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'God's Real Name is God'

The Matteo Ricci-Niccolo Longobardi Debate on Theological Terminology as a Case Study in Intersemiotic Sophistication

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Abstract. *In the early 17th century, two Jesuits reached opposite conclusions about the feasibility of 'domesticating' or 'foreignizing' key theological terms and concepts in classical Chinese. Matteo Ricci proposed cultural equivalents that would allow the use of Chinese terms to translate key Catholic concepts on the basis of his own reading and interpretation of the Confucian canon. Niccolo Longobardi consulted contemporary Chinese scholars in order to understand the orthodox native interpretation of that canon. When he discovered that Neo-Confucian cosmology did not recognize the separation of matter and spirit, he decided that cultural equivalents did not exist, and insisted on transliterating key Catholic terms. The disagreement between Ricci and Longobardi constitutes an early modern laboratory situation for testing approaches to cross-cultural transfer and developing a theoretical model for comparative cultural studies. This model – combining aspects of Karl Popper's Three World conjecture, Hans Georg Gadamer's metaphor of a cultural horizon, the concept of a hermeneutic circle initiated by Friedrich Schleiermacher, and Sinological considerations – offers a framework through which to analyze the contrasting approaches and conclusions of Ricci and Longobardi in the contexts of ethnocentrism and of linguistic-cultural relativism.*

Keywords. Confucian cosmology, Cross-cultural transfer, Ethnocentrism, Hans Georg Gadamer, Niccolo Longobardi, Karl Popper, Matteo Ricci.

A passage in the first section of *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, in which the child Stephen Dedalus "open[ed] the geography to study the lesson", provides us with a curious incipient theory of translation, and therefore of cross-cultural transfer (Joyce 1916/1972:16-17):

> It was very big to think about everything and everywhere. Only God could do that. He tried to think what a big thought that must be but he could think only of God. God was God's name just as his name was Stephen. *Dieu* was the French for God and that was God's name too; and when anyone prayed to God and said *Dieu* then God knew at once that it was a French person that was praying. But though there were different names for God in all the different languages in the world and God understood what all the people who prayed said in their different languages still God remained always the same God and God's real name was God.

Thus the young Dedalus simplifies the complicated problem of cross-cultural transfer, thereby begging the related questions raised by the field of translation studies, of universal equivalence (linguistic, dynamic, functional or cultural) on the one hand, and heterogeneous relativism, linguistic or cultural, on the other.

Stephen's affirmation corresponds to a translation fallacy defined by Chad Hansen in the context of Chinese studies (1992:7-8):

> Another feature of the standard theories [of Chinese thought as taught by Hansen's professors of Chinese studies] is that they attribute the conceptual structure of a Western theory of mind and language to Confucian writers. This results from the translation paradigm that tempts us to treat English as fixing the possible meaning structure of Chinese. ... I call this the English-is-the-only-real-language fallacy in honor of my son, who first formulated it in those words. "Why," I asked him, "do you say that English is the only real language?" "Because every other language means something in English."... The translation model motivates the conventional cliché, but the problem with this cliché becomes acute when the translator proceeds with the interpretation. She assumes that what she did before – the translation – is objectively verifiable and what she is about to do is subjective and speculative. The translator's speculations are then guided by inferences that she draws from the scheme of beliefs and theories in which the English word functions. This naturally tempts us to the interpretive hypothesis that Chinese philosophical theories are like our own. The result is a circular argument that their philosophy must have the same conceptual structure that ours does.

Both young Dedalus and Hansen's son demonstrate a naive version of ethnocentrism, of the tendency to consider one's own world view to be normal, and to interpret differing world views by adapting them to one's own. The earliest Jesuit missionaries in China tried to adapt concepts that were key to their own culture to a world vision that was very different from their own, and to develop strategies for negotiating these differences.

1. Ricci versus Longobardi on the interpretation of Chinese culture

The question of God's name in the context of Chinese Studies became a very real and crucial question for Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), one of the first Jesuit missionaries to reach Peking early in 1601, who became an excellent scholar of classical Chinese and its Confucian culture. He had to decide whether or not there were equivalent terms in Chinese for such basic Catholic theological concepts as *Deus*, *anima* or *angelus* ('God', 'soul', 'angel'). The fact that he had to work with the Latin version of these terms is interesting in itself, and corresponds in part to young Dedalus' theory of translation, but in this case it was due to the longstanding decision of the Roman Catholic Church to accept only the Vulgate version of the Bible – itself a *translation* – as the *original* version of that most canonical of European texts.

Before getting down to such delicate and important matters as discovering or inventing the existence, or not, of Chinese equivalents for God's name, Ricci had to establish his credentials with the Mandarin class and the imperial court; he did so through a sophisticated use of seemingly intersemiotic equivalence.[1] He used a geography lesson. That is because Ricci recognized the importance of what would now be called the *imaginaire* or the semiotic context – or 'semiosphere' – of key cultural referents. That is to say, he understood how they would be received or interpreted by the Chinese in a Chinese context, relative to how they were being understood by Catholics in a European context. His key to the Mandarin class was the *mapamundi* – a Chinese language map of the world with the Pacific Ocean in the centre – which he had first elaborated in Macao in 1584.

Ricci's use of cartography to awaken the interest of high-ranking Mandarins who could give him access to the imperial court corresponded to the Jesuit policy of 'accommodation'. This was the guiding principle of admitting and respecting all those concepts of another culture that were of significant cultural importance or prestige in their native context, without being, at the same time, incompatible with the most basic tenets of Catholic dogma (Ching and Oxtoby 1992, Minamiki 1985, Mungello 1985, 1999, Ricci 1583-1610/1942, Saussy 2001b, 2001c, Spence 1984, Zhang 1997). The very name of China embodied one of these concepts: 中国 *Zhongguo*, 'the country in the middle'. Ricci knew that a European *mapamundi*, with the Atlantic Ocean in the centre and China marginalized off the far eastern edge of the map, would not be acceptable, so his *mapamundi* put the Pacific Ocean, and thereby China, in the centre: an example of intersemiotic sophistication (as well as intersemiotic ingratiation).

In doing so, did Ricci run the risk about which the hedge school Master

[1] My use of the term 'intersemiotic' here differs from Roman Jakobson's. He referred to translation between two systems of signs within a given culture, such as the translation of a novel into a film (Jakobson 1959). I mean the search for equivalence between the separate semiotic systems of two different cultures.

