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Chinese Buddhism and the Threat of Atheism in Seventeenth-Century Europe

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When the Europeans first came to Asia, they met with the multiform presence of Buddhism. They gradually came to understand that a common religious tradition connected the different brands of Buddhism found in Sri Lanka, Thailand, Japan, and China. I propose here to examine a presentation of Buddhism written in Guangzhou by the Italian Jesuit Prospero Intorcetta (1626–1696) around the year 1668. This text was later edited by the Flemish Jesuit Philippe Couplet (1623–1693) and published in Paris in 1687, within an encyclopedia on Chinese thought titled *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (The Chinese Philosopher Confucius, hereafter called *CSP*).

In the first part of this study, I shall introduce the background of the Jesuit encounter with Buddhism, first in Japan and then in China, as well as their literary production on the subject. Then, I shall examine Intorcetta's presentation of Chinese Buddhism, especially his understanding of the two faces of Buddhism: Pure Land Buddhism, which he categorized as superstition, and Chan Buddhism, categorized as atheism. These two notions of superstition and atheism seem contradictory, but in fact they are derived from Intorcetta's interpretation of the Buddhist theory of the "two truths." I shall conclude with an evaluation of Intorcetta's account. Because this early presentation of Buddhism exists only in Latin, I have inserted excerpts that I have translated.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ENCOUNTER WITH BUDDHISM

Since the sixteenth century, missionaries have traveled to different regions of Asia and collected information about the religions they encountered, including Buddhism. They also exchanged information among themselves, asking questions of colleagues in order to confirm and complete information. The missionary reports were sent to Europe for their superiors and were sometimes published as such, but more often incorporated into larger works.

The First Encounter, from Japan to China

Among the first reports reaching Europe about Buddhism were the letters of the Spanish Jesuit Francis-Xavier (1506–1552), who drew information from Yajiro, a Japanese he met in Malacca in 1547. During his own stay of more than two years in Japan, in 1549–1551, Francis-Xavier had exchanges with monks and could progress in his understanding of Buddhism. His letters were very influential among the network of Jesuit schools in Europe, being copied and read at many venues.¹ Other missionaries in Japan, like Cosme de Torres (1510–1570), Luís Fróis (1532–1597), and Baltasar Gago (1515–1583), went further in understanding Buddhism.

Also, when, at the end of the sixteenth century, the Jesuit missionaries approached Buddhism in China, their understanding was already shaped by fifty years of knowledge gained in Japan. Just as in Japan, the China Jesuits were interested in Buddhism because it provided them with an indigenous vocabulary in which to express Christian ideas. Thus, the missionary was perceived as a kind of Buddhist monk. The symbolic identification with Buddhism went even further than in Japan, because for more than ten years in Guangdong, from 1579 to 1595, they adopted Buddhist dress and shaved their heads.

However, as the missionaries deepened their understanding of the Buddhist doctrine, they realized that many tenets could not be reconciled with Christianity. Since they were greatly concerned about disseminating the orthodox faith and avoiding dubious theories, which they believed to be the tricks of the devil, they distanced themselves from Buddhism and became closer to Confucianism, whose discourse, which focused on moral life in the present world, did not directly conflict with the supernatural truths of Christianity. While Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607) and Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) had initially started interacting with Chinese culture by using Buddhism, later on Ricci abandoned this approach and started to use Confucianism as the main medium. In the *Tianzhu shiyi* (True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven), Ricci wrote for his Chinese readers a strong refutation of the Buddhist doctrine from the standpoint of Aristotelian philosophy.² He criticized the concept of selflessness (*wuwo*) on metaphysical grounds, writing that everyone should draw their existence from an ultimate origin. In his *Della entrata della Compagnia di Gesù e Christianità nella China* (Entry of the Society of Jesus into China), Ricci wrote also for the Western audience the first extensive presentation of Buddhism in China.³

Early Accounts on Buddhism in China

After Ricci, a few China Jesuits wrote about Buddhism during the seventeenth century. In 1655, Martino Martini (1614–1661) published in Amsterdam his *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (New Chinese Atlas), including a short presentation of Buddhism.⁴ He also mentioned Buddhism a few times in his *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima* (The First Part of the Ten Divisions of the Chinese History), published in Munich in 1658 and in Amsterdam in 1659. Alvaro de Semedo (1585–1658) made also a short presentation in his *Relação da propagação da fé no reyno da China* (Report on the Propagation of

the Faith in the Chinese Kingdom, 1642). Three other works followed, but were quite superficial in their understanding of Buddhism: *China Illustrata* (China Illustrated, 1667) by Athanasius Kircher (1602–1680), *Nouveaux Mémoires de la Chine* (New Accounts about China, 1696) by Louis Le Comte (1655–1728), and *Histoire de l'Edit de l'Empereur de la Chine* (Narration about the Edict of the Chinese Emperor, 1698) by Charles Le Gobien (1653–1708).

In *Curious Land*, the American Sinologist David Mungello recently described and discussed the works in which the seventeenth-century Jesuits presented Chinese culture, including Buddhism.⁵ However, important documents were overlooked, such as a letter of the Portuguese Jesuit Tomás Pereira (1645–1708) that was included in *The Temporal & Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon* by Fernão de Queyroz (1617–1687).⁶ Mungello has also overlooked the presentation done by Intorcetta in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*. Similarly, Bernard Faure, in his detailed treatment “Zen Buddhism in Western Imagination,” overlooked this text.⁷ However, Intorcetta’s account is very detailed and probably the most comprehensive account of the seventeenth century. As we shall see, though this presentation draws on previous accounts, it is a landmark for the wealth of information it contains and also for its intellectual engagement with Buddhism.

Intorcetta and the Confucius Sinarum Philosophus

Intorcetta’s main field of study was not Buddhism, but Confucianism. After his arrival in Macao in 1659, he studied the *Four Books* under the Portuguese Jesuit Inácio da Costa (1603–1666), at Jiangchang, in Jiangxi province. This led in 1662 to the publication of the *Chinese Wisdom (Sapientia Sinica)*.⁸ During the Calendar Case instigated by Yang Guangxian (1597–1669), Intorcetta was summoned to Beijing and then deported with some twenty missionaries to Guangzhou, where they arrived on 25 March 1666. This semi-captivity turned out to be a blessing: being prevented from doing any pastoral activities, Intorcetta turned his energies into scholarly work, which were also connected to issues of missionary policies. As we know, missionaries discussed the suitability of adapting some Christian practices to Chinese culture, spending a considerable amount of energy discussing the correct interpretation of the Chinese rites. They held a formal meeting, which lasted forty days, from 18 December 1667 to 26 January 1668, a meeting that has become known as the Canton Conference.⁹ Behind the debate on concrete missionary policies, a controversy erupted about how to interpret Chinese thought and texts, especially Confucian classics. Intorcetta’s translations were criticized by Dominican and Franciscan friars.

In 1668, at the margins of the Canton Conference, Intorcetta wrote an essay to defend his translations and the Jesuit policy. This essay constitutes the first half of what became the *CSP*’s preface. There, Intorcetta introduced the reader to the basic knowledge about Chinese classics and about the three schools of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. His presentation of Chinese thought is greatly favorable to ancient Confucianism, presented as a completely rational philosophy without any stain of superstitions. In order to show that he was not soft on questions of ortho-

doxy, Intorcetta came to theorize and systematize his opposition to Buddhism. To this effect, he wrote a long chapter in which he developed an elaborated refutation of the Buddhist teaching, as we are going to see below.

