimakonam and Chimakonam, "Two Problems of Comparative Philosophy, 228.
[120] Jullien, "From the Écart to the Unfamiliar," 77.

Finally, one might argue that refraining from quick judgement clashes with receiving information in a critical manner. However, these two ideals do not necessarily contradict one another. It is possible to assess the reliability of one's sources of information without making any definitive judgement about the specific content they convey.

An Emperor of a Thousand Years?

Having tried to convince Maigrot of the rashness of his judgements, Kangxi proceeds to discuss a different matter.

> [Kangxi:] I ask you, what evil do you find in these words: *Jing Tian*, Revere Heaven? Perhaps in this phrase *Tian* does not signify the Lord of Heaven?
>
> [Maigrot:] It does not mean that.
>
> [Kangxi:] You amaze me! Have I not told you before that *Tian* means the Lord of Heaven himself and that this is a far more beautiful name for God than *Tianzhu* or *Tiandi wanwu zhi zhu*, which is a term you use in China for God? For the first means only the Lord of Heaven, while the second means the Lord of heaven, of the earth, and of the ten thousand things; but *Tian* itself signifies the Lord of Heaven, of earth, and of all beings. Tell me why the people call me *wansui*, ten thousand years. It cannot be done according to your religion, because I am not ten thousand years old.
>
> [Maigrot:] This is done to express the desire they have that Your Majesty's life may last as long as possible.
>
> [Kangxi:] You have answered correctly, and learn from this that in our language, words and rites are not to be understood merely according to what is said or according to their external appearance. We celebrate rites in honour of Confucius, and of our ancestors who have died, in order to demonstrate our love and reverence for them. Explain where

I am mistaken, and whatever according to you there is in our teaching which is not in accord with your religion. When did these errors begin? Did it perhaps begin in the time of Li Madou (Father Ricci) and continue up to the present day? You must have read the book written by this Li Madou?

Father Parrenin interpreted this, just as he had interpreted what went before, using the Chinese name unchanged, Li Madou. The Most Illustrious Bishop of Conon turned to Father Parrenin and said "Reverend Father, who is this Li Madou?" The Father said: "Li Madou is the Chinese name of Father Matteo Ricci, and it is printed at the beginning of the book in which he proves that Tian or Shangdi is not the material heaven, nor li nor taiji nor anything created."

[Maigrot:] I have not read that book.[121]

In this passage, Kangxi asks Maigrot: "[t]ell me why the people call me *wansui*, ten thousand years. It cannot be done according to your religion, because I am not ten thousand years old." This is repeated by Kangxi in his private notes: "[s]ometimes, as I pointed out, the emperor is addressed honorifically as 'under the steps of the throne'; would Maigrot say this was reverence to a set of steps made by some artisan? I am addressed as '*Wan-sui*, Ten Thousand Years'; obviously that too is not literal—since from the beginnings of history to the present day only 7,600 years have passed."[122] In the same vein, almost fifteen years later, Kangxi would tell Mezzabarba and others: "[a]s for addressing *T'ien* as God, it is the same as people addressing me as 'Ten Thousand Years' or 'Emperor'. Though they address me differently, they are nevertheless motivated by the same reverence towards their monarch. If you take everything literally, how can I possibly be called 'Ten Thousand Years' in view of the fact that the universe

[121] Stumpf, 80-81.
[122] Spence, 79-80.

itself has existed only for some seven thousand six hundred years?"[123] What does Kangxi want to teach Maigrot here? Kangxi's intention becomes clear when, with quite a powerful phrase, he instructs Maigrot: "learn from this that in our language, words and rites are not to be understood merely according to what is said or according to their external appearance." In other words, should 'Ten Thousand Years' be interpreted literally or more figuratively? In this way, Kangxi appears to stimulate Maigrot to be conscious of his hermeneutic, that is, of the way in which he interprets Chinese expressions and of the fact that his interpretations may be mistaken.