Hugh warned the British army cartographer in Brian Friel's newly canonical play *Translations* (Friel 1981:43)?

> I understand your sense of exclusion, of being cut off from a life here ... But remember words are signals, counters. They are not immortal. And it can happen – to use an image you'll understand – it can happen that a civilization can be imprisoned in a linguistic contour which no longer matches the landscape of ... fact.

The question of whether or not the linguistic contour of the Chinese civilization from which Ricci chose his terminology to translate God's name matched the landscape of Catholic fact would become one of the longest-running controversies in the history of the modern Catholic Church. Known as the Chinese Rites Controversy, it began after Ricci's death in 1610, and lasted until the Vatican's recantation in 1939 (Golden 2000, Minamiki 1985, Mungello, 1985, 1994, 1999; Noll 1992, Ricci 1583-1610/1942, Spence 1969, 1984). Ricci's own reading of the canonical texts of Confucianism led him to believe that there had existed a form of natural monotheism in ancient Chinese thought, which could serve as the basis for introducing the Christian concept of monotheism to the Chinese. This interpretation was an example of the theory of 'completion', that the only thing lacking from Chinese culture was the acknowledgement of Christianity (Mungello 1985). Ricci decided that the Jesuits had only to inform the Chinese Confucians that their 上帝 *Shangdi* (Sovereign on High) – or 天帝 *Tiandi* (Sovereign of the Sky), synonymous terms from the earliest Chinese texts, or 天主 *Tianzhu* (Lord or Master of the Sky; which was the term Ricci used in the title of his best known Chinese book; Ricci 1603/1985) – were just some of the "different names for God in all the different languages in the world" (Joyce 1916/1972:17).[2]

This personal interpretation of the canonical Confucian texts justified Ricci's proclaiming that there were indeed Chinese cultural and conceptual equivalents for the key concepts of Catholic dogma, and that these equivalent terms could be used to translate the Catholic concepts. The obvious advantage of this interpretation was that the terminology used in the translations into Chinese would sound familiar to Chinese readers and be more easily accepted or assimilated. Thus he implicitly advocated as a translation strategy what would now be called 'domestication' (归化 *guihua* in Chinese translation discourse), or making foreign references sound familiar.[3] Ricci's doctrine

[2] The Chinese concept of 天 *tian* was closer to 'sky' than to the Christian religious concept of 'heaven'. It was an abstract force of nature, the cosmos, not an anthropomorphic divinity, nor a Creator, nor a paradise.

[3] Although the terms 'domestication' and 'foreignization' are associated with the work of Lawrence Venuti in translation studies in the Euroamerican ambit, these concepts have independently formed part of the twentieth-century Chinese translation discourse, beginning with some of Lu Xun's essays in the 1930s. Cf. Gu (1998), Lin (2001), Liu (1987/1994), Lou (1984), Sun (1996, 2003), Venuti (1995, 1998), Xu and Zhang (2002), Zhu (2001).

facilitated the early success of the Jesuit Mission in the imperial court and led to the conversion of several very prominent Mandarins.

Ricci's practice was more a case of using Chinese discourse *for* translation than a case of Chinese discourse *on* translation. He deliberately adopted a form of discourse fashionable at the end of the Ming, that of 讲学 *jiangxue* or philosophical debate, and studied the core of the Neo-Confucian canon, the 四书 *Sishu* (Four Books), in order to develop his discourse for a catechism in Chinese that would appeal to and satisfy the literary taste of his *literati* audience. The missionaries called their preaching halls 书院 *shuyuan* (academies) in accordance with the vogue at the time (Gernet 1985:16-17). In a letter written to the Superior General of the Jesuits he wrote (*ibid.*:27):

> Accordingly, we have judged it preferable in this book [天主实义 *Tianzhu shiyi*, 'The True Meaning of the Master of Heaven'], rather than attack what they say, to turn it in such a way that it is in accordance with the idea of God, so that we appear not so much to be following Chinese ideas as interpreting Chinese authors in such a way that they follow our ideas.

Ricci had a clear, if intuitive, understanding of the semiotics of Chinese culture. Having begun by imitating the garb of Buddhist monks, as the Jesuits had done in Japan, where Buddhist monks were highly respected, he quickly switched to dressing like the *literati* when he learned that Buddhist monks were looked down upon by the Mandarins. When he discovered that the image of the Crucifixion did not produce a sympathetic response among the literati who perceived it to be the image of a condemned criminal "nailed to a construction in the shape of a ten" (十 *shi*, Gernet 1985:226), he began promoting the image of the Virgin Mary, which was easier to assimilate to the positive image of 观音 *Guanyin*, the Buddhist goddess of mercy. The same was true of literary style (*ibid.*:47):

> A decisive reason had led Matteo Ricci to employ the highest style in his works in Chinese rather than forge new words and express himself in a barbarian fashion contrary to the spirit of the language: he had decided first of all to win over the people of high society. Being extremely sensitive to a writer's style, the latter would have rejected badly written works without even reading them through. Ricci, his Jesuit contemporaries and his successors were in contact with educated people and the latter played an essential part in the definitive presentation of their works.

Neither was his deliberate use of Chinese discourse for translation lost on the Chinese intellectuals who attacked him. The Ming dynasty scholar Huang Wendao 黄问道 wrote that it was Ricci's constant use of Chinese forms of

expression and formulae culled from the Classics that had misled some intellectuals into believing his doctrine: since the words and sounds of Ricci's own language had nothing in common with Chinese, he had invited Chinese men of letters to instruct him in the Classics and then adapted the external features of his own foreign discourse to their native literary discourse to disguise the difference between what he was saying and the writings of the ancient Confucian sages Yao, Shun, Zhougong (the Duke of Zhou) and Confucius (*ibid.*:49).

Yang Guangxian 杨光先 (1597-1669) wrote that the missionaries dissected and dismembered the text of the Classics, that Ricci quoted all of the passages in the Classics in which the words 上帝 *Shangdi* appear and adapted them to prove that the Confucian 上帝 *Shangdi* was the equivalent of the Catholic 天主 *Tianzhu*, and that their works "pillage the language, style and even the propositions of our Classics" (*ibid.*:57).