Intorcetta could not continue the work on the translation project because he was elected as procurator of the China mission. He departed for Europe in August 1668 and chose a group of three Jesuits to continue the work in Guangzhou: the Austrian Christian Herdtrich (1624–1684) and two Flemish, François de Rougemont (1624–1676) and Philippe Couplet. Upon completion, the translations of the *Daxue*, *Zhongyong*, and *Lunyu* were sent to Europe, along with the preface by Intorcetta. However, all the manuscripts were left untouched in Europe and remained unpublished. In 1680, Couplet was sent to Europe, and, in 1686 and 1687, he worked in Paris on the final edition of the *CSP*, notably editing Intorcetta's preface and adding his own essay, which became the second part of the preface.

In a general discussion on Confucianism at the beginning of the preface, Intorcetta mentioned the position of the statesman and Christian convert Xu Guangqi (1562–1633), "*Pu ju; give fe*" (*buru juefo*), and explains it thus: "Christianity supplies and completes what is lacking in Master Confucius and in the Philosophy of the literati, and truly uproots and removes the harmful superstitions and worship of devils" (*CSP*, xxx). In fact, Xu's authentic formulation is actually milder, as *buru yifo*, "to complement Confucianism and to displace Buddhism."¹⁰ This more radical rejection of Buddhism can be explained within the context of the Rites Controversy. Because Intorcetta had argued, against the Dominican and Franciscan friars, that ancient Confucianism was free from superstition, he needed to show that he was intransigent on the question of orthodoxy and radicalized the opposition to Buddhism.

Initially written by Intorcetta, this presentation of Buddhism inserts itself within the grand historical scheme constructed by Couplet, in which China stands out as a unique nation in the world: while ancient Israel was led by the revelation of God and while all other nations fell into idolatry, ancient China alone was led by natural reason. Leaving Mesopotamia under the leadership of Fuxi, the ancient Chinese brought with them the uncorrupt knowledge of God. Because they lived in isolation from all other nations, they avoided the contamination of superstitions. China followed this natural religion until the coming of Buddhism, a "foreign superstition" that corrupted the whole ancient teaching.¹¹

BUDDHISM AS A SUPERSTITION

Let us move now to Intorcetta's presentation of Buddhism itself, corresponding, in the preface edited by Couplet, to the fourth chapter of the first part. The title of the chapter is quite neutral: "A Brief Notice about the Sect Called *Foekiao* [*fojiao*] and Its Followers" (*CSP*, xxvii). The presentation runs for eight pages tightly written, including a biography of Śākyamuni Buddha (three pages) and a presentation of Pure Land Buddhism (two pages) and of Chan Buddhism (three pages). Intorcetta presented two faces seemingly contradictory of Buddhism: superstition on one side and atheism on

another side. Here, we shall analyze the presentation of Buddhism under the familiar face of a religious superstition.

The Geographical and Historical Scope of Buddhism

Intorcetta first identified Buddhism thanks to something quite familiar to Christianity, a celibate clergy. Despite their different names, dresses, and customs, the missionaries could point out the existence of a clergy (*sangha*) called “*Sem* {*Seng*} or *Hoxam* {*Heshang*} by the Chinese, *Lamasem* [Lamas] by the Tartars, *Talapoins* by the Siamese, and finally, *Bonzii* {*Bonzes*} by the Japanese” (*CSP*, xxix). Since the beginning of the seventeenth century, the geographical delimitations of Buddhism were well known because Francis-Xavier had reached Japan in 1549, Michele Ruggieri China in 1583, Baltasar Sequeira (?–1609) Siam in 1607, and Antonio de Andrade (1580–1634) Tibet in 1624. Thus, Intorcetta could draw the map of the Buddhist *sangha* across Asia.

Besides its huge geographical scope, he came to realize also its vast historical scope. He correctly associated the “teaching of Fo” (*fokiao*, or in modern pinyin, *fojiao*) to a historical figure of India called Foe [Fo] in China and Xacca [Śākya] in Japan. Interestingly, Intorcetta came to place the birth of Buddha in the year 1026 BCE, some five hundred years before the actual date (cf. *CSP*, xxviii). Intorcetta did not invent this date, but followed the date given by a forged document of the Tang dynasty, *The Extraordinary Records of the Zhou Dynasty* (*Zhoushu yiji*), which relates some unusual natural phenomena that would have announced the birth of Buddha to King Zhao of the Zhou dynasty. Most probably, this date was accepted beyond the Buddhist circles by many Chinese intellectuals because they had no way to probe into the actual date of Buddha’s birth. Martino Martini seems to have been the first Jesuit to use this date of 1026 BCE, and Intorcetta followed him.¹²

It seems that Ricci knew nothing about *The Extraordinary Records of the Zhou Dynasty*, because he placed the life of Buddha at the time of Pythagoras. Ricci saw the similarity between the Pythagorean theory of the metempsychosis and the Buddhist theory of reincarnation, even suggesting a historical connection between Buddhism and the Pythagoreans. He argued that the doctrine of reincarnation originated with Pythagoras, was then brought to India, and finally was adopted by Śākyamuni Buddha.¹³ In this sense, we could say that Ricci placed the origins of Buddhism in Greek philosophy, which made David Mungello criticize Ricci for his Eurocentrism.¹⁴

Intorcetta recognized the centrality of the doctrine of reincarnation in Buddhism and established, like Ricci, a historical connection with the Pythagoreans. However, because Intorcetta wrongly believed that Buddha was born in 1026 BCE, he saw the influence the other way around, from India to Greece. In fact, Pythagoras (ca. 580–500 BCE) lived before Buddha and could not therefore have been influenced by Buddhism. Also, the theory of reincarnation is not properly Buddhist but originates much earlier. However, despite a wrong date for Buddha, the *CSP* was correct in stating that the doctrine of reincarnation came from India to Greece, where it was transformed

by Pythagoras into the theory of metempsychosis. Ironically, because the *CSP* had the wrong dates for the life of Buddha, it could rightly conclude a transmission from India to Greece, and not the other way around as Ricci stated.

Concerning the introduction of Buddhism into China, Intorcetta followed the official historiography, associating the event with the dream of Emperor Han Mingdi:

In 65 AD, Han Mimti [Mingdi], the seventeenth emperor of the fifth dynasty, was moved by the words of the Philosopher [i.e., Confucius], and even more by an announcement in a dream under the appearance of a holy hero from the West. Because it was not safe for him to go, he sent Çaicim [Caiqing] et Çin-kim [Qinjing] as his legates, in the direction of the sunset, looking there for this holy man and his holy teaching. Landing on an island not far away from the Red Sea, and not daring to advance further, they brought back to China a certain idol and a figure of a man called Foe who had lived in India some five hundred years before Confucius, as well as this detestable teaching of his. They would have been more successful and forever worthy of their homeland if they had brought, instead of this curse, the saving teachings of Christ that the Apostle Thomas was propagating at that time in India (*The Life of Confucius, CSP*, cxx).¹⁵

The same story had been told earlier by Ricci in the *Tianzhu shiyi*.¹⁶ Ricci and Intorcetta did not express any doubt about the veracity of Emperor Ming's dream, but they accepted it as a fact. Because the Chinese people were supposedly expecting a sage to come, the missionaries believed that God had sent a messenger to the Emperor Ming announcing the birth of Christ, just as God had sent a sign to some "wise people from the East," according to the Gospel by Matthew.¹⁷ The text suggests that Han Mingdi saw in his dream the apostle Thomas, who was evangelizing at that time in South India. However, unlike the wise people from the East in the Matthean Gospel, the two ambassadors of Han Mingdi would have failed to find Christianity, and mistakenly brought back Buddhism to China. Therefore, Buddhism started in China with a misidentification.