What important insight may be drawn from this passage? The importance of this hermeneutic awareness might apply to all cross-cultural research in general. This is because it is always useful to consider various ways in which something can be understood. Otherwise, it often does not take long before misunderstanding arises and misinterpretation occurs. Therefore, to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation whenever one starts to study, or is studying, matters of another culture, it is advantageous to be aware of the fact that doing so might require a different method of interpretation than the one they are used to. About different methods that may be employed within the traditions of other cultures more generally, Burik remarks that "[t]he concept 'methodology' is itself a Western concept fraught with presuppositions that may not be shared by different cultures. Are there even family-resemblance-concepts from other cultures for the concept of 'methodology'? And even if there are, should we not be open for ways of comparing and practicing intercultural encounters of philosophical traditions that are not based on (preassigned) 'methods'?"[124]

[123] Li, 20-21.
[124] Burik, 215.

A Vice and a Virtue

As the discussion is coming to an end, Maigrot is described as exhibiting both a vicious and a virtuous character trait.

> [Kangxi:] Li Madou and his companions came to these lands at least two hundred years ago. Before those times China knew nothing of the Incarnation nor of the name *Tianzhu* which you now give to God, who was not made flesh in these lands of ours. Before the arrival of Ricci, why did we have no right to call God *Tian*? And what difficulties now prevent God from being called by the name of Heaven in this China of ours?
>
> [Maigrot:] The reason is that Heaven is not the Lord of Heaven; He who made Heaven is the Lord of Heaven.
>
> *With a suggestion of severity in his tone, the Emperor said:*
>
> [Kangxi:] I told you long ago that Heaven and the Lord of Heaven mean the same.[125]

Kangxi had already shown Maigrot that he seriously lacked knowledge of Chinese matters. He had argued that certain ideas Maigrot maintained were false, and sought to reveal that this was largely due to a considerably uncritical reception of misinformation about which Maigrot had not thought for himself. Nevertheless, Maigrot remained unwilling to change his mind about erroneous things he was previously told to be true. To put it succinctly, in this extract, Maigrot is presented as being quite obstinate. But this attitude seems to change completely at the end of the discussion.

[125] Stumpf, 81.

The emperor smiled at what they said and again directed his words to the Lord Bishop of Conon:

[Kangxi:] Come now, […] let us finish some of this business today. Do you wish to have a debate about our books?

[Maigrot:] I do not wish to debate anything, for I do not have the capacity to debate Your Majesty.

After this, the Emperor now for the first time addressed Father Beauvollier: "What do you say," he asked, "about the word Tian and its meaning?" The Father replied: "Tian, both from the elements of the character and its accepted usage, means yi da, the first great one or the first being, who existed before there was heaven or earth and anything else, who created heaven and earth and everything which is contained in them."

[Kangxi:] Do you Yan Dang [Maigrot] have anything to say against that?

[Maigrot:] I cannot debate it, for an ignorant person who is not an expert should not enter into a debate.[126]

Now, Maigrot suddenly refuses to debate anything related to Chinese literature or language, and openly admits that he is ignorant of it. Kangxi highly valued this attitude. In his private notes, he wrote: "I've always been willing to admit I made a mistake, be it over a trifle or some serious matter."[127] Although one may rightfully question the veracity of this claim, it must be conceded that this is a virtuous attitude to have in cross-cultural contexts.