Li Zhi 李贽 (1527-1602), a Confucian scholar who met Ricci but did not subscribe to his beliefs, acknowledged that Ricci "had learned the rituals of the country" (行此间之仪礼; Saussy 2001a). Ricci "was capable of adopting a Daoist identity or mask in the title of one of his most popular works", the 畸人十篇 *Jiren shipian*, which he called in his Italian journals "his book of *Paradoxes*" (*ibid.*). The editor of Ricci's journals, Pasquale M. d'Elia, translated the title more literally as *Ten Chapters of a Strange Man*, and identified the source of the phrase 畸人 *jiren* in a passage of *Zhuangzi* 庄子[4] that d'Elia translated to read: "The strange man is strange to other men, but similar to heaven". In this passage, one of Confucius' followers asks what *jiren* means: "'I should like to ask about the *jiren* 畸人, the odd man.' Confucius answers, '畸人者, 畸于人而侔于天', 'The *jiren* is odd as regards men, but of a pair with heaven.'" (Saussy 2001a). As Haun Saussy points out (*ibid.*):

> *Ji* is etymologically the oddness of odd numbers, the remainder in dividing up land or objects.... "Of a pair," *mou*, is the opposite of *ji*, "odd": in the perspective of heaven or nature, *tian*, 天, the *ji* is not *ji* at all. The *jiren* is not just a "strange man," but some sort of holy fool. So with this context reestablished, we can see more fully what the point of naming Ricci's dialogues *Jiren shipian* was. The phrase *jiren* tells Ricci's reader to expect to relive the anecdote from *Zhuangzi* – to anticipate a movement from shock and disbelief to a new form of awareness, which is *fangwai* [方外 'beyond this world'].

Saussy goes on to say that this would have been a deliberate strategy on Ricci's part (*ibid.*):

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[4] *Zhuangzi*, 'Da zong shi', in Guo Qingfan, *Zhuangzi jishi*, pp. 264-68. ("In my translation I have taken some expressions from Burton Watson's version: *Chuang-tzu*, pp. 86-87"; Saussy 2001a).

> Ricci must have determined that the echo of *Zhuangzi* would be strategic – it would help to establish him in the world of Chinese letters. It was, for Chinese readers, a familiar sign of unfamiliarity. ... We tend to see Ricci in his mandarin's robes, quoting from the *Shi jing* 诗经 and *Shang shu* 尚书, brushing aside Buddhism and Daoism as impure superstitions, standing next to his altar with the highly respectable Xu Guangqi [徐光启] – as the Confucian Catholic hybrid impressed on our minds by both sides in the Rites Controversy. But that [image of] Ricci could only emerge in the context of an already established Tianzhu 天主 church in China, with its audience ready-made and eager to find ways of serving Kongzi 孔子 [Confucius] and Yesu [耶稣; Jesus] simultaneously. To catch the attention of those not yet converted, Ricci had to put on more arresting guise, even if it went no further than the titles of his books. An accidental Daoist he may have been, but not an entirely innocent one.

Ricci even went so far as to challenge the famous 'white horse' paradox of 公孙龙 Gongsun Long (c. 325-250 BC) (Gernet 1985:244):

> Let us consider the term "white horse", in which we have the words "white" and "horse". The horse is the substance [自立者 *zilizhe* "that which is established of itself"] and white is the accident [倚赖者 *yilaizhe* "that which depends upon something else"]. Even if there was no white, there could still be a horse; whereas if there were no horse there could be no white. So white is accidental. If one compares these two categories [one will say that] all that is substance is primary and [that] all that is accident is secondary and lowly.

Ricci had been obliged to paraphrase, translating *substance* as "that which is established of itself" (*zilizhe*) and *accident* as "that which depends upon something else" (*yilaizhe*). He is certainly neither the first nor the last Sinologist to founder on this Chinese paradox, which also illustrates important differences in understanding the world and in reasoning about it through the constraints of a European language or the Chinese language. "From the Chinese point of view the distinction was gratuitous and artificial since in their language nothing of the kind was suggested" (Gernet 1985:243). Gongsun Long had declared 白马非马 *baimafeima* "a white horse is not a horse", giving the words 白 *bai* 'white' and 马 *ma* 'horse' equal status. "The one relates to colour, the other to form", which are not opposed to each other as substance and accident. "The horse which is not linked with the white is the horse. The white which is not linked with the horse is the white" (*ibid.*). According to Gernet, the distinction between substance and accident was indispensable for Ricci for his proof of the autonomy of the spirit and the existence of a rational soul. In the case of this paradox he had come up against a (Chinese ethnocentric) immanental,

relativistic and dynamic cosmovision which did not share his (European ethnocentric) transcendental, absolutist and static convictions about absolute truths (*ibid.*:244).

This is precisely the point where another Italian Jesuit and competent Sinologist, Niccolò Longobardi (1559-1654), took issue with Ricci's hypotheses of Confucian cultural equivalents for basic tenets of Catholic dogma. Longobardi, who shared Ricci's intersemiotic sophistication, used Chinese cartographic terminology and methodology to produce the first three-dimensional globe in Chinese history. But Longobardi's understanding of Confucian culture did not coincide with Ricci's. Unlike his predecessor, who had elaborated his own personal reading of the ancient Confucian canonical texts in order to justify the use of Chinese terms – a very Protestant thing to be doing at the height of the Catholic Counter-Reformation – Longobardi contrasted Ricci's personal interpretations with the orthodox interpretations of the same texts by the leading Confucian scholars of the time, and was shocked by what he perceived to be 'heretical' results.

Another Jesuit missionary, Sabatino de Ursis (1575-1620), had written: "The Chinese, according to the precepts of their philosophy, had had no knowledge of a spiritual substance quite distinct from the material ... [and] consequently they had never known either God, the Angels or the Rational Soul" (Gernet 1985:31). In order to put this hypothesis to the test, Longobardi interviewed *literati* to discover whether or not they did distinguish between matter or substance and spirit, and in 1623 wrote *De Confucio ejusque doctrina tractatus* (A Treatise on Confucius and his Doctrine, Longobardi 1623). He recognized the danger of quoting the Confucian Classics with an interpretation alien to Chinese literary traditions and cited the difficulty and obscurity of the text to prove that learned commentaries were indispensable. As Longobardi wrote, "If the Chinese themselves were obliged to have recourse to commentaries, foreigners surely had to do so all the more" (Gernet 1985:31). As Gernet concludes, "In contrast to Ricci who had ascribed [to] the terms [有 *you* and 无 *wu*] the meaning of being and nothingness, [Longobardi], who as a result of his inquiry into Chinese ideas had become better informed on the matter, had understood that in reality these two terms denoted the two aspects that it was possible for the 'universal substance' to take" (*ibid.*:207).