The *Book of the Latter Han (Houbanshu)*, which records the history of Eastern Han (25–220) but was written only in the fifth century, mentions the enquiry about Buddhism made by Han Mingdi after he saw in a dream "a tall golden man the top of whose head was glowing." According to Yang Xuanzhi (sixth century), when the delegation came back to the capital, carrying on white horses the image of Buddha and the sutras, the emperor established the White Horse Temple (*Baimasi*). In fact, the dream of Han Mingdi, his embassy, and his recognition of Buddhism have little historical basis. Buddhism was introduced to China at an earlier date, not through a diplomatic mission, but through caravan routes. Unable to probe into this story of imperial approval, Ricci engineered a convenient way of changing its meaning with the supposed misidentification, which is carefully imputed to the ambassadors, and not to the emperor himself. Intorcetta gave details not found in Ricci's work, for example, the names of the two ambassadors who were supposed to have been sent, Cai Yin and Qin Jing. As we see, regarding these two fundamental events—the dates of

the birth of Buddha and of the entry of Buddhism into China, Intorcetta uncritically depended on Chinese texts and traditions.

Buddhism and the Work of Satan

For the Jesuit missionaries, the evil origin of Buddhism was a certainty. Based on the life of Buddha in Chinese, Intorcetta could read in Buddha's birth the work of the devil:

A minor king, Infan Vam [Jingfan Wang] once ruled a region of India, located between the North and the South, and called by the Chinese Chumtiencho [Zhongtianshu]. His wife was named Moye [Māyā]. They gave birth to a son who was first called Xe [Shi] or Xekia [Shijia], a name which now signifies all the dirt and superstition of the Bonzes. The Japanese write it, with an incorrect Chinese character, as Xaca. When he reached thirty, he was called Foe. Whether he was a man or only a creation of the devil is the matter of an unsolved controversy. The Apostle of Japan, Francis-Xavier, held the second opinion. Indeed, if what the Buddhists mention about his birth is not a myth, then Francis-Xavier could be right. They say that his mother was brought in a dream to a white elephant which worked its way into her womb through her mouth. Thus, Buddha was reportedly conceived from an elephant. But, according to other people, it is more probable that he was conceived, through the work of Satan, from a human seed brought from elsewhere to Moye's belly. They say also that Buddha was born from the right side of his mother and that she died soon after. Therefore, "this savior of mankind," as the Buddhists call him, could not even save his own mother. From this you can see that this human monster had more of the serpent to him than of a true human. Indeed, the Chinese character of Foe, being made of "no" and "man," indicates this. As soon as he was born, he could stand and walk seven steps, one hand pointing toward heaven and the other pointing toward the earth. So that no one would be in any doubt about his origin, he proclaimed with a loud voice: "*Tien xam, Tien hia to ngo guei çum*" (*Tianshang tianxia duwo wei zun*); that is, "Only I should be venerated in heaven and on earth." (CSP, xxvii–xxviii)

The extraordinary facts surrounding the birth of Buddha are not negated as false. On the contrary, the religious imagination of the missionaries was still shaped by the medieval idea of the omnipresence of the devil in the world, which, with all its tricks, was quick to deceive people. On the basis of the opinion of Francis-Xavier and the etymology of Buddha's name, the text argues that Buddha was indeed a creature of the devil. The Chinese character *fō* is the first part of the phonetic translation of Buddha as *fo-tuo*, and therefore, there is no meaning attached to it. However, one could play with the etymology of the character as "man-not," either for enhancing the divine nature of Buddha or for denying him humanity.¹⁸ The Jesuits understood it to mean that Buddha was not of human nature, but of devilish nature.

Though the missionaries looked at Buddhism as a superstition, it was not a superstition in the modern sense of the word, that is, a belief without foundation or effect

in the world. On the contrary, they believed that people could make a pact with the devil and use his supernatural powers. Accordingly, the Buddha could achieve many deeds because of a supernatural force coming from Satan: “Through the power of the devil, he achieved many things, and because of their novelty, people became blind, or, because of their miraculous nature, absolutely stupefied” (*CSP*, xxviii). This line of argumentation for rejecting Buddhism falls off from the rational standard of the whole *CSP*. In 1752, some decades after the publication of the *CSP*, the Danish natural law theorist Martin Hübner strongly criticized the use of such irrational arguments.¹⁹

Besides the miraculous account about Buddha’s birth, the *CSP* gave a brief but accurate account of his life:

At the age of seventeen, Xekia [Shijia], or Xaca took three wives. He had a son, called in Chinese Loheulo [Luohoulou].²⁰ Soon after he renounced human affairs and responsibilities and he dedicated himself to penance because of his dead mother.²¹ At the age of nineteen he withdrew into the desert.²² It is said that he was taught there by four gymnosophists, called “Jogues” [i.e., Yoggis] in India.²³ When he was thirty, one day before sunrise, he looked by chance at the Great Bear [i.e., the planet Venus]. With a single gaze at this star, he was immediately able to understand the essence of the First Principle, and, inspired by some strange divinity, he became Foe, like a god—also called “Pagode” in India.²⁴ From disciple, he became Master; from human, divine; and he started to communicate his teaching to the people. What is said about the multitude of his disciples is difficult to believe: eighty thousand are said to have individually received either the title of gymnosophist or of idolater.²⁵ Then, besides this multitude of disciples which I have mentioned, the Buddha left behind Moojiaye [Mohejiaye, i.e., Mahākāśyapa], for a long time his most cherished disciple, as the first heir and propagator of the heresy. He ordered him to insert the following words at the beginning of all the books to be published about his teaching: “*Ruxi ngoven*” [*Rushi wouven*], which means, “I heard it like this,” without using any other reason or argument.²⁶ (*CSP*, xxx)

Intorcetta probably consulted a Life of Buddha in the Chinese language, like the *Buddhacaritakāvyaśūtra*. Yet, because of the shortness of this account, it is difficult to identify the source.