An insight that may be drawn from this, therefore, for those who start to study, or are studying, matters of another culture, is that, in cross-cultural dialogues, it bears more fruit to be willing to admit that one's knowledge of another culture's matter is (at least at first) limited,

[126] Ibid., 82.
[127] Spence, 73.

rather than being unwilling to change views one initially thought to be correct. Renate Schepen calls this dialogical virtue 'self-reflectivity', which she describes as the aspiration "[t]o become aware of one's prejudices and assumptions and a willingness to change these. This is fostered by an attitude of epistemic modesty, in which one acknowledges that one's knowledge is limited."[128] Another 'skill' Schepen distinguishes is 'trust'. Interestingly, Kangxi also briefly talked about (dis)trust in his private notes. However, whereas Schepen describes this attitude as "stay[ing] in a creative process with the participants of the dialogue while the outcome and even the ground one walks on are unknown,"[129] Kangxi stresses the importance of both being able to speak the same language: "[y]ou [Tournon] have seen here Westerners who have stayed forty years with us, and if they are still lacking in knowledge of imperial affairs, how could someone just transplanted from the West do better? I would not be able to get along with him as I do with these. *We would need an interpreter, which means distrust and awkwardness* [emphasis added]."[130]

Fact or Fiction?

As has become evident, in the *Acta Pekinensia*, Kangxi is represented as teaching Maigrot that he should be aware and critical of his sources of information. Let us, therefore, follow Kangxi's advice by examining whether the discussion, as recorded in the *Acta Pekinensia*, may be considered a reliable source of information, and, if so, to what degree.

As will be discussed, it is debatable whether the discussion between Kangxi and Maigrot has been paraphrased verbatim. However, as has become clear, even if it is not entirely accurate, one may still extrapolate interesting philosophical insights from it. Furthermore, at least four reasons may be mentioned as to why the discussion between Kangxi and Maigrot

[128] Schepen, *Kimmerle's Intercultural Philosophy and Beyond*, 209.
[129] Ibid.
[130] Spence, 78.

might be considered as philosophical as it is historical. First, the discussion heavily touches upon epistemology, which is a philosophical subject. Second, the discussion is divided into several larger arguments and themes, such as (a) limited knowledge of Chinese language and literature, (b) uncritical unawareness of sources of information, (c) making judgements, (d) interpretations, and (e) different dialogical attitudes. Third, various rhetorical devices are employed. There are, for example, two clear instances of parallelism: "[i]f you don't understand the meaning of four characters, how on earth can you understand our books?"[131] In his private notes, Kangxi uses this rhetorical device more explicitly when he writes that "Maigrot wasn't merely ignorant of Chinese literature, he couldn't even recognize the simplest Chinese characters; yet he chose to discuss the falsity of the Chinese moral system."[132] Moreover, Kangxi asks Maigrot: "'You must have read the book written by this Li Madou?' [… As a result of which t]he Most Illustrious Bishop of Conon turned to Father Parrenin and said 'Reverend Father, who is this Li Madou?'"[133] To express it differently, the argument appears to be: 'not only had Maigrot not read Ricci's book, he did not even know Li Madou was Matteo Ricci's Chinese name!' Fourth, at the end of the discussion, Maigrot is portrayed as changing his attitude of obstinacy to one of epistemic modesty fairly quickly. This might be indicative of a didactic process. In other words, it is clear that Kangxi wanted to teach Maigrot certain things. Eventually, Kangxi seems to have succeeded in turning one of Maigrot's vices into a virtue. In a similar way, Elisa Freschi takes the biblical account of Jacob's fight with the angel[134] as an example. Even though it must be noted that, in contrast to the discussion between Kangxi and Maigrot, Freschi specifically addresses dialogues between a reader and the text they are reading, she argues that

[131] Stumpf, 77.
[132] Spence, 80.
[133] Stumpf, 80.
[134] Genesis 32:22-32.

> one should not aim at destroying one's philosophical opponent, but also not remain at the superficial level of a peaceful chatting. Even if one is reading someone whose ideas one feels sympathetic with, in order for the encounter to be really fertile, one needs to engage in a real combat, that is, in a strict philosophical confrontation, being ready to have to admit one's defeat and to change at least some of one's assumptions. This means that one is not just staging a combat and in fact holding tight to one's ideas. One is ready to risk one's (philosophical) life, that is, one's beliefs.[135]

Furthermore, she goes on to say that "Jacob fights. He does not just encounter the angel, he fights with him. Similarly, in order for the encounter with another philosopher to be really *transformative* [emphasis added], one should not just engage with a restatement of one's ideas but rather look for points of difference and not just of harmony. One is not transformed with the encounter of the n-th philosopher who agrees with oneself."[136] Thus, are cross-cultural dialogues not meant to transform its interlocutors in at least some way or another?