Longobardi's approach seems to foreshadow aspects of modern descriptive anthropology that try to establish how a culture understands itself or how it constructs its own social reality. The issue for Longobardi was not especially 'God's real name' but the existence or not of a comparable conceptual scheme between Catholic and Confucian culture. Longobardi's concern was sparked by the difficulty of translating *Deus* and *anima* and *angelus*. The reigning philosophical school of the time in China was Neo-Confucianism (道学家 *Daoxuejia*), an interpretation of the thought of Confucius (551-479 BC) that evolved over the 10th through 12th centuries AD and dominated Chinese cul-

ture until the 20th century. Longobardi's research revealed that Neo-Confucian cosmology was based on two principles: 理 *li*, 'form, principle', and 气 *qi*, the 'essence' of all things (Longobardi 1623). According to this theory, *qi* was a universal essence, one that could be configured to form anything and that returned to an undistinguished and undistinguishable source when the things it formed disappeared. *Qi* could assume a variety of physical forms without losing its quality of *qi* – like water, that can congeal to become solid in the form of ice, or disperse partially to become liquid, or completely to become steam. As the essence of all things, *qi* might be compared to Aristotle's concept of 'substance' or *materia* or 'matter', and *li* to Aristotle's 'form', but *qi* is not matter. Etymologically, it corresponds more to the European concept of 'energy' (the written character represents the steam rising from a bowl of rice, its 'essence'). But *qi*, which is neither energy nor matter, can assume the attributes of either energy or matter (Cheng 1997, Feng and Bodde 1983, Needham 1956). *Qi* is not limited to the concept of 'matter' or of 'energy' because the Neo-Confucian cosmology did not distinguish between them. Not until Einstein's $E=mc^2$ were matter and energy reunited in the Euroamerican cultural ambit, but they had never been separated in the Chinese cultural ambit. If Chinese culture did not distinguish between matter and spirit or soul, then it could not have equivalent concepts for *anima* or *angelus*, and none of its terminology could serve to translate these alien concepts. What was worse, from the point of view of the Mission, was that Longobardi's interpretation would require Chinese converts to reject the conceptual bases of their own culture and espouse those of an alien culture. The theory of 'completion' could not be applied in China, and Ricci's success with the imperial court would have been based on false premises.[5]

Longobardi concluded that there were no cultural equivalences between Confucianism and Catholicism that could justify using pre-existing Chinese terminology for Christian concepts. He advocated the use of phonetic transliterations in Chinese of the key Latin terms of Catholicism to show they were not equivalent. Thus *Deus* would have to be transliterated as 徒斯 *Tusi* (or Jehovah as 耶和华 *Yehehua*), and not translated as *Shangdi* or *Tiandi* or *Tianzhu*, as Ricci had recommended, and these Catholic concepts would sound alien in Chinese. The Latin term for 'soul', *anima*, would be transliterated as 亚尼玛 *yanima*; the name of Jesus as 耶稣 *Yesu*. He implicitly advocated a 'foreignizing' translation strategy (异化 *yihua* in Chinese translation discourse),[6] ensuring

[5] In Brian Friel's play *Dancing at Lughnasa* (Friel 1990), Father Jack, a missionary priest who has returned to his sisters' home in rural Ireland after working for twenty-five years in Africa, suffers from what I call 'the Father Jack Syndrome': he has difficulty relating to the lifestyle, concerns and values of his own family, has lost the habit of speaking English, and has so assimilated tribal belief systems and ceremonies that they infuse and modify his own religious beliefs. May Ricci have suffered the same fate to some extent?

[6] Cf. Fn. 3 above.

that incompatible foreign references sounded unfamiliar.

Longobardi's interpretation would have ruined the Jesuits' relationship with the imperial Mandarins. The Mission decided to silence it and maintain Ricci's. Longobardi accepted this decision, but the treatise he wrote to justify his own interpretation would resurface half a century later, to be translated and published in various European languages and fuel the Rites Controversy between the Vatican and the Chinese imperial court (which defended Ricci's interpretation) (Golden 2000).

The differences between Ricci's approach and Longobardi's are interesting from the perspective of cross-cultural transfer and with reference to intersemiotic sophistication, to the refined and subtle manipulation of semiotic elements across cultures. Both were expert manipulators of intersemiotic, Sino-European aspects of the Chinese *imaginaire* through ambits like cartography, attire, iconography, rhetoric, aesthetics, poetics and others, but their interpretations of the conceptual bases of Chinese thought differed radically. In this respect, their disagreement would seem to foreshadow the Sapir-Whorf Hypothesis and other theories of linguistic and cultural relativism, as Graham (1989:389, 402) has noted with respect to Chinese in general:

> Chinese thought before the introduction of Buddhism from India is the unique instance of a philosophical tradition which, as far as our information goes, is wholly independent of traditions developed in Indo-European languages (Arabic philosophy descends from Greek, Tibetan from Indian). It therefore provides the ideal test case for Whorf's hypothesis that the thought of a culture is guided and constrained by the structure of its language.
>
> .....
>
> Western philosophising in languages with number termination starts from the adding up of particulars, leading at two of its limits to the reduction of cosmos and community to aggregates of atoms and individual persons, while the Chinese operating with generic nouns think in terms of variously divisible Way [道 *dao*], pattern [理 *li*], *ch'i* [气 *qi*], and kind of thing.