Pure Land, or the Dangers of a Seemingly Respectable Religion

Besides the elements about Buddha’s life, Intorcetta presented how the Buddhist faith could improve the next reincarnation. Accordingly, faith to Buddha is fundamental because he has the power to expiate sins:

The good people and the wicked, the perverse and the just, all receive different retributions: seats are prepared for some as reward, and for others, as punishment. Bliss can be obtained, with the “thirty-two features” and the “eighty qualities” [of Buddha]. Foe, or Xaca, was himself a god and the Savior of

humanity. He came to this world because he pitied the people who were going astray from the path of salvation. He expiated their sins so they could pass from death to salvation and be favorably reborn in another world. (*CSP*, xxx)

The notion of expiation of sins comes from Christianity and is problematically applied to Buddhism. Concerning this passage, an early reviewer of the *CSP* noted that the author “probably mixes too many Christian ideas with Chinese expressions.”²⁷ In fact, in Mahāyāna Buddhism, Buddha’s teaching can help people to become enlightened, but even Buddha has no power to save people. It seems that Intorcetta confused here Śākyamuni Buddha and Amithaba Buddha. However, immediately after, Intorcetta mentioned Amithaba Buddha, who was understood as a savior, with the power of transferring merits to other people, in Pure Land, or *Jingtu zong*, the most common form of Buddhism in Ming and Qing China:

Foe, or Xaca, makes mention in his books of another Master, more ancient than himself. He is commonly called Omito [Amituo] by the Chinese or, again with a corrupt word, Amida, by the Japanese. He lived in Eastern India, or Bengal, where, as the Bonzes tell it, there are Elysian Fields, called in Chinese “cintu” [Jingtu]. Indeed, the Holiness of Amida is such and his merits so numerous that anyone who prays to him can be forgiven, no matter the number of his sins. There are therefore no words that come quicker to their tongue than the names of these two monstrosities, Omito and Foe. Through the names and the merits of these two together, they can find an escape and be cleansed. Consequently, they are driven by Omito and Foe and also driven more and more by their own original passion, greed and perfidy, and so they continue, unpunished, to shamelessly abandon all restraint. (*CSP*, xxx)

Though Śākyamuni Buddha and Amithaba Buddha are here distinguished, yet the text suggests that both have the power of bringing salvation to people who call upon their name. Just as Christians make Christ their Savior, Buddhists make the Buddha and Amida their saviors. Yet, Intorcetta shows that faith and incantation are not enough, but some correct deeds are necessary in order to prepare for a better reincarnation:

There are five precepts: the first, not to kill any living being; the next, not to steal; the third, to abstain from fornication; the fourth, not to lie; the fifth, not to drink wine. In fact, under the appearance of honesty and of justice, this enemy of our salvation is hiding his deceits and traps. There are six works of charity are prescribed to the faithful. The most important is for them to build for them monasteries and temples to keep the Bonzes warm and fed. This way, they will not lack the help of the monks who can, through their prayers and self-imposed suffering, release the common people from the punishment due to their sins. During funerals, they bring bundles of paper representing gold or silver (this was invented later), and they burn them, with silk garments and other things of this genre, in order to find them in the after-life, turned into real metal and real commodities. This way, the dead have enough clothing

and food. Through such things, they can also placate and appease the eighteen fierce and relentless guardians of the netherworld. But, if people neglect these things, they will certainly fall, through one of the six ways, headlong into hell. According to the eternal wheel of transmigration of souls, they will unfortunately be reborn as a beast, a man, or one of the other forms. (CSP, xxx–xxxii)

Intorcetta did not deny the moral value of the Five Precepts, because there is indeed nothing there contrary to Christian morality. However, moral life can never be divorced from religious salvation, and Intorcetta therefore rejected Buddhist morality as a deceitful strategy of Satan: under the appearance of moral deeds, people are going astray from the true salvation in Christ. But beyond the traps of Satan, the text suggests above all the irreligion of people under the disguise of religious rituals and offerings. People pretend to serve the gods but, in fact, they use religion only in order to fulfill the satisfaction of their own desires. In this sense, Intorcetta truly represented Buddhism as idolatry and superstition.

BUDDHISM AS ATHEISM

The description of Buddhism as a superstitious practice could have been complete as such. This way, despite its geographical spread and its historical span, Buddhism would have remained only one superstition among many. However, behind the familiar form of a religious superstition, there was a more terrible danger hiding itself: atheism. I shall first show how Western Antiquity attempted to link together superstition and atheism. But the issue of atheism somehow disappeared during the late Antiquity and the Middle Ages, to reappear in force during the seventeenth century. Because of the Buddhist theory of the two truths, Intorcetta could articulate, in a new way, superstition and atheism.

The Connection between Superstition and Atheism in the West

Our modern mind is quite puzzled by the idea of associating superstition with atheism. Yet, in Western classical thought, the two “errors” were very early on linked together. For example, Plutarch of Chaeronea (46–c. 122) wrote:

Ignorance and blindness in regard to the gods divides itself at the very beginning into two streams: one stream, as if flowing in hard ground, has generated in hardened characters *Atheism*; the other, as if in moist soil, has produced in tender minds its opposite, *Superstition*. Every false judgment, especially concerning the gods, is a mischievous thing; but when emotion also enters, it is most mischievous . . . A man thinks that in the beginning the universe was created out of atoms and emptiness. His assumption is false, but it causes no sore, no throbbing, no agitating pain. A man assumes that wealth is the greatest good. This falsehood contains venom; it feeds upon his soul, distracts him, does not allow him to sleep, fills him with stinging desires, pushes him over precipices, chokes him, and takes from him his freedom of speech . . . Some

persons, in trying to escape superstition, rush into a rough and hardened atheism, thus overleaping true religion which lies between the two.²⁸

Long before the *CSP*, we can find here the idea that the correct religion stands between the superstitious idolatry of many gods and the opinion that no gods at all exist. In the religious psychology established by Plutarch, people with a tender character, because they are easily influenced, worship the many gods to satisfy their wishes, and people with an independent character lean toward materialism and reject any divinity. With the establishment of Christianity all over Europe, the threat of atheism receded and superstitions came to be considered the real danger. The whole of the Middle Ages was busy chasing and eliminating all forms of superstitious practices among the common people, often mixed with Christian rituals. Only during the Renaissance and the Classical Age in the seventeenth century was atheism again perceived as a danger. But atheism was not then the frank proclamation that God does not exist, like in ancient Greece or in nineteenth-century Europe, but something much more subtle and difficult to detect, because people could practice the external forms of Christianity and yet harbor some unorthodox ideas about God. As we are going to see below, atheism meant essentially a kind of pantheism.²⁹ This new form of atheism started to be felt as a growing threat in seventeenth-century Europe. The same danger was also seen in the distant lands of Asia, where Ricci already suspected some atheistic tendencies in Neo-Confucianism. The Italian Jesuit Niccolò Longobardo (1565–1655), successor of Ricci as head of the Jesuit mission in China, went further, holding that ancient Confucianism was also atheistic.³⁰ During the Canton Conference, the question of atheism loomed large in the discussion. Also, it is no surprise that Intorcetta would unravel Buddhism as atheistic in its core. But while Plutarch had made the link between superstition and atheism through a psychological explanation, Intorcetta would read into the Buddhist theory of the double truths the intellectual foundation for such a link.