In any case, let us now discuss the extent to which the discussion between Kangxi and Maigrot, as articulated in the *Acta Pekinensia*, may be regarded as a factual description. In 1991, Alasdair C. MacIntyre wrote that "in comparing two fundamental standpoints at odds with each other, […] we have no neutral, independent standpoint from which to do so. We may compare Confucianism and Aristotelianism from a Confucian standpoint, or [compare Aristotelianism and Confucianism] from an Aristotelian [standpoint]."[137] In the same vein, Smid and Burik assert respectively that "there is no view from nowhere, no neutral place for the comparativist to stand,"[138] and that "[w]e have no view from nowhere with which to analyse different methods or judge them. We only do that from particular backgrounds. We always

[135] Freschi, "Thinking Along with Texts from Afar," 101.
[136] Ibid., 102.
[137] MacIntyre, "Conversation between Confucians and Aristotelians," 121.
[138] Smid, "On the Taming of Comparison," 188.

enter the field from some place, from some position."[139] Applying this to the current thesis, the standpoints of Kangxi and Maigrot are at odds with each other. According to MacIntyre, Smid, and Burik, there is no neutral standpoint from which these two standpoints may be compared. Let us examine the extent to which this is true in this case.

The discussion between Kangxi and Maigrot is said to have been recorded by Kilian Stumpf (1655-1720). A good case can be made for the conviction that it is unlikely that Stumpf's representation of the discussion between Kangxi and Maigrot was completely neutral. First, Stumpf might not have been present himself. Stumpf records that, in addition to Kangxi and Maigrot, the following people were present: Appiani (Lazarist), Guéty (*Missions Étrangères de Paris*), and Angelita (Tournon's secretary), as well as the Jesuits Thomas, Pereira, Parrenin, Barros, and Beauvollier. However, Stumpf does not mention that he was present himself, and it is unclear whether his presence may be assumed or not.[140] If Stumpf was not present, he must have had to reconstruct the discussion between Kangxi and Maigrot on the basis of what he heard from those who were present. This would mean that the recorded discussion is not a literal transcription of the things that were said. Second, Stumpf was a Jesuit. In general, Jesuits had good reasons for disliking Maigrot's views. As accommodationists, for instance, they generally did not like the 'abolitionist' ideas he had formulated clearly in the edict published in 1693. Even so, Stumpf was also assigned the prestigious role of papal notary.[141] In good faith, he was to report everything he came to know, especially about Tournon. This may have caused him to write: "[a]lthough what I have related may seem long or irrelevant, I have included it out of a desire that the truth should be told."[142] But, at the same time, Stumpf also served the Chinese emperor in the royal court. This, then, is the third reason: Stumpf appears to have been in a difficult situation. On a religious level, Stumpf had to be

[139] Burik, 204.
[140] Stumpf, 76.
[141] Ibid., 1.
[142] Ibid., 83.

loyal to the Holy See, but, in a political sense, he had to be obedient to the Chinese emperor. This seems to be why, on the one hand, Stumpf repeatedly uses honorary titles like 'Most Illustrious Bishop of Conon' to refer to Maigrot, but, on the other hand, cannot put Kangxi in a bad light. After all, the Chinese punishments for disloyalty or treason were not mild.

It would be too harsh to conclude that Stumpf must, therefore, have favoured one standpoint over another, because he could not afford to neglect the interests of either the Holy See or the Chinese emperor. Still, it seems clear that it is improbable that he was able to record the discussion between Kangxi and Maigrot from an entirely neutral standpoint.[143] Notwithstanding, in the end, Stumpf did a good job at recording the discussion between Kangxi and Maigrot, in spite of the complicated interplay between different religious, political, and personal factors that must have influenced him (on at least a subconscious level).