It also seems to confirm Erik Zürcher's hypothesis of a 'cultural imperative' (1994:40-41, 63-64):

> This was the configuration into which the Jesuit fathers landed when they started spreading their message among the Chinese elite. ...[T]hey were faced with what may be called a "cultural imperative": no marginal religion penetrating from the outside could expect to take root in China (at least at the social level) unless it conformed to that pattern that in late imperial times was more clearly defined than ever. Confucianism represented what is *zheng* 正, "orthodox", in a religious,

> ritual, social and political sense; in order not to be branded as *xie* 邪, "heterodox" and to be treated as a subversive sect, a marginal religion had to prove that it was on the side of *zheng*. When Ricci started to apply his method of accommodation, he probably did not realize the full weight of that cultural imperative; he must only gradually have realized, with a rare combination of intelligence, intuition, and a growing knowledge of the Chinese situation, that this was the only viable way. If there was to be any Chinese church, it would have to stand on the basis of Chinese culture.
>
> ....
>
> Since [the Chinese converts] lacked the intellectual and theological heritage that their Jesuit teachers had carried with them from Europe, they had to accommodate the Jesuit input within their own traditional universe of discourse, just as more than a thousand years before, Kumarajiva's Chinese disciples had eagerly absorbed the master's teachings, and yet created their own brands of Mahayana philosophy, simply because they lacked Kumarajiva's Indian scholastic frame of reference.

2. A theoretical model for comparative cultural studies: Part I

My study of the Jesuits' attempts to bridge the cross-cultural gap between Confucianism and Catholicism[7] has led me to elaborate a theoretical model for comparative cultural studies, based on aspects of Karl Popper's 'Three World' conjecture, on Hans Georg Gadamer's metaphor of a cultural 'horizon', on the concept of a hermeneutic circle initiated by Friedrich Schleiermacher, and on Sinological considerations. I believe that this model provides a framework for analyzing the contrasting approaches and conclusions of Ricci and Longobardi in the contexts of ethnocentrism and of linguistic-cultural relativism.

One of the fundamental debates in modern European philosophy with immediate relevance for the study of communication (cross-cultural or otherwise) concerns the opposition between idealism and empiricism. Carried to its solipsistic extreme, idealism would deny that two people have ever shared the same experience of the world and that would make mutual understanding impossible; everything would be relative to the individual. Carried to its materialist extreme, empiricism would state that external material reality is determinant. Materialism would provide a universal basis for mutual understanding (or conditioned response).

To establish a surer footing for the modern scientific method, Karl Popper proposed the Three World conjecture as a model of reality (Popper 1972): World 1 (the material world of physics, chemistry, biology, etc.), World 2

[7] The history of Jesuit attempts at cross-cultural transfer and intersemiotic sophistication provides more case studies, such as that of Roberto de Nobili in India; cf. Cronin (1959).

(the individual psychological experience of the world, mental states, feelings, etc.), and World 3 (the sum of the abstract products of the human mind, such as mathematics, scientific theories, social and cultural values, beliefs; similar to Richard Dawkins' 'memes', Dawkins 1992). Popper situated the individual subjective experience of the world (World 2) between the conditioning aspects of the material world (World 1) and the world of intangible realities (World 3). Figure 1 illustrates how Popper visualized his Three World conjecture. World 1 (the material world) overlaps with World 2 (the individual experience of the world) and World 3 (intangible reality). It overlaps and thereby conditions or determines, in part, many aspects of Worlds 2 and 3. At the same time, however, World 3 overlaps with Worlds 1 and 2 and World 2 overlaps with Worlds 1 and 3. Part of each World remains outside the conditioning aspects of each of the other Worlds, while another part of each World is over-determined by each of the other Worlds.

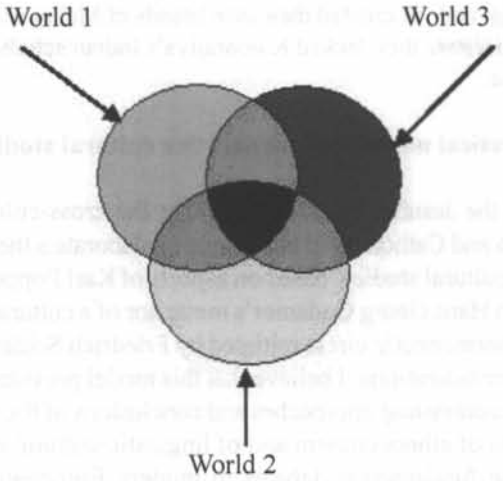


Figure 1. Karl Popper's 'Three World Conjecture'

This model can be readily adapted to the field of comparative cultural studies. World 1 would correspond to the material base of a culture. The sociocultural organization of a society would have to respond adequately to this world (cf. Haudricourt 1962 on how the differing material bases affected the development of the Chinese and the Semitic languages). At the same time, the Sociocultural World could modify the Material World as well, in order to overcome the limitations it imposed. The Individual World is highly determined by both the Material and the Sociocultural Worlds, but can also modify or manipulate the material base, or innovate in the world of ideas or scientific discoveries.

An individual assimilates and internalizes the values, norms and beliefs of a particular sociocultural group, and these values, norms and beliefs define

what that individual would consider to be 'normal'. Hence the problem of ethnocentrism in cross-cultural communication: each individual unconsciously considers his or her own values, norms and beliefs, that is to say, those of her or his own sociocultural group, to be normal, and any others will be different by comparison, and therefore not normal. In order to escape this inevitable ethnocentric conditioning, individuals would have to acquire consciousness of their own conditioning.

For the purposes of linguistic and literary studies, it might be useful to focus on those elements of the Sociocultural World that would constitute its *imaginaire*, on the one hand, and its linguistic and literary aspects, on the other. In the case of the writer or writing, these elements would exercise a poetic or productive function, while in the case of the reader or reading, they would exercise an aesthetic or receptive function, as is illustrated in Figure 2.

