What Were “The Directives of Matteo Ricci” Regarding the Chinese Rites?

by Paul A. Rule, Ph.D.

Paul A. Rule is an Honorary Associate at the History Program, La Trobe University, Melbourne, Australia, and a Distinguished Fellow of the EDS-Stewart Chair for Chinese-Western Cultural History at the USF Ricci Institute. Rule has produced over one hundred and fifty publications covering the history of the early Jesuit missionaries in China and Sino-Western cultural relations of the 16th-18th centuries. He has taught courses on modern China, Catholicism, religion and society, peace studies and Aboriginal religion.

This Pacific Rim Report is offered by the USF Ricci Institute as part of its contributions to the worldwide celebrations marking 2010 as the 400th anniversary of the death of the great Jesuit pioneer of the China Mission, Matteo Ricci, who died in Beijing on May 11, 1610.

The paper was originally presented by Rule at an international symposium at Taiwan’s Fu Jen University in April 2010. The content is based on Rule’s work for the Institute’s Chinese Rites Controversy Project. (See Pacific Rim Report No. 32, February 2004, for more information on this important topic).

The Decree of 19 April 1707 from the Kangxi Emperor (excerpt) regarding Ricci’s so-called ‘Directives’. The marked section reads: “Instruction to all Westerners: Henceforth whoever does not follow the customs of Li Madou [Matteo Ricci] shall positively not be permitted to live in China, but must be expelled.” [Per A.S. Rosso’s translation.] See Endnote 2.
in December 1706 the Kangxi Emperor, annoyed by the activities of the papal legate, Charles Maillard de Tournon, made as a condition for missionaries remaining in China the observance of “The Directives of Matteo Ricci” (利瑪竇的規矩). Surprisingly, the specific directives Ricci issued as Superior of the Jesuit China Mission have not come down to us. However, they can be reconstructed with considerable accuracy from Ricci’s own writings and the attacks of his critics as well as the writings of those many Jesuits who claimed his authority for their practices. And we have a good summary of the original, then in the archives of the Japan Province in Macao, written in 1680 by the Vice-Provincial of China at the time, Giandomenico Gabiani.

Gabiani, in his “Apologetic Dissertation on the Rites Permitted in the Chinese Church,” produced a list of extant documents on the subject going back to the time of Ricci. They comprise Ricci’s directives or instructions (ordinaciones) issued in 1600 after consultation with his colleagues of the China Mission; further directives issued by Ricci in 1603 and confirmed by the Visitor Alessandro Valignano after consulting the whole Mission; some added ‘resolutions’ by Valignano; and a summary of these directives produced by Valignano “the same year” (presumably 1603). Gabiani sums these up as follows:

All these early directives for this Church deal directly with inducing Christian morals and virtues in the Chinese neophytes, eradicating depraved and superstitious abuses; with tolerating prudently social rituals and civil cults according to the practice of the nation, and especially with rites for dead parents; grateful veneration of Master Confucius within the limits of common courtesy; with the licit use of Chinese sacred names as well as European; with covering the head as a sign of reverence with the Chinese; and finally with purifying the intention in fasting according to the Chinese custom…. Father Ricci before he made any decisions spent almost 18 years closely studying the customs, rituals and books, and consulted in various provinces and places all sorts of scholars and mandarins of all ranks especially the highest.

Gabiani and later Jesuit apologists, like their anti-Jesuit counterparts, seem to have assumed that Ricci was denying the ‘religious’ nature of rituals for ancestors and Confucius, but Gabiani was writing seventy years after Ricci’s death and as part of a rebuttal of the views of the Dominican friar, Domingo Navarrete. By then, the new distinction of ‘religious’ from ‘secular’ (with the former being condemned if not Christian) had come to dominate the controversy over the Chinese Rites. Ricci himself, as we shall see, was coming from a different tradition, the late Christian humanism of the Renaissance with its emphasis on ‘natural religion’ and ‘natural theology’. He taught his Chinese visitors, he tells us, that “the law of God was in conformity with the natural light [of reason] and with what their first sages taught in their books.”