Let Us Be Real

As has been seen, it is also recorded that Kangxi admonished Maigrot for judging about Chinese matters too quickly. But as ideal as the principle 'do not judge (too quickly)' may sound in theory, it is often difficult to put into practice. A few reasons will be given as to why this also applies to the specific case of Maigrot.

First, as harsh and rash as the judgements written in Maigrot's edict of 1693 may appear to be, it must be noted that, in this same document, Maigrot openly admits that he made these judgements reluctantly, and that he was, to some extent, forced to make certain decisions, despite his relatively little knowledge. He writes the following.

[143] In the same vein, the standpoint I assume in this thesis is not entirely neutral either, even though I have tried to be as neutral as possible.

> A number of our Vicariate's missionaries were very desirous of removing not only the discordant opinions but also the diversity of practice in questions of such great importance. They sought our opinion out of regard for the apostolic Vicariate we are unworthily administering. Not wanting to be oppressed with unending scruples of conscience and queries, they kept asking us to make some decision at least for the time being.[144]

Second, Tournon had already introduced Maigrot to Kangxi as someone extraordinarily well-read in Chinese language, literature, and other matters, before the discussion between the Chinese emperor and the Bishop of Conon even was to take place. The following is recorded in the private notes of Kangxi.

> *De Tournon said that he had come to repay debts of gratitude, and also to institute reciprocal contacts between the Emperor and the Pope—such contacts were valued, he said, by the rulers in the West.*
>
> [Kangxi:] To handle such matters, […] choose whom you like.
>
> [Tournon:] The responsible party for the proper handling of such an interrelationship must be one who is in the confidence of the Pope, and deeply versed in the ways of the courts of Western rulers, and especially in the ways of the Roman Curia.
>
> […]
>
> [Kangxi:] If the Pope would send a man of impeccable conduct and spiritual gifts as good as those Westerners here now, a man who won't interfere with others or dominate them, he'll be received as warmly as the rest. But if we give such a man power over the others, as you requested, there will be many and serious difficulties. You have seen here

[144] Sure, 8.

> Westerners who have stayed forty years with us, and if they are still somewhat lacking in knowledge of imperial affairs, how could someone just transplanted from the West do better? I would not be able to get along with him as I do with these. We would need an interpreter, which means distrust and awkwardness. Such a man would never be free from error, and if he were appointed the leader of all he would have to carry any blame earned by the others and pay the penalties according to our usage.
>
> *The legate suggested he had a candidate, nevertheless.*[145]

Presumably, this 'candidate' refers to Maigrot. If so, Kangxi must have had high expectations of Maigrot, given that Tournon had introduced Maigrot as a savant. In turn, Maigrot might have wanted to live up to the Chinese emperor's high hopes, and this sentiment might have contributed to persuading Maigrot to make judgements about several Chinese matters (too quickly).

At least one important insight may be drawn from this for those who start to study, or are studying, matters of another culture; that is, that the presence and influence of sociopolitical factors and power structures in (cross-cultural) dialogues might well be inevitable. Accordingly, Kramm and others argue that "the ubiquity of power inequalities" is one of three key issues "more recent decolonial scholarship tends to emphasize."[146] Relatedly, Chakrabarti and Weber argue that "politics may play a crucial role with regard of creating the conditions of possibility for 'the conversation' of global philosophy."[147] In a similar and more concrete way, Schepen mentions that "[e]conomic factors often determine which philosophers get published and which knowledge gets reproduced in academic discourse, and [that] these factors generally tend to determine the power structures underlying philosophical discourse."[148] Furthermore,

[145] Spence, 77-79.
[146] Kramm et al., "Confrontation or Dialogue," 605.
[147] Chakrabarti and Weber, 164.
[148] Schepen, "Layers of Heinz Kimmerle's Intercultural Philosophy," 60.