Interpreting the Two Teachings in Buddhism

According to Intorcetta, Śākyamuni Buddha himself established two levels in his teaching: “On the point of death, the Buddha spewed out the terrible poison of atheism, saying that “in more than forty years, he had not declared the truth to the world, but, content with figures, comparisons and parables, he had hidden the naked truth with an abstruse and metaphorical teaching” (*CSP*, xxix). On the manuscript of the *CSP*, kept at the National Library of France, the quote above from Buddha is given in Chinese characters: *Sishiyunian weixian zhenshi*. These last words, supposedly from Buddha, come from *The Sutra of Immeasurable Meanings*, a sutra that belongs to the so-called *Threefold Lotus-Sutra*, or *Fabua sanbu jing*, and was composed at least five hundred years after the death of Śākyamuni Buddha. Of course, like the majority of the Chinese Buddhists at that time, the Jesuits did not discuss the authenticity of this sutra and they accepted it as authentic. This hypothetical sentence by Buddha is intended to show that the Buddha made a gradation in his teaching, preserving his

core message and revealing it at last for the few disciples who could understand it. For Intorcetta, Buddha's public teaching was deceiving because he denied it in private.³¹

In fact, the doctrine of the two truths, one conventional and one absolute, was not formulated by Buddha himself. Yet, it can be traced back to the idea of "skill-full means" in Indian Buddhism (*upāya*). Much later, the doctrine of two truths was expressed in its philosophical form by Nāgārjuna (ca. 150–250), distinguishing a relative truth from an absolute truth. In Chinese Buddhism, this doctrine was applied, mostly for sectarian consideration, to differentiate Buddhist sutras and schools, according to their level of understanding. The Tiantai and Huayan schools came to develop a very elaborate system for "dividing the teachings" (*panjiao*) between some "temporary teaching" (*quanjiao*) and "real teaching" (*shijiao*). Intorcetta precisely applied the theory of the two truths to different levels of teaching:

With regard to the double teaching, its force and reason lies in the fact that the "exterior teaching" leads to the "interior teaching." The "exterior teaching," called *kiven* [*quan*] or "substitute," was in use for a very long time before the other teaching, called *xe* [*shi*] or "true" and real, could stand firm in the souls of those capable of it—who are in fact, very few among the common people. They make the following comparison: if someone wished to erect a stone building, he would certainly first raise a wooden construction as a support, until he had placed the stones and had obtained enough strength. Once the structure is completed and strong enough, then the wood is no longer needed and thus, removed and discarded. (*CSP*, xxx)

The comparison between a wooden structure and a stone structure illustrates the idea of a difference of degree between conventional teaching and absolute teaching. I suspect that the architectural metaphor comes from a Buddhist text in Chinese, because the Chinese characters for "real" and for "stone" are homophonous (*shi*).

The first Westerner to explain the double teaching in Buddhism was Baltasar Gago in 1557.³² In 1623, Longobardo generalized the notion of double teaching to all the schools in China, including Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism.³³ For him, all the schools followed this way of thinking, establishing a secret teaching reserved to an elite and a popular teaching accessible to all.³⁴ In 1655, in the preface of his *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, Martino Martini mentioned briefly two teachings of the metempsychosis, one exterior and one interior.³⁵ However, as we are going to see just below, Intorcetta used the theory of the two truths in a more systematic way.

This idea of a gradation of teachings struck the missionaries because it had largely been rejected by Western thought. Though Longobardo acknowledged that many ancient philosophers, from Pythagoras to Plato, had adopted this way of thinking, he praised Aristotle for not imitating them in this point.³⁶ The plain and universalistic teaching of Aristotle was judged by him as a progress culminating with Christianity. The idea that some Christians would have received from God private revelations or a secret teaching was condemned very early by the Church. By rejecting Gnosticism, the Church condemned also the idea of gradualism in truth. Here, we touch probably one of the main differences between Buddhism and Christianity, with the latter

representing a centralized and unified body and with a strong emphasis on normative beliefs. Therefore, for Intorcetta and other missionaries, the Buddhist conception of two levels of teaching seemed both intellectually wrong and politically dangerous.

The “Inner Teaching of Buddhism” as Atheistic

Intorcetta’s specific contribution was to raise the debate with Buddhism to a new philosophical level. Intorcetta saw Buddhism not only as a superstition but, despite its clergy, rituals, and prayers, as atheistic in its core. Intorcetta could hold these two contradictory aspects by applying the theory of the two truths to the two forms of Buddhism he saw in China: the popular form of Pure Land Buddhism, considered superstitious, and the elite form of Chan, considered atheistic. Accordingly, Chinese Buddhism is not made of two schools, existing side by side, Pure Land and Chan, but it is made of an external form of religious piety and rituals, and an atheistic core. Chinese Buddhism appears in its practice as Pure Land religiosity, but in fact, in its thought, it is Chan atheism. As we saw above, Intorcetta already suggested that the theory of the two truths could be traced back to the Buddha himself. Consistent with himself, he stated that atheism originates also from Buddha, making him a cryptic atheist:

Being close to death, he wanted to express the secret thinking of his heart: “Indeed, besides the first origin of everything, being ‘empty’ and ‘void,’ or *Cumbiu* [*kongxu*] in Chinese, there is nothing else to be sought, nothing else in which our hopes can be placed.” The last words of this ominous impostor are the prime root of atheism. This root is hidden by the darkness of falsehoods and superstitions, as if buried underground, and thus it escapes the notice of the ignorant masses. (*CSP*, xxix)

Intorcetta understood these words as a proclamation of atheism, yet a hidden proclamation, as those atheists in Europe who did not dare to express publicly their inner thought. The last words of Buddha sounded as a complete denial of his open teaching, showing his duplicity on the moral level, his nihilism on the intellectual level, and his atheism on the religious level. Here, we should be reminded that atheism in seventeenth-century Europe did not take the form of a direct denial of God or the divine, as it happened in the nineteenth century. At that time, to say about someone being an atheist most often means that he is a pantheist. In this sense, an “atheist” may deny the idea of a transcendent God as the creator of the cosmos, but may still believe in the existence of an immanent God. At the same time in which the threat of “atheism” rose in Europe, the *CSP* was very influential in propagating the idea of Buddhism as “atheistic,” that is, pantheistic. Indeed, the French philosopher Pierre Bayle (1547–1606) found support in the *CSP* to claim that atheism is similar to Buddhism. In his *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique* (Historical and Critical Dictionary, 1696), in the entry about the Dutch philosopher Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), Bayle makes him “*un atbéiste de système.*” Bayle recognizes that though Spinoza never claimed to be an atheist, he was hiding his atheism.³⁷ Also, Bayle explained that

many thinkers expressed some atheistic views in ancient times in the West, and he remarked that atheism could also be found outside Europe. Then, in a very long note in the article, he quoted extensive passages from the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*.³⁸ For the first time, through the well-diffused dictionary of Bayle, itself quoting the CSP, the idea of Buddhism as “atheistic” came to be widely disseminated in the West, and it is still one of the most common misunderstandings about Buddhism.

Huayan Buddhism as Pantheism

In support for his judgment of Buddhism as atheistic, Intorcetta expounded the Buddhist notion of emptiness, a notion that he mostly understood along the lines of pantheistic metaphysics: “The essence of the teaching that they call ‘interior,’ solid or true, is this *Cumhui* [*Kongxu*], or some kind of emptiness and vacuity. It is the beginning and end of all things. The first ancestors of humanity come from it, and when people die, they return to it. This is our human condition. As they say, we belong to emptiness; it is our substance. So, everything is produced from this void and from its elements. After death, everything dissolves and returns there . . .” (CSP, xxxi).

We should notice that Intorcetta did not describe Buddhism in terms of nihilism here, but in terms of essentialism, with “emptiness” being the underlying substance of all the phenomena—a substance that is itself empty. In the *Tianzhu shiyi*, Ricci had already rejected, from the point of view of the four causes of Aristotle, the Buddhist concept of emptiness as unable to establish the existence of things.³⁹ To the Aristotelian-minded missionaries, the idea of an empty substance sounded like an aberration.