He was a Christian humanist in the line of Desiderius Erasmus, seeing civility, as the Chinese saw li (禮), as covering all forms of behavior from what we would call religious ritual to social intercourse and political correctness.

What he was rejecting was that rituals for dead parents and Confucius were idolatry (idolatria), or were in the Christian sense ‘worship’ (latria) of the deceased. He admitted, as we shall see, that there might be elements of superstition in such rituals as conducted by non-Christians, but these were not essential and could be eliminated. Ricci believed that Chinese Catholics could be trusted to have correct intentions in performing such rituals—intentions of veneration, reverence and emulation, not worship, as of exemplary human beings, not gods—and intentions were what determined the morality of an act.

Furthermore, the non-Christian educated elite were regarded by Ricci as holding materialistic and even atheistic views which made them less, not more, suspect of idolatry and superstition. As many later Jesuit polemicists were to point out, one of the strangest arguments of their opponents was that the Chinese were simultaneously atheists and idolaters, both materialists and believers in ghosts and spirits. Either they were using these terms very loosely or simply as empty pejoratives.

Many later subjects of contention are hinted at in Gabiani’s summary. There is, for example, the question of ‘fasters’. Should converts who came, as many did, from the ranks of sectarian Buddhism, be allowed to continue to practice vegetarian fasts? Ricci appears to have believed that, if fully instructed, they might be allowed to do so, now with Christian motives.
Also mentioned are liturgical practices which followed Chinese rather than European sensibilities, such as covering rather than uncovering the head during mass. I would note in passing that the fierce supporters of uncovering the head, who included some Jesuits, do not seem to have reflected on the fact that women—and bishops for part of the time—covered their heads during the liturgy in Europe. They had converted culturally and historically contingent European customs into Christian absolutes.

It is a pity that the other general directives issued by Ricci and Valignano perished in the eighteenth-century dissolution of the Society of Jesus. What we can say with certainty is that they did not include, as was maintained by their enemies, any instructions not to preach Christ crucified. The *Tianzhu shilu* of Ricci’s companion, Michele Ruggieri, specifically mentioned the crucifixion and death of Tianzhu become man, although the casual Chinese reader would perhaps not have appreciated the full significance of the phrase “suffering on a support in the cross.” Ricci wrote of the crucifixion and soon afterward illustrated lives of Christ including the crucifixion were published by the China Jesuits. Ruggieri certainly recommended caution in public display of the crucifix after his experience with the eunuch Ma Tang who interpreted it as a fetish, but it was an integral part of the presentation of Christian doctrine by Ricci and his companions. The *Tianzhu Shiyi* from which it is absent, is not a *doctrina* for the instruction of neophytes but a work of apologetics to attract those outside the faith. The description of ‘catechism’ given to it relates to its question and answer form, not its intended audience.

External conformity to Chinese customs in dress and behavior had been prescribed from the beginning. The Visitor, Valignano, instructed the members of the Japanese mission not only to live and act like Japanese but to celebrate in their houses Japanese festivals, including *Bon* (the Japanese ‘All Souls’ commemoration of the dead), and to conform to Japanese ceremonial usage. He also argued that in a hierarchical society like that of Japan (and presumably this applied in China also), both European and Japanese Jesuits should attempt to obtain acceptance as the social and religious equivalent of the influential religious sects. In Japan, these were clearly Buddhist. But soon Valignano learned, no doubt from Matteo Ricci, that in China it was the mandarins, not Buddhists, who were most respected and that these “follow the schools and doctrine of one of their ancient philosophers who dealt with moral virtues and good government,” that is, of Confucius. He reported to the Bishop of Evora in 1588 on the initial success of his scheme for China:

> When I was in Japan, I determined that two of the fathers [Ruggieri and Ricci] who were in Amacao, the Portuguese port of China, should devote themselves to nothing else but learning the language and literature of China, and be given masters and everything else necessary. And it happened that they made great progress in the language, so when I returned from Japan I appointed them to this great enterprise of entering China. I gave them instructions that seemed suitable for this. They should introduce themselves into China as men of letters who had come from far-off lands because of the reputation China had for learning and letters. To achieve this they should first of all write a treatise in the form of a dialogue in the language and letters of China in which they would expound the whole substance of our holy faith.