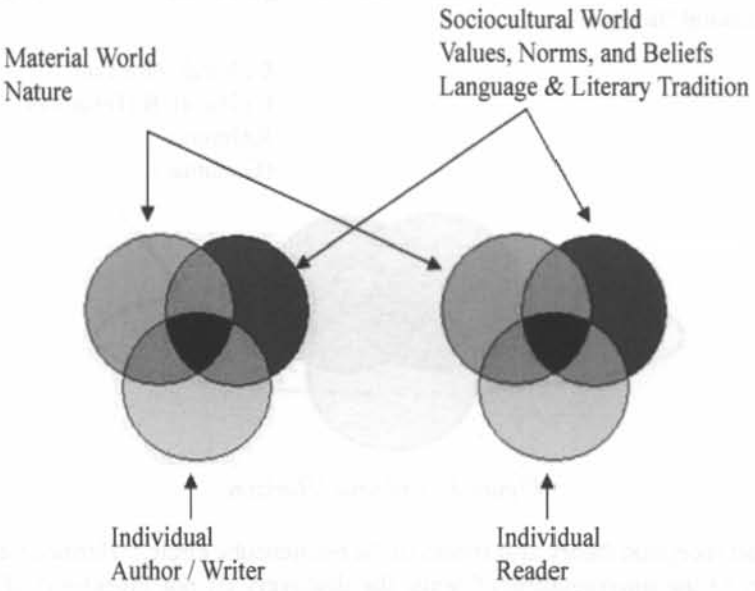


Figure 2. An Adaptation of the 'Three World Conjecture'

To a certain extent, these two versions of the Three World conjecture would have to overlap for full mutual understanding to occur, although imagination can go a long way toward creating virtual overlaps, but I do not think this model goes far enough to contextualize the problematic of either intracultural or intercultural studies.

The acquisition of one's own culture is a process known as 'enculturation'. Hans Georg Gadamer has developed a theory of reader reception that could help to contextualize the ethnocentric problematic of enculturation (Gadamer 1975, 1977). He proposes the concept of a cultural horizon that is common to

everyone who forms part of a given sociocultural group in a given place in a given era. Members of such a group will share the same cultural references within (but not beyond) their horizon. By sharing these cultural references, they participate in the 'intertextuality' of their own culture's texts or semiotic manifestations. As a result, they participate in the 'intersubjectivity' that will be common to the comprehension of the texts or semiotic manifestations of their own group. The concept of intersubjectivity implies that there are many cultural references that every member of the group will share in common, and many subjective experiences that, though individual in each case, take place within commonly shared sociocultural structures. As a result, all members of the same group, in the same place in the same era, will share common elements that will permit mutual comprehension. Gadamer's horizon delimits everyone's cultural perception of the world, just as the sea-faring horizon marks the outer limit of what a sailor can see. Figure 3 depicts the concept of the cultural 'horizon'.

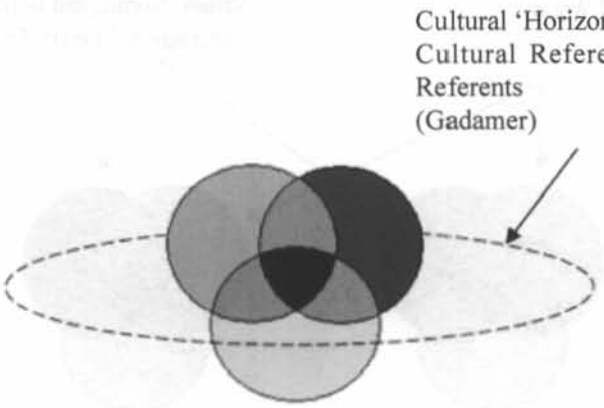


Figure 3. Cultural 'Horizon'

Reader reception theory also speaks of the hermeneutic circle.[8] 'Hermeneutics' refers to the interpretation of texts, the discovery (if not invention) of the different meanings contained in a text, implicitly as well as explicitly. 'Semiotics' extends hermeneutics to the interpretation of non-semantic sociocultural phenomena as well. People who form part of the same sociocultural group in the same place in the same era will also share the same criteria for interpreting phenomena and cultural manifestations within the shared cultural horizon of their shared world, in roughly the same way. This common way of interpreting things is one of the most fundamental elements of their enculturation. As

[8] In the field of Translation Studies, one of the best known discussions of the hermeneutic circle can be found in George Steiner (1998), *After Babel (3rd ed.)*, Oxford: Oxford University Press.

a result, the hermeneutic circle acts as a complementary horizon that conditions people's capacity to interpret their world. Figure 4 combines the cultural horizon and the hermeneutic circle.

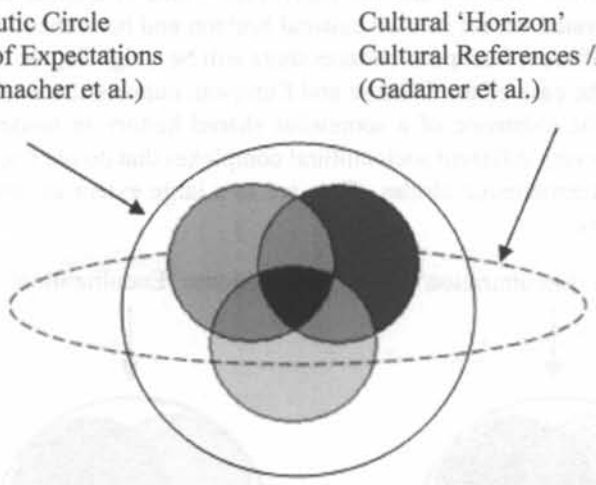


Figure 4. Cultural 'Horizon' + 'Hermeneutic Circle'

We could now fuse the Three World conjecture with the cultural horizon and the hermeneutic circle, as in Figure 5.

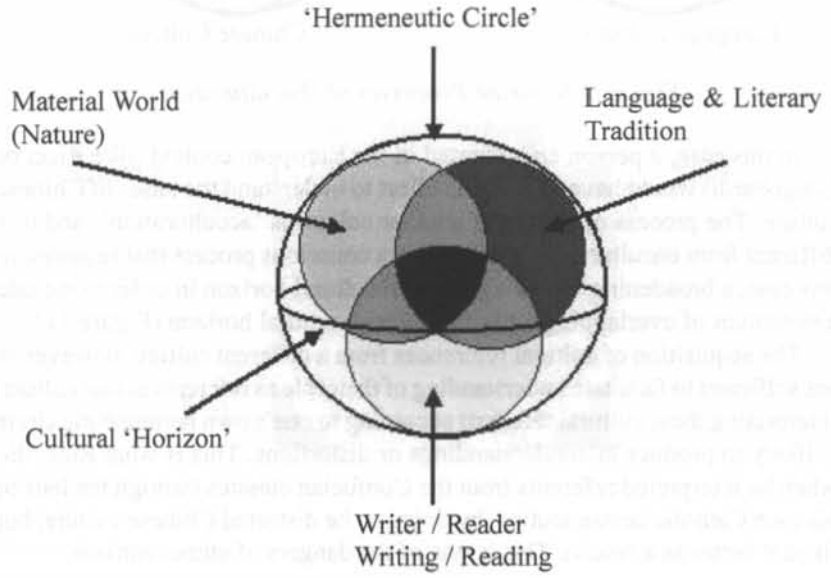


Figure 5. 'Three World Conjecture' + Cultural 'Horizon' + 'Hermeneutic Circle'

So far we have considered the situation of individuals enculturated within the same sociocultural group. What happens when someone wishes to understand a completely different culture? The other culture has its own Material and Sociocultural Worlds, and the Individual World of another culture has been enculturated within its own cultural horizon and hermeneutic circle. In the case of different European cultures there will be a high degree of overlapping but in the case of the Chinese and European cultures there will be very little (until the existence of a somewhat shared history in modern times). They are two very different sociocultural complexes that do not share cultural horizons or hermeneutic circles. They are to a large extent separate worlds (see Figure 6).