However, even though early Buddhism did not talk about emptiness as a substance, Chinese Mahāyāna did talk about absolute reality in terms of essence or nature. This ontologized form of Buddhism was somehow close to scholastic metaphysics in the West, because the discourses on the Buddha-nature have many similarities with the theological discourses on God. And so, the Jesuit understanding about emptiness came to be shaped by a metaphysical brand of Chinese Buddhism, the Huayan school, as we can see clearly in this passage:

Things can be distinguished and differentiated only through some appearances and qualities. Just as water can be poured into one vessel or another, it can also be changed into flakes of snow, or discharged in clouds like vapors; or it can be forged into ice barriers or become compact hailstones. It is the same thing with copper or gold: the craftman can cast from it either a human being, a lion or any other tool, and so on, but melted metal is still the same. It is the same for anything endowed with life, feeling and intellect: though it may differ in use and in shape, it is intrinsically the same and unique thing, unseparable from its origin. (CSP, xxxi–xxxii)

The metaphor of the lion and the idea of a substantial nature behind the phenomena are drawn from the *Treatise on the Golden Lion* (*Jin shizi zhang*) by Fazang (643–712). In this treatise, both the gold and the lion are said to be nonexistent. The lion is only the characteristic of the dharma, which can change shape into something different, like

another animal or a table. Also, the lion does not exist without the gold, nor does it exist without the craftsman giving shape to it; because the lion depends on something else, it is not permanent. Similarly, the gold also is nonexistent, because it relies on the lion to make it appear. Without the shape of a lion (or something else), the gold could not be seen. At the conventional level, both the gold and the lion are not existent. Therefore, the true nature is gold, representing the Buddha-nature, existing in every sentient being and present in the whole cosmos.

Intorcetta may have been positively impressed by Huayan metaphysics, which moves toward affirming the existence of a universal and eternal principle, or, as he wrote, “something completely admirable, pure, clear, refined, something infinite which cannot be produced or destroyed, something which is the perfection of everything, the most perfect and tranquil thing” (*CSP*, xxxii). This positive language used by the Huayan school to talk about the ultimate reality appears clearly theistic, quite similar to the attributes of God in scholastic theology. However, the proximity of thought between the two metaphysical systems made some other basic differences also more apparent. For example, Intorcetta mentioned also that the ultimate reality in Buddhism is “not endowed with feelings, moral virtue or reason” (*CSP*, xxxii). On the manuscript of the *CSP*, one can read, next to the Latin, the Latin transliteration with the Chinese characters: “*uûsin, uûnién, uûze*” (*wuxin, wunian, wusi*). However, this affirmation of an ultimate reality deprived of intelligence was not acceptable for Westerners.⁴⁰ Basing himself on the account by Intorcetta, Bayle could not accept the Buddhist idea that the ultimate principle has no life, no feeling, no intellect, and he noticed that even Spinoza did not commit this mistake because the supreme principle in his philosophy is continuously active and thinking. In the philosophical framework of the West, this philosophy was indeed pantheistic. Though Intorcetta did not use the word “pantheism,” Bayle precisely understood it this way, and he felt indignation that plants, animals, and human beings could share the same origin and could be put at the same level.⁴¹

Chan Buddhism as Quietism

Besides the monist metaphysics of Huayan, Chan made a strong impression on the Jesuits. According to Intorcetta, the adepts of this “new” school devoted themselves to the “whole contemplation” of the principle of emptiness, by which bliss could be obtained. There is mention of the founder of the school in China: “A certain Tamo [Damo], the 28th descendant of Xaca, sat for nine years facing a wall. During all this time, he contemplated nothing else but his chimerical principle, emptiness and nothingness. Then, by at last conforming to his principle, he could finally become divine” (*CSP*, xxxiii). Here, Intorcetta wrongly implied a blood lineage between Bodhidharma and the Buddha. Also, there is a basic misunderstanding about the Buddhist illumination: a Buddhist does not aim at becoming divine, but at being liberated from the cycle of rebirths. Yet, the Jesuits were lacking the proper words to express the ultimate reality for Buddhism, and they used ambiguous words like “God” or “the divine,” as we have already seen in the account of the biography of the

Buddha. But more importantly, the Jesuits stressed the practical consequences of the Chan doctrine:

If anyone wishes to live well and happily, he should strive with a constant meditation to vanquish himself, so that, becoming very similar to his own principle, he may control all human feelings and even extinguish them. He is not troubled nor disturbed by anything, but, being fully absorbed into the highest contemplation as an ecstatic, without any use or working of the intellect, he enjoys a divine peace and perfect happiness. While he has obtained this inner peace, he may teach others the common way of life and its exterior teaching. Though he himself may even follow it, yet he secretly dedicates himself to the real truth. Thus, in this hidden quietness, he enjoys heavenly life. This is the highest point of this mystery. (*CSP*, xxxii)

Our text describes here the Chan attitude toward the world. However, a European reader could not fail to notice many resemblances with Quietism. This passage may have been originally written by Intorcetta, but its wording suggests that Couplet composed it, having in mind Quietism, which was precisely condemned by Innocent XI in 1687, the year in which the *CSP* was published.⁴² However, Couplet's suggestion that Chan amounts to a kind of Quietism amounts to misunderstand both Quietism and Chan. First, Quietism does not make the pure passivity of mind and heart an absolute, but a condition in order to be moved by God's grace alone. Second, Chan does not amount to idleness of a mind disconnected from the world, but it aims at finding quietness within worldliness.

The twentieth-century Catholic theologian Henri de Lubac (1896–1991) noted that, through the Quietist controversy, Westerners came to understand the importance of Buddhist spirituality and mysticism.⁴³ Yet, we should not forget that the missionaries associated Chan Buddhism to Quietism only to better reject both of them. Perhaps the biggest trouble with Chan and Quietism lies in the realm of institution and politics: their followers pay only lip service to the approved teaching and make themselves the final instance for deciding the truth. This was precisely the accusation made against the Quietists in Europe, who claimed personal autonomy in their own spiritual life and were undermining Church unity and discipline. It was also a common accusation in China against some “wild monks.” Indeed, as Intorcetta remarked, the “inner teaching” of Buddhism could lead to immorality and unruleness because “there is no mention of the wicked and the just, of reward and punishment, of divine providence and immortality of the souls” (*CSP*, xxxii). Without the fear of hell, it was believed that people might unfasten the ties of religion and politics.