But this immediately raised the question of God-language, which Gabiani refers to in his summary of Ricci’s directives as “the licit use of Chinese names as well as European.” The Chinese Rites Controversy was from the beginning as much about ‘terms’, the Chinese names for God and other essentials of the Christian faith, as it was about rituals.

Initially, the problem arose in relation to the formula for baptism. Probably following the practice of the Japanese mission, Ricci and his companions seem to have first used a formula in Chinese which represented the sounds of the Latin baptismal formula:

> Ego te baptizo in nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen

But this modern Chinese transliteration does not perfectly reflect the pronunciation of Ricci’s time.

---

**The Chinese Rites Controversy was from the beginning as much about ‘terms’, the Chinese names for God and other essentials of the Christian faith, as it was about rituals.**
The reason for this curious approach was a concern about the validity of the baptism, which in Europe was thought to depend on the exact use of the prescribed formula. Undoubtedly, Latin was used in baptisms performed by European priests, but once Chinese Jesuit brothers, catechists, and perhaps lay Christians, following the standard catechism, began baptizing, even if only in emergencies, problems immediately arose. As a catechetical device it was useless: the formula was nonsense or worse. And even the concern about phonetic exactness lost force through the variety of dialects and local pronunciations. By about the time of Ricci’s death, the China Mission was already moving towards a translation solution not fully realized however until the twentieth century.

More central, and a subject of dispute for centuries to come, was the term for ‘God’ in Chinese. The Jesuit solution was the ancient one, reflected in the very word ‘God’ (from Germanic Gott) and the Latin and Greek Deus and Theos. This was to take a corresponding term in the local language drawing on local belief systems. But which term?

A solution was found accidentally, but to Ricci and his companion, Michele Ruggieri, it seemed providential. Ruggieri had been forced to leave temporarily his first mission in Zhaoqing 肇慶 in early 1583, and when he returned with Ricci in September that year they found their disciple, Chen, had preserved their mass altar in his house and placed on it incense burners and above it on the wall an inscription to ‘the Lord of Heaven,’ Tianzhu 天主教, the name by which Catholic Christianity is known in China to this day, was born. This solution was enthusiastically adopted in place of awkward phonetic renderings based on the Spanish dios/Portuguese deus not only by the Jesuits in Japan but also by the Spanish Dominicans in Manila.

But the adoption of Tianzhu as the name for the Christian God left open the possibility of the use in certain contexts of the common God-language of the Confucian tradition, Tian 天 and Shangdi 上帝. Ruggieri seems to have initially thought, as indicated in a letter of 1581, that Tian was simply the material sky and that the Chinese knew no God. This was a conclusion that could easily be reached by a beginner in Chinese language studies on encountering the bewildering variety of tian expressions for weather, time, stars, and so on. By the end of his life, however, Ruggieri was writing that all the Chinese study of the heavens was “theology rather than astrology since they worship a god they call Tian.”

Matteo Ricci seems to have arrived at his view that Tian and Shangdi were God-concepts from studying Confucian writings, especially the Four Books and the Classics. In his most famous work, one which the Kangxi Emperor read and praised on several occasions, the Tianzhu Shiyi (first edition 1603, the year of Ricci’s major “Directives’), Ricci concluded: “You can see from examining the passages of the ancient books that Shangdi and Tianzhu differ in name only.” And what of Tian? And, especially, what of the Neo-Confucian interpretation of Tian as Principle (li 理) rather than a personal god? Ricci’s reply to a purported inquirer in the Tianzhu Shiyi is that the material sky could not be the controller of all things; its use in the ancient books is metaphorical. Heaven must, in the end, be the Lord of Heaven. Even less is the Neo-Confucian Supreme Ultimate (Taiji 太極) a god to be worshipped:

“The solution [to the problem of the Chinese name for God] was enthusiastically adopted not only by the Jesuits in Japan but also by the Spanish Dominicans in Manila.”