"having more access to both academic resources as well as to the means necessary for reproducing philosophical texts" also highly influences the dynamic and relation among the interlocutors of a certain dialogue.[149]

The Word, the Tone, and the Gesture

Finally, let us explore whether the small remarks about the setting of the discussion reveal something, and, if so, what they disclose. These 'circumstantial descriptions' may be divided into two categories: intonation and bodily gestures.

As for intonation, it is said that "His Majesty [Kangxi] spoke slowly, distinctly, and clearly," that "[t]he Most Illustrious Lord [Maigrot] hesitated before he answered; but, after he had thought about it for some time in silence, he answered," and that "[w]ith a suggestion of severity in his tone, the Emperor said […]."[150]

With regard to bodily gestures, it is mentioned that Antoine Thomas "fell to his knees,"[151] and that "two *yuxian*, that is assistants, went down on their knees."[152] Similarly, during the encounter between Kangxi and Mezzabarba, it is recorded that the latter "prostrated before the emperor and kowtowed."[153] Furthermore, Kangxi is said to have smiled twice,[154] and it is mentioned three times that a person turned their gaze (or words) to someone else.[155] Likewise, in his private notes, Kangxi writes that, during his conversation with Tournon, he raised his eyebrows before he said something, and later, at the end of the meeting, paused on the threshold to add something.[156]

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[149] Ibid., 61.
[150] Stumpf, 77; 79; 81.
[151] Ibid., 77.
[152] Ibid., 81.
[153] Li, 21.
[154] "With a smile, the Emperor replied"; "[t]he Emperor smiled at what they said." Stumpf, 79; 82.
[155] "The Most Illustrious Bishop of Conon turned to Father Parrenin"; "The Emperor […] again directed his words to the Lord Bishop of Conon"; "The Emperor turned back to the Bishop of Conon." Ibid., 80; 82; 83.
[156] Spence, 78-79.

Apart from the fact that it appears to be the case that these circumstantial descriptions can make a text slightly biased by occasionally emphasising a particular person's characteristic (e.g. prostrating and kowtowing to show submission), three of Heinz Kimmerle's insights may be cited.

First, these circumstantial descriptions show that "[i]t is important for all dialogues that the participants are, as far as possible, bodily present, as in these cases there is quite a lot of pre-linguistic exchange."[157] Somewhat similarly, Brakel and Ma state that "[t]he 'principle of reasonableness' refers to the principle of mutual attunement already required in the prelinguistic stage of interpretation," and that "[a]lready 'before' interpretation and the principle of reasonableness become 'active', there is mutual attunement of humans with their local *Umwelt*."[158]

Second, "[b]esides the encountering looks there are quite a number of other multi-sensorical mutual relationships between the partners of a dialogue. The gestures and the intonation, which accompany the oral speech, play a role in the process of understanding. They stimulate the attention and mediate emotional aspects of what is said, which can be very important."[159] In other words, it is not only vital to listen to *what* is said, but also to *how* it is said. Miranda Fricker might even want to take a step further and argue that the virtuous hearer listens "as much to what is *not* said as to what is said." [160] In the same vein, Jullien expresses that "what is essential is in the unsaid."[161]

Third and final, Kimmerle notes that "it is important to mention that gestures and other forms of body language are often different in different cultures. Special attention and again some kind of methodological cautiousness are necessary in this aspect of intercultural

[157] Kimmerle, 75.
[158] Brakel and Ma, 42-43.
[159] Kimmerle, 76.
[160] Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 171-172.
[161] Jullien, 75.

understanding."[162] It might also be added that similar forms of body language can communicate different messages: when it is reported that Kangxi smiled, for example, did he do so somewhat contemptuously or rather kindly?