In 1688, the French philosopher François Bernier (1620–1688) was inspired by the section of the *CSP* on Buddhism and he associated it to his own travels in the Orient some twenty years before. In his last article, “Essay on Quietism in India,” Bernier prudently stated that Christian Quietism and Oriental Quietism are different. However he showed his dislike for both, suspecting that the high spiritual insights of the Quietists are false and may lead to irreligion and libertinage.⁴⁴ In his article on Spinoza, Bayle also mentioned that “the followers of Foe, teach and practice

Quietism,” but, unlike Bernier, he refrained from criticizing them on this point, perhaps because of Bayle’s own emphasis on freedom of thought.⁴⁵

The Wrong Political Use of Religion

We have shown above how Huayan was presented as flawed metaphysics, and Chan as subversive Quietism. The Jesuits also came to assess the Buddhist influence on Chinese culture and society as a whole. They stressed the negative influence of Buddhism because it brought superstitions to the common people of China. Yet, its influence on the literati was more subtle. Intorcetta remarked that although most of them held the external practices of Buddhism in low esteem, many were intellectually influenced by the atheism of the inner teaching:

There are some literati who condemn this foreign novelty [of Buddhism] and, with severe words and judgment, teach it to be heretical and pernicious. Yet, it seems to me that they do not really intend by their criticisms to demolish the stone construction, but only the wooden construction. Indeed, these people hate the conventions of the “external teaching,” the numerous rites, the abstinence from meat and wine, the omens of idols and the idle crowd of useless Bonzes in the country. Yet, many have embraced the “inner and esoteric teaching” and they have headlong departed for this deep hole of atheism in which they were already leaning, being bowed under the weight of their swollen arrogance and their vices. (CSP, xxxiii)

This way, the original Confucianism was corrupted and developed into the erroneous “natural philosophy” of the school of *Simli* [*Xingli*], that is, the school of Nature and Principle of the Song dynasty. The faulty philosophers are listed as Zhou Dunyi, Zhang Zai, the Cheng brothers, and Zhu Xi, being accused of departing from the theistic teaching of Confucius.

Closely connected to the intellectual influence of Buddhism, our Jesuit account is also marked by the worry that religion may be a mere tool used by political power. As we know, with the advent of modernity in seventeenth-century Europe, the legitimacy of political power was less and less based on religion, and therefore religion tended to be more and more evaluated from the standpoint of its political usefulness. The Jesuits in Europe resisted this, arguing that Christianity was good, not only because it was useful, but, more importantly, because it was true. So, the Jesuits were set aback when they realized how the Chinese literati looked at Buddhism: “The plain and credulous crowd has to be kept in obedience through the fear of the Tartars and through these stories [of hell]. Only the nobility and the literati can understand the truth, as well as some monks and bonzes who have special abilities and who excel over the others” (CSP, xxxi). According to Intorcetta, the literati could encourage popular beliefs about the afterlife, without themselves believing in them. A few decades before, Longobardo had stated that the literati were promoting Buddhism only because the popular teaching in reincarnation was keeping people in check. Longobardo remembered the mention of such an impious use of religion in Western

antiquity, as recorded in a book like the *Placita Philosophorum*.⁴⁶ Longobardo found similar ideas reappearing again in recent times in the West, like in the *Hieroglyphica* (1556) of Piero Valeriano Bolzani (1477–1558).

In order to qualify this ambiguity of the literati toward religion, we find in the *CSP* the expression “atheo-political.” In 1641, the Spanish Jesuit Juan Eusebio Nieremberg (1595–1658) had already called Machiavelli “atheo-politicus.”⁴⁷ François de Rougemont, one of the contributors to the translation project in Guangzhou, had also used this expression in reference to the Chinese literati in his *Historia Tartaro-Sinica nova*, a book written during the exile in Guangzhou and published in Louvain in 1673.⁴⁸ This same expression can be found ten times in the *CSP*, not in the part dealing with Buddhism and authored by Intorcetta, but in the second part of the preface, written by Couplet.⁴⁹

By the expression “atheo-politicus,” Couplet intended to show that on one hand the literati were atheistic, following a Confucian philosophy that had been corrupted by the inner teaching of Buddhism, and on the other hand they were political, in the sense that they promoted Buddhist practices for political reason. The literati did not openly profess their atheism and could even practice some religious rituals. For Couplet, this amounted to reducing religion to political expediency. The idea that religion could be manipulated by power was seen as being horrendous to the Jesuits. Moreover, in the case of Buddhism, it is suggested that this situation was made possible because of the Buddhist theory of the double teaching. By renouncing the idea of a universal truth common to all and by holding atheism secretly, Buddhism became subservient to political power and was reduced to be a tool in the hands of the literati.

Later on, many “enlightened monarchs” (*despotes éclairés*) could precisely take China as a model: just as the Chinese emperors were using Buddhism, European political elites could also use Christianity for their own rule. Reading the Jesuit accounts on Chinese Buddhism, Voltaire could thus conclude: “It seems, indeed, that the masses do not deserve a reasonable religion.”⁵⁰ Voltaire’s prejudice against religion embraced not only Buddhism, but Catholicism, considering that because common people need this kind of religion, the rulers could let people have it, and thus control them better.

CONCLUSION

This early Western account of Buddhism was quite negative because the China Jesuits judged Buddhism mostly from the standards of Western philosophy and religion. However, the Jesuits had a glimpse of the complexity of Buddhism, and their information was well documented. This account is unique because it shows Buddhism as a superstition, and yet atheistic in its core. Its purpose was to show that the Jesuits, both in Europe and in Asia, were engaged into a worldwide fight against what was perceived as the greatest threat at that time—atheism—because it was undermining both religion and political authority from within.

This presentation of the double teaching in Buddhism reveals an important issue in comparative religion, that is, the gap in Buddhism between practice and theory, between common believers and elite. At the popular level, Pure Land includes many

theistic elements, yet the core of Buddhist philosophy, as shown in Huayan or Chan, is nontheistic. Yet, the Buddhist elite who professed Huayan or Chan did not discourage the common people from worshipping deities in their search for a better reincarnation, and this was seen by the Jesuits as an intellectual and moral flaw of the elite. I suggest here three approaches to further evaluate this conundrum.

First, we should remember that the question of orthodoxy and orthopraxis is more acute in Christianity than in Buddhism because Christian salvation or damnation is decided in this lifetime. The Buddhist liberation plays within a larger time frame, in which many lifetimes can be needed for reaching ultimate liberation. From this perspective, the Buddhist elite may consider that worshipping is adapted to the level of understanding of the common people at the stage where they are.

Second, in any religion there is a gap between theory and practice. It would be quite naïve to expect the two to coincide exactly. Even Jesuit missionaries in China showed some flexibility toward popular forms of religion, and, for the sake of evangelization, they did not hesitate to appear as if they were doing some miraculous healings, even though they were aware of using only rational means.

Finally, each religion uses symbols in its rituals and its language. The symbols are opened to various interpretations, which may not exclude each other. The Jesuits met a similar difficulty with Confucianism, because the same Confucian rituals were interpreted differently by the common people and by the literati. In Buddhism, the same rituals, like feeding hungry ghosts, can also be understood differently by an adept of Pure Land and by a Chan monk. Probably, the Jesuits did not pay enough attention to the rich symbolism at work there and were too confident that the theological language of Christianity could provide an absolute norm against which to judge other religious practices and beliefs. As we have seen, the political implications of the “inner teaching” of Buddhism were felt very seriously by the Jesuits because it freed religious and intellectual life from a common norm applied uniformly to all. It is no surprise that the Jesuits could see in atheism and Buddhism a common threat not only to the unity of reason, but even more to the established order of religion and of the state.

NOTES

1. See Henri De Lubac, *La rencontre du Bouddhisme et de l'Occident* (Paris: Cerf, 2000), 53–60.
2. Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (Paris: Institut Ricci, 1985), 102–105.
3. Matteo Ricci, *Della entrata della Compagnia di Gesù e Christianità nella China* (Maceratta: Quodlibet, 2000). Ricci's work was translated into Latin, edited, and published by Nicolas Trigault under the title *De Christiana Expeditione apud Sinas* (Augsburg: C. Mangius, 1615). French version: *Histoire de l'Expédition Chrétienne au Royaume de la Chine* (Paris: Desclée de Brower, 1978).
4. Martino Martini, *Novus Atlas Sinensis* (Trento: Museo Tridentino di Scienze Naturali, 1981).
5. David Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1989), 68–353.
6. Fernão de Queyroz, *The Temporal & Spiritual Conquest of Ceylon*, English translation by S.