Although I have only recently entered China I have thoroughly and diligently studied the ancient classics. I have heard that the gentlemen of ancient times paid their respects to the High Lord of heaven and earth (Tiandi zhi Shangdi 天地之上帝), but I have never heard that they revered a Supreme Ultimate. If the Supreme Ultimate was the begetter of the High Lord of all things, why didn’t the ancient sages say so?

The view that Taiji and Li were Song Dynasty innovations was one that Chinese scholarship came to accept not long after.

Ricci used Shangdi and Tian extensively and interchangeably in his Chinese writings but seems to have preferred Shangdi, especially in his more literary works such as his “Treatise on Friendship” (jiaoyoulun 交友論, 1595) and his “Eight Songs for the Harpsichord” (Xiqin quyi bazhang 西琴曲意八章, 1601).
Ricci first equates Tianzhu on mistaken views about the Lord of Heaven, (Sovereign on High) in Chinese.”32 He then identifies Shangdi, humble country is he who is called “He who is called the Lord of Heaven in my

Ricci’s first important scholar disciple, wrote: “Treating on Friendship,” Qu Rugui 瞿汝夔, Tianzhu Shiyi. In the second chapter of his Tianzhu Shiyi, Ricci first equates Tianzhu with Shangdi:

"He who is called the Lord of Heaven in my humble country is he who is called Shangdi (Sovereign on High) in Chinese.”32 He then identifies Shangdi with Tian, denies that Tian as Lord (zhu) is the 'blue sky', and asserts that "only the one true Lord of Heaven who creates all things and who produces and preserves mankind may be reverenced.”33

H ow far did Ricci’s assimilation to Confucianism go in ritual matters? In his 1599 preface to Ricci’s “Treasure of Friendship,” Qu Rugui 瞿汝夔, Ricci’s first important scholar disciple, wrote:

He recites the texts of the Sages, and observes the laws of the kingdom. He wears a scholar’s cap and belt, and he offers the spring and autumn sacrifices. He is pure in his behavior and walks in the paths of virtue. He respects and serves the commands of Heaven and promotes orthodoxy.34

Did Ricci really participate in the solemn sacrifices of the Confucian 'school'35 in Spring and Autumn? Through what ritual actions, if any, did he promote orthodoxy?

With no patriarchal household and no ancestral graves to tend, presumably he would have avoided ancestor rites. But what of the rites to Confucius that he describes in such loving detail?36 It is certainly not impossible, given his detailed descriptions of them, that he "offered the Spring and Autumn sacrifices," or, at least, attended them. His account is complex and nuanced, and it is his translator/editor Nicholas Trigault who added a flat: "[Con-
fucius] was never venerated with religious rites, however, as they venerate a god.”37 Ricci himself unequivocally calls it a 'sacrifice', involving incense and the offering of animals, but not a true sacrifice," since "they acknowledge no divinity in him and ask nothing of him."38 Also, with serious later consequences, Trigault’s Latin version turns Ricci’s designation of Confucius’s disciples from the Italian santi (his rendering of Chinese sheng 師) to the Latin divi, or gods (Chinese shen 神).39