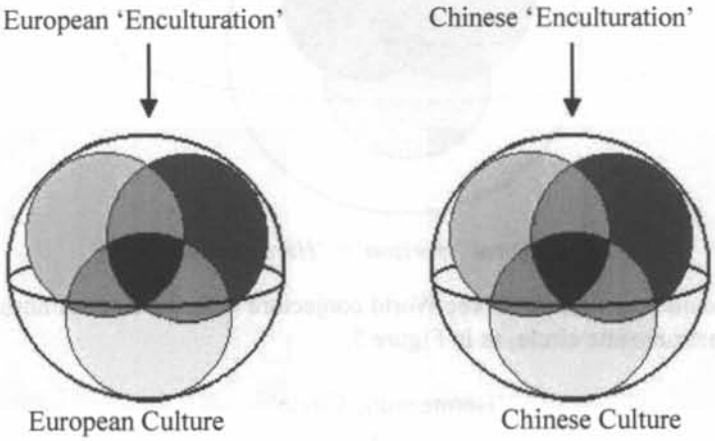


Figure 6. Separate Processes of 'Enculturation'

In this case, a person enculturated in the European context (like Ricci or Longobardi) would have to make an effort to understand the bases of Chinese culture. The process of acquiring another culture is 'acculturation', and it is different from enculturation because it is a conscious process that requires, in this case, a broadening of one's European cultural horizon in order to include a minimum of overlapping with the Chinese cultural horizon (Figure 7).[9]

The acquisition of cultural references from a different culture, however, is not sufficient to facilitate understanding of their role as referents in that culture. Interpreting these cultural referents according to one's own hermeneutic circle is likely to produce misunderstandings or distortions. This is what Ricci did when he interpreted referents from the Confucian classics through the lens of his own Catholic hermeneutics (by doing so he distorted Chinese culture, but liked it better as a result). This is one of the dangers of ethnocentrism.

[9] I do not think it is possible for a non-native to acquire a fully native understanding of another culture through acculturation.

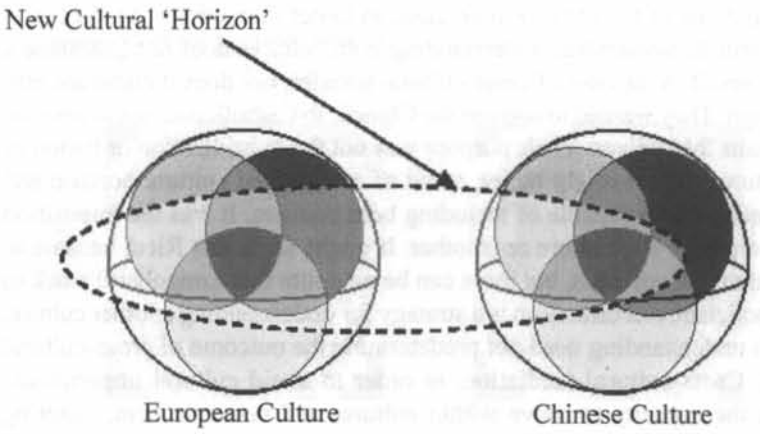


Figure 7. Acculturation: New Cultural 'Horizon'

To avoid this danger one must also broaden one's own hermeneutic circle to include a minimum of overlapping with the Chinese hermeneutic circle in order to understand the bases of Chinese culture on their own Chinese terms, without imposing ethnocentric cultural imperatives or filters (see Figure 8). This is what Longobardi appears to have done as a result of consulting Chinese scholars for their interpretations of the Confucian classics rather than applying his own criteria (by doing so he understood Chinese culture better, but liked it less as a result).

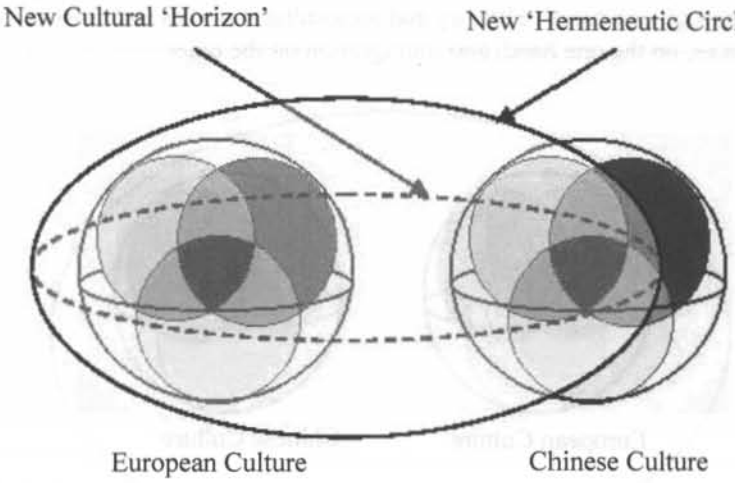


Figure 8. Acculturation: New Cultural 'Horizon' + New 'Hermeneutic Circle'

These diagrams are simplified and schematic. Some processes of acculturation will be more inclusive than others, some less; as a result, some people will

understand one or the other or both cultures better than others. As Ricci and Longobardi demonstrated, understanding both cultures does not guarantee a uniform result in the case of cross-cultural transfer, nor does it eliminate ethnocentrism. They wanted to convert the Chinese to Catholicism, not to become Confucians themselves. Their purpose was not the hybridization or fusion of two cultures, which might be the result of an enlarged cultural horizon and hermeneutic circle capable of including both cultures. It was the imposition of the values of one culture on another. It might seem that Ricci became to some extent a Confucian, but there can be no doubt that Longobardi stuck to his Catholicism. Acculturation is a strategy for understanding another culture, but such understanding need not predetermine the outcome of cross-cultural transfer. Cross-cultural mediation, in order to avoid cultural imperialism, requires the capacity to move within cultures and between them, adapting transfer strategies to differing purposes.