G. Perera (Colombo: Colombo Government Press, 1930), 3 vols. In 1671, Queyroz decided to write a book on the history of Ceylon, but he had not much information about Buddhism since he himself was based in Goa. His fellow Jesuit and compatriot Pereira provided information about the life of Sakyamuni Buddha, which Queyroz inserted in the chapters 17, 18, and 19 of his book. Queyroz's manuscript in Portuguese was completed in 1687, but published only in 1930.

7. Bernard Faure, *Chan Insights and Oversights: An Epistemological Critique of the Chan* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993), 31.

8. ARSI, Jap.Sin. III, 3. See Albert Chan, *Chinese Books and Documents in the Jesuit Archives in Rome, a Descriptive Catalogue: Japonica-Sinica I–IV* (Armonk, NY: Sharpe, 2002), 474–475.

9. Details on this conference can be found in J. S. Cummins, *A Question of Rites, Friar Domingo Navarrete and the Jesuits in China* (Aldershot, UK: Scholar Press, 1993).

10. In his *Tianxue lueyi*, João Monteiro (1602–1648) wrongly attributed to Xu the more radical formulation *buru juefo* “complements Confucianism and exterminates Buddhism.” Here also, Intorcetta wrongly attributed this formulation to Xu.

11. See CSP, second part of the preface, lxxiv–xcvii.

12. Marino Martini, *Sinicae Historiae Decas Prima*, 94.

13. See Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi*, 241. See also Ricci, *Della entrata della Compagnia di Gesù e Christianità nella China*, 99; Ricci and Trigault, *Histoire de l'Expédition Chrétienne au Royaume de la Chine*, 166.

14. David Mungello, *Curious Land*, 69.

15. The whole episode of Han Mingdi's dream and legation was first inserted by Intorcetta in his biography of Confucius, as found in *Sinarum Scientia Politico-Moralis* (1668–1669).

16. *Tianzhu shiyi*, 452.

17. *Gospel by Matthew*, 2: 1–12.

18. I suspect that this interpretation of the Chinese character *fo* was not invented by the Jesuits, but come from some anti-Buddhist literature.

19. Martin Hübner, *Essai sur l'histoire du droit naturel* (1752), 24–26.

20. According to the traditional accounts, Buddha was given three wives by his father. The main wife was Princess Yasodharā (in Chinese, Yeshutuoluo). The son is Rahula.

21. Alvaro Semedo (1586–1658) had stated the same thing in his *Histoire universelle de la Chine* (Lyon, 1667), 128. However, Buddha left his palace because he was seeking enlightenment.

22. In traditional accounts, Buddha married at nineteen and stayed ten more years in his father's palace, until age twenty-nine.

23. The gymnosophists, or naked philosophers, refer to the Indian ascetics who consider clothing and food as detrimental to the purity of thought. After the expedition of Alexander the Great in India, Plutarch and other authors have mentioned these gymnosophists.

24. Traditional accounts set the enlightenment of the Buddha at the age of thirty-five, instead of thirty as here. The First Principle may refer to the “Four noble truths,” or to Emptiness. The Portuguese term *pagode* stands for deity, being derived, via the Dravidian, from the Sanskrit *bhagavat*.

25. According to some traditions, at the end of his life, Buddha pronounced a discourse in front of eighty thousand followers. The Buddhist community, or *sangha*, was divided into ordained monks and lay practitioners. The division between gymnosophists and idolaters is a Jesuit invention, to show that from the very beginning there were two instituted currents inside Buddhism: the atheism of the elite and the idolatry of the common believers.

26. Mahākāśyapa became the first patriarch of Buddhism, convening its First Council. However, it was not him but Ananda who heard and memorized many speeches of the Buddha. Yet, the Chan School considers that Mahākāśyapa had secretly received from Buddha the Chan teaching.

27. *Bibliothèque universelle et historique, tome VII de l'année 168* (December 1688): 348.

28. Plutarch, *On Superstition (De superstitione)*, vol. 2 of the Loeb Classical Library's edition of the *Moralia*, first published in 1928. I have slightly modified the English translation.

29. In modern day vocabulary, we would say that pantheism is nontheistic and would refrain from calling it atheistic, as they did in the seventeenth century.

30. Longobardo, *Traité sur quelques points de la religion des Chinois*, 84.

31. Alexandre de Rhodes reported the same last words of Buddha. See *Histoire du royaume de Tonquin* (Lyon, 1651), 65–67.

32. Baltasar Gago, *Sumario de los errores de Japão de varias seitas (Summary of the errors of various sects of Japan)*, 1557.

33. This controversial treatise was published only in 1701 in Paris, with the French title *Traité sur quelques points de la religion des Chinois* (Treatise on Some Points of the Chinese Religion).

34. Longobardo, *Traité sur quelques points de la religion des Chinois*, 26.

35. See Martino Martini, *Novus Atlas Sinensis*, 115.

36. Longobardo, *Traité sur quelques points de la religion des Chinois*, 23.

37. In his *Tractatus Theologico-Politicus* (1670), Spinoza denied the charge of atheism given to philosophers in general and to himself in particular.

38. Pierre Bayle, *Dictionnaire Historique et Critique, Cinquième Edition* (Amsterdam, 1740), 254–255. It seems that Bayle did not have access to the CSP; he mentioned the “Confucius published by the Jesuits in Paris,” but he quoted passages of the CSP that were reproduced from two journals: *Bibliothèque universelle et historique, tome VII de l'année 1687* (December 1688), 333–390, and *Le Journal de Leipsic ou Acta Eruditorum Lipsiensia* (1688): 257ff.

39. Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi*, 103.

40. Already some eighty years before, Ricci had considered Buddhism wrong for holding onto a principle devoid of humanity, intellect, and righteousness. *Tianzhu shiyi*, 105.

41. Bayle, 254.

42. The Quietist movement was initiated in Spain by Miguel de Molinos (1628–1697) and grew especially strong in France, where it was propagated by Mme. de Guyon (1648–1717) and the archbishop François Fénelon (1651–1715).

43. See Henri de Lubac, *La rencontre du Bouddhisme et de l'Occident*, 87.

44. François Bernier, “Mémoire sur le Quietisme des Indes,” in *Histoire des ouvrages des Savants de Basnage* (September 1688): 47–52.

45. Bayle, 255.

46. Longobardo, *Traité sur quelques points de la religion des Chinois*, 24. Longobardo mentioned that the *Placita Philosophorum* was authored by Plutarch, an attribution that has been denied by modern scholarship.

47. *Theopoliticus sive brevis illucidatio et rationale divinatorum operum atque providentia humanorum* (Amberes, 1641).

48. François de Rougemont, *Historia Tartaro-Sinica nova* (Louvain, 1673), 156, 269.

49. Occurrences are found in the CSP, on pages lxii, lxxxvii, xciv, xcvi, cviii, cxi, cxii, and cxxii.

50. Voltaire, *Essais sur les Mœurs et l'Esprit des Nations*, in *Œuvres Complètes de Voltaire* (Paris, 1817), t. XII, 260.

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