Ricci, significantly, does not say, as later Jesuits did, that rituals for Confucius were not religious, but rather that they were not idolatrous.40 This stems from his general view that Confucianism was in origin a monotheistic religion but that this 'original Confucianism' in time was overlaid with Buddhist and Daoist superstition and denatured by a naturalistic materialist interpretation in the Song Dynasty.41 Some Confucians, he thought, had never lost the sense of the ancient tradition which was preserved in the texts and structure of the ritual, and some were recovering it during the intellectual and political crisis of the late Ming. This was especially the case with the shuyuan 書院, or literary academies, of the period, which were committed to political and moral reform as well as recovery of the mission of Confucianism. The Jesuits found allies there in their struggle against Buddhism and their advocacy of high and pure morals in private and public life, although some academicians regarded the growth of Christianity as a symptom of the nation’s moral decline rather than a remedy.42

On ancestor rituals he was more cautious. He saw no problem in Christians performing them, because he thought their Christian instruction would obviate any danger of ‘superstition’, i.e., beliefs incompatible with Christian faith, about the location of the spirits or their power to help their descendants. He was duly cautious about such beliefs on the part of the majority of Chinese. However, he was quite certain that idolatry was not involved. This assessment is found in the Storia, where he summed up his view of ancestor rites after a detailed and accurate description of the more solemn rituals:

The reason they give for this observance on behalf of their ancestors is this, “to serve the dead as if they were living.” Nor do they think that the dead come to eat these things, or have need of them; but they say they do it because they know of no other way of showing the love and gratitude they have for them. Some say that this ceremony was instituted more for the living than the dead, that is to teach the children and ignorant people, once they are dead, perform for them the services they were accustomed to perform when they were alive. And since they neither recognize any divinity in these dead, nor ask anything of them, nor hope for anything from them, the practice is completely free from any idolatry, and perhaps could even be said to involve no superstition. Nevertheless, it would be better to replace this custom with giving alms to the poor for the souls of these dead, when they become Christians.43

There is not the slightest suggestion that Ricci acknowledged but condoned idolatry,
as many later anti-Rites critics and even some modern writers have alleged. After investigation he was convinced that no idolatry was involved, no ‘worship’ of the ancestors, and certainly not superstition on the part of Christians. ‘Perhaps’ (forse) it was not superstitious in any way.

The diversity of beliefs associated with ancestor rituals, ranging from an austere agnosticism on the part of many scholars to fear of the wrath of unappeased ancestors by many ordinary Chinese, meant that the ritual actions per se could not be accused of implying acquiescence in any specific set of beliefs, superstitious or otherwise, and it was in the accompanying beliefs, not acts, that superstition lay. In the end, he envisages what has become the modern practice in many Chinese Catholic communities, the development of modified domestic and communal rituals combining Chinese forms with specifically Catholic practices.

A similar caution marks his position on funerary rituals. Ricci, in the Storia, does not play down the overtly religious elements, including the normal participation of “many priests of the idols,” i.e., Buddhist monks, or the burning of paper money and goods. What is obligatory, however, and laid down in the ritual books always consulted on such occasions, are the mourning clothes, the visits, the bowing, and the offerings of food and drink “just as when they were alive.” It would seem that Ricci had no problem with the basic death rituals stripped of Buddhist and Daoist elements.

On the annual visits to the graves he is quite laconic: “Every year on the Day of the Dead, the relatives go to the cemetery to perform the usual ceremonies, burning incense and making offerings according to the usage of the land.” These rituals resemble those to the living; for example, obeisance to parents and the courtesies at solemn banquets. In his description of the latter, Ricci notes the ritual of making a libation of wine before sitting down, which he says is offered to ‘the Lord of Heaven.’ In other words, he sees a religious element to Chinese social occasions which he interestingly compares to the Greco-Roman convivium, the love-feast of those who are accustomed to eat and drink together. Ricci, in typical Christian humanist fashion, sees the social, especially the ritualized social occasion, as grounded in religion. He does not describe such actions as ‘political’ (politus in Latin)—polite or civil in the modern sense—as opposed to religious.

Interestingly, though, the term politicus is used by Trigault in the description of Ricci’s own funeral in Trigaul’s Latin appendix to his own 1615 Latin version of Ricci’s journals:

“When the ecclesiastical rites were concluded, the neophytes did not omit their own political rites (suos politicos); they performed bows and genuflections first to the image of Christ the Savior, then to the tomb as was their custom.”