Conclusion

In conclusion, from a comparison of papal decrees, at least five insights may be drawn for cross-cultural philosophers. First, language is not always used in a neutral manner, supposing, of course, it ever can be. Second, one's perspectival situatedness, as well as its corresponding presuppositions, may cause one to pose different questions than a person situated in another perspective. This is why various perspectives ought to be included, especially ones that contradict one another. Unfortunately, Chinese voices other than Kangxi's have not been included in this thesis, mainly because their writings are largely unavailable and untranslated. According to Mungello, "[t]he neglect of these documents by scholars shows that the Chinese side of this controversy has not been fully explored."[163] Third, if different perspectives may produce different questions, different questions may, in turn, yield different responses. To put it differently, the way in which a certain question is formulated highly influences the manner in which it is responded to. Therefore, the formulation of a specific question itself can be problematic. Fourth, even though drawing comparisons may not be possible without the necessary generalisations, one should be careful to generalise particular cases, because it facilitates misrepresenting them. Rather, one should strive to be as precise as possible. Fifth and final, in the context of the Chinese Rites Controversy, whenever a decision was made about or for a certain community—be it reluctantly or voluntarily—their experience should have been an essential factor to take into consideration. Still, one should not be oblivious

[162] Kimmerle, 76.
[163] Mungello, 8.

to practicalities that made inclusive decision-making difficult. In an academic cross-cultural context, however, scholars make decisions only insofar as they give arguments and interpretations for or against other scholars' claims. For cross-cultural scholars, therefore, a key takeaway could be that it is wise to take into account practical considerations, such as the sociopolitical ramifications one's (theoretical) arguments and interpretations could have or possible ways in which they might be (mis)appropriated for various political (or other) ends.

A close examination of the discussion between Kangxi and Maigrot has also yielded at least six insights for cross-cultural scholars. First, it tends to be the case that whenever one is studying matters of another culture, one's understanding of them is, at least in the beginning, considerably restricted. From this, it follows that it is more fruitful to acknowledge one's limited knowledge, instead of being unwilling to change views one initially thought to be correct, but which turned out to be (partly) mistaken. Second, one should not only be aware, but also be critical, of one's sources of information, and should always evaluate the information one acquires from them. This entails that it is not beneficial to claim to have understood a certain matter as soon as one has heard about it, but rather to keep one's mind open for possible corrections. Furthermore, it is important that, in assessing the information one acquires, one is as critical of information about matters of one's own culture as of information about matters of another culture. In this way, one avoids the accusation of hypocrisy. Third, whenever one is studying matters of another culture, one might want to be slow to judge it. It must be admitted, however, that ever-present sociopolitical factors and power structures can nudge someone towards making a judgement about a certain matter. Fourth, Kangxi proposed that one can know whether or not any one matter is compatible with any other matter if and only if one understands both of them. Insofar as Kangxi referred to 'understanding' in a holistic sense (that is, understanding another culture as a whole), cross-cultural research may yield only relatively humble conclusions, if it can yield any meaningful conclusion at all. After all, it takes a

significant amount of time to become familiar with a (radically) different worldview. However, academic comparative analyses often tend to be more reductionist, in the sense that scholars do not often compare entire cultures or traditions with one another, but rather compare certain arguments and interpretations about specific matters of different cultures. Therefore, Maigrot's suggestion that 'with the little knowledge that I have (of the other culture as a whole), this is how (several matters of this culture) appear to me' may be a more desirable attitude to assume for cross-cultural scholars. Fifth, to avoid misunderstanding and misinterpretation, it is good to be aware of the fact that one matter may be understood in various ways, and that studying matters of another culture might require a different method of interpretation than the one they are accustomed to. Sixth and final, insofar as it is possible, physical presence is useful in cross-cultural encounters, because of the ample pre-linguistic exchange. Furthermore, it allows for a sensitivity to intonation and non-discursive modes of communication, such as gestures. With regard to intonation, *what* is said is as crucial as *how* it is said. Similarly, what *is* said may be as vital as what is *not* said. As for body language, one must be careful, as the same gesture can mean something different in another culture.

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