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*The Zhongyong 中庸 (Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis)
and the Jesuits' interpretation of Some Philosophical Concepts*

In the beginning the Jesuits started to translate the *Four Books* in order to teach the Chinese language and introduce basic notions of Chinese culture (in particular Confucianism) to the missionaries. In fact, they provided the original texts in Chinese characters, a phonetic transcription in Roman alphabet and the literal translation in Latin. The Chinese characters were numbered with their corresponding Latin words in order to facilitate the learning process. According to Thierry Meynard, S.J. Michele Ruggieri (1543-1607) “was the first to engage in this type of work, preparing a translation of the *Four Books*, until he was recalled to Rome in 1588”. However, when Michele Ruggieri arrived in Rome in 1590, he did not find support from his superiors and could only write a short essay on the missionary method in China in which he translated part of the preface of the *Daxue* in Latin.

After Michele Ruggieri left for Rome, Matteo Ricci continued to read and translate the *Four Books* in order to teach the Chinese language and to understand Chinese thought. In particular, he taught the Chinese language to the newly arrived Jesuit Francesco de Pietris (1562-1593), using the *Sishu* as a primer. Moreover, Ricci, on the instruction of Alessandro Valignano, was preparing a new Catechism, which should replace the Catechism (*Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄) by Michele Ruggieri. Meynard notes that “Ricci probably felt that he had first to translate these books into Latin in order to secure their meanings and avoid introducing any theological errors. This shows his extreme caution in dealing with the Classical texts of China. Also, as we know, Ricci’s catechism had to be approved by superiors who did not read the Chinese and therefore had to prepare a Latin version of it.”

It is evident that the task of translating the classics into Latin had manifold implications and that the first readers were the missionaries who arrived in China and their superiors in Rome, who had to approve the Latin translations. Thus, in this phase, the Chinese who had to be converted to Christianity were not considered.

In a letter dated November 15, 1594, Ricci wrote that he had translated “the most important moral book of this kingdom, which can be read as it consists of “sententie morali assai acute e buone”. The book Ricci was referring to is probably the *Zhongyong*.

After Matteo Ricci and Michele Ruggieri, we have to wait until the XVII century to see new translations of the *Zhongyong*:

- The *Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis* (The Moral and Political Science of China) by Prospero Intorcetta (1626-1696), published at Goa between 1667 and 1669;
- The second part of the collection *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus sive Scientia sinensis Latina exposita*, Paris 1687 (by Prospero Intorcetta, Christian Wolfgang Henriques Herdtrich, François de Rougemont and Philippe Couplet;
- The *Immutabile Medium*, which is part of the *Sinensis imperii libri classici sex*, translated by François Noël (1651-1729), published in Prague.

The *Zhongyong* is one of the most fascinating and cryptic texts of Chinese philosophical literature, it has been exhaustively studied and commented throughout the centuries. It deals with self-cultivation and the art of the *junzi* 君子. The paper provides an excursus of the translations of the *Zhongyong* and examines the reception and understanding of some key concepts by Prospero Intorcetta.