The same action, one clearly worship, the other clearly not so interpreted; but both ‘religious’.

Ricci’s comments as detailed in this paper are taken from his memoirs, written in the last year of his life and found in his desk after his death. But the letters, which survive as well as those of others, all confirm this general picture of Ricci’s views on Confucianism and Chinese rituals. “The Directives of Matteo Ricci” on ancestor rituals and rituals in honor of Confucius sprang from a deep-seated Christian humanism which he found echoed in the Confucian tradition.

It was but a short step from this to approving the rituals that enshrined their values, the values which Kangxi was defending by insisting on “The Directives of Matteo Ricci” being followed by missionaries in China.

ENDNOTES

1. This paper draws heavily on a chapter on Ricci in my forthcoming history of the Chinese Rites Controversy.

2. The formal decree on the subject (of 19 April 1707) is to be found in Chen Yuan 陳垣 ed., Kangxi yu Luoma shijie guanxi wenshu yingshi, 康熙與羅馬使節關係文書影印本, Beijing: Gugong Bowuyuan 故宮博物院, 1932 (reprint Taipei: Xuesheng shuju, Zhongguo yinben 故宮博物院, 1979), doc. 4, pp. 13–14. Giju 規矩 in this document is translated as ‘customs’ in A. S. Rosso’s translation in Apostolic Delegations to China of the Eighteenth Century (South Pasadena: P & I. Perkins, 1948, doc. 5, p. 242), but the phrase seems to be regulatory and to imply obligation rather than mere custom. They were Ricci’s instructions as superior of the

“... the diversity of beliefs associated with ancestor rituals, ranging from an austere agnosticism to fear of the wrath of unappeased ancestors, meant that the ritual actions per se could not be accused of implying acquiescence in any specific set of beliefs, superstitious or otherwise.”
8. There is no evidence that Ricci toward the
7. See Roger Chartier,
6. Gabiani's 1680 list (elenchus), which is to be
5. “Intra civiles terminos contenta.” Again, the
4. Gabiani writes: “de politicis ritibus et civili cultu
3. Gabiani’s 1680 list (elenchus) from its Erasmian sense, which en-
1. “Intra civiles terminos contenta.” Again, the
language is not that used by Ricci himself in his exant writings; ‘civil’ should not be read here as ‘secular’ as opposed to ‘religious’. 
6. FR, N250, vol. 1, p. 195. This is one of the pas-
5. “Intra civiles terminos contenta.” Again, the language is not that used by Ricci himself in his exant writings; ‘civil’ should not be read here as ‘secular’ as opposed to ‘religious’.
3. See P.M. D’Elia, SJ, “Il domma cattolica integral-
2. pp. 292–93; “especially using arguments that can in some way be proved by natural reason and understood by the same natural light.”
eamed all forms of behavior from the religious and the spiritual, “qualities of the soul or the divine in man,” to strictly social activities.
8. There is no evidence that Ricci toward the end of his life came to regard ancestor rituals as ‘worship’ in this sense as Timothy Billings seems to claim in the introduction to his new translation of Ricci’s Jiaoyulun (On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince, New York: Columbia University Press, 2009, p. 12).
16. In the Tianzhu Shiyyi, he introduces the incarna-
19. Letter from Goa, 23 Dec. 1588, to Don Theoto
20. This is the formula given in the 1605 edition of the T’ienchi jiaoyao, published in Beijing presumably under the auspices and probably authorship of Ricci. Compare the note in FR, vol. 1, p. 370, on the edition held by Propaganda Fide with Ricci’s own annotations. In 1611, Ricci’s successor Longobardo introduced a slightly different and improved formula which does not simply follow the Latin (it has a Chi-
22. Only in 1924 did the Synod of Shanghai allow baptism in the name of the (Chinese) Father (fu 父), Son (zi 子), and Holy Spirit (shengshen 聖神); see Rouleaux Dugage, “La version chinoise de la formule baptismale,” in Axes 13 (1981): 25 on the historical development of the baptismal formula.
24. Published in 1584 as the T’ienzhu Shihu 天主寶錄.
25. For example, in Juan Cobo’s T’ianzhu shengjiao shihu zhencun 《天主正教實錄真傳》 (1593). See the facsimile in C. Sanz, Primitivas Rela-
29. True Meaning, #114, p. 131.
30. My translation from True Meaning, #78, p.106.
31. P.M. D’Elia gives a word count of Ricci’s respective employment of T’ianzhu, Tian, and Shangdi in his various writings in “Prima introduzione della filosofia scolastica. in Cina (1584, 1603),” in Zhongyong Tianyijuanshan lishi yuan yuanjiusuo jikan 中央研究院: 歷史語言研究所集刊 [Bulletin of the Institute of History and Philol-
32. True Meaning, #103, p. 121 (romanization changed).
33. True Meaning, #110, 11, p. 127 (romanization changed).
38. FR, N44, vol. 1, p. 40. Trigault added a gloss that the Chinese "are accustomed to use the word sacrifice in a broad and indefinable sense" (Gallagher, p. 335), which suggests it had already become an issue a few years after Ricci’s death.
39. De Expeditione, p. 108. Athanasius Kircher in his China Illustrata (1667) copied this passage. In the French edition (1670), apart from the disciples being ‘dieux’, Confucius himself becomes ‘le Dieu Confutius’. This then was used in anti-Jesuit polemics as proof that Ricci believed Confucius was worshipped as a god in Confucian rituals.
40. Compare Lionel Jensen, Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization, Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 1997, p. 64: Ricci “emphatically denied the religious aspect of the ceremonies in honor of Confucius.” This is a common view, but one that does not survive a close textual analysis. Similarly, Filippo Mignini in his preface to the new edition of Ricci’s memoirs says Ricci denies Confucianism is a ‘vera religione’, but the passage he quotes says simply it is not ‘una legge formata’, i.e., a hierarchically organized institutional religion, an entirely different matter; see Della Entrata della Compagnia di Gesù e Christianità nella Cina, ed. Piero Corradini, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2000, p. XVII. In one of his earliest letters from China, Ricci stated that there was no ‘religion’ in China, but in the context he seems to mean no centrally organized body with fixed and enforced doctrines, since he goes on to say that their beliefs are so complex that nobody seems to be able to give a clear explanation of them, and then writes of the three ‘sects’ (sette) of China which he contrasts with Islam, which he seems to regard as a legge formata (Ricci to Roman, Zhaoqing, 13 September 1584, Ricci, Lettere (1580–1609), ed. Francesco D’Arelli, Macerata: Quodlibet, 2001, p. 84). Confucianism is again included among the three religions (sette) of China in FR, bk. 1, ch. 10.
41. The key passage on the development of Confucianism is found in FR, N170, vol. 1, pp. 108–10. See a more full analysis of Ricci’s writings in Rule, K’ung-tzu or Confucius?, pp. 26–43.
43. FR, N177, vol. 1, pp. 117–18.
45. Again Gallagher adds a gratuitous and misleading note by saying “the funeral procession itself is really a religious function” (China in the Sixteenth Century, p. 73), a comment found in neither Trigault’s Latin nor the Italian original.
46. FR, N133, vol. 1, p. 84.
47. FR, N133, vol. 1, p. 85.
49. FR, N128, vol. 1, p. 76.
51. FR, N170, vol. 1, pp. 109–10, compare an exact translation in De Expeditione, p. 104. This is spelled out even more explicitly in a letter to Francesco Pasio: “We can hope in the divine mercy that many of their ancients were saved through observing the natural law with whatever help God through his goodness gave them” (Letter of 15 February 1609, Lettere, p. 518).