On the basis of this joint model, we can begin to define the sociocultural traits that delimit each culture as well as the sociocultural processes that conserve these traits, or modify them. It is also worth noting that acculturation changes the person who undertakes it, who is no longer confined to a native cultural horizon and hermeneutic circle, nor fully assimilated into the other culture, but has become someone who inhabits a new territory between the two cultures that are now in contact. This process of inevitable and necessary hybridization, were it to be extended to a larger group of persons, would produce a new intercultural territory that would replace the previous closed and mutually exclusive sociocultural worlds. It is a process that expresses itself through comparative literary and sociocultural studies and cross-cultural influences, on the one hand, and immigration on the other.

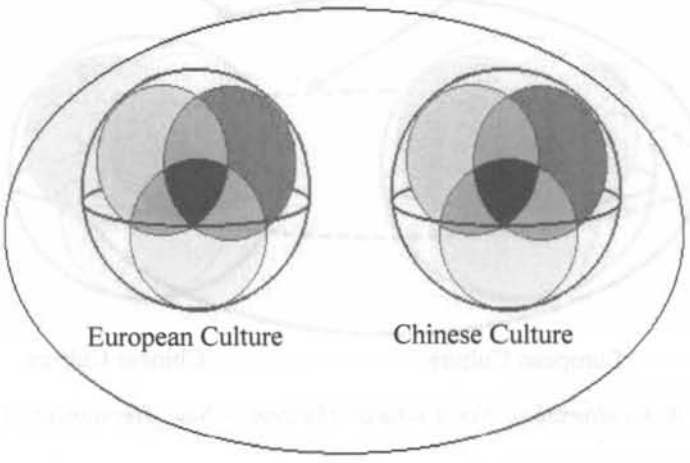


Figure 9. An Ahistorical and Asociocultural Worldview

The previous graphic representation of the process of acculturation is much more modest than that depicted in Figure 9, which tries to englobe both cultures within a single (and static) perspective, granting the observer a point of view that is superior to either of the cultures in question. It thereby raises ideological implications that would be difficult to defend – such as attributing to oneself an ahistorical and asociocultural omniscience; or the overbearing (and self-deluding) self-confidence of an imperial metropolis.

3. A theoretical model for comparative cultural studies: Part II

The model as presented thus far, however, is still too static, too simplistic. A translator or cross-cultural mediator has to consider many more factors. Therefore another model is needed, one that is more dynamic, constantly moving and not dichotomous. Western paradigms of translation have tended to be 'either/or' in outlook (literal vs. free, adequate vs. acceptable, Chinese vs. European). The dichotomies created by such an either/or perspective become mutually exclusive (black or white, good or evil). They can become an obstacle to cross-cultural transfer and understanding.

An alternative to the dichotomous model is the notion of the correlative pair, a 'both/and' relationship, in which each part complements the other, wherein a change to one part also changes the other (light and shadow, hot and cold). A model that is 'correlative' rather than 'dichotomous' might generate a more agnostic, postmodern and postcolonial vision of the comparative study of cultures that would try to focus both cultures within a single (but dynamic) perspective; this would grant the observer a point of view that participates in both cultures in question, and alternates between them. Figure 10 illustrates this dynamic, interactive and interdependent process in the form of a sphere revolving in a clockwise direction.

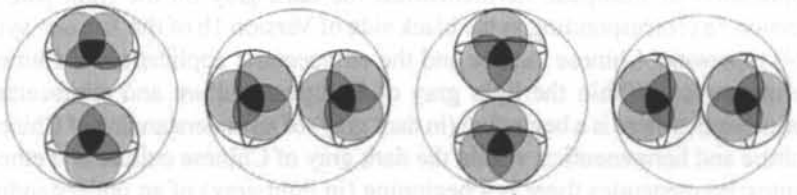


Figure 10. A Dynamic, Interactive and Interdependent Approach

This approach is inspired by the dynamic vision of correlative pairs that informs the 阴阳 *Yinyang* relationship in Chinese culture (Needham 1956, Henderson 1984, Graham, 1986, 1989, Cheng 1997, 2007, Zhou *et al.* 1994). The etymology of the written form of 阴 *yin* is the side of a mountain in shadow, while the etymology of 阳 *yang* is the sunny side of the mountain. Where there is more sun, there is less shadow; where less sun, more shadow.

The relative amounts of sun and shadow change constantly throughout the course of a day. At noon all is *yang*, at night all *yin*; mid-morning and mid-afternoon, half and half. The lengthy shadows cast in one direction at dawn gradually shorten to nothing at noon but gradually return and lengthen in the opposite direction as the sun goes down. *Yin* and *yang* are not specific things; they are dynamic relationships between complementary poles (hot and cold, high and low, hard and soft, sweet and sour, male and female; perhaps even literal and free, adequate and acceptable, Chinese and European). The relationship between *yin* and *yang* alternates in a complementary way (and their relative proportions change constantly). Figure 11 simplifies this model of cross-cultural transfer by englobing the two worlds of European and of Chinese culture within their own respective hermeneutical processes as two contiguous and correlative worlds.

Yinyang Version 1a | *Yinyang* Version 1b | *Yinyang* Version 2a | *Yinyang* Version 2b

Figure 11. Correlative Worlds of European and Chinese Culture

By englobing the models of European and Chinese culture in this way, we can relate each one to the other in a correlative way. In Figure 11, the light gray on the left side of Version 1a (corresponding to the white side of Version 1b of the *Yinyang* symbol) represents European culture and the ethnocentric application of European hermeneutics; the dark gray on the right side of Version 1a (corresponding to the black side of Version 1b of the *Yinyang* symbol) represents Chinese culture and the ethnocentric application of Chinese hermeneutics. Within the light gray of European culture and ethnocentric hermeneutics there is a beginning (in dark gray) of an understanding of Chinese culture and hermeneutics; within the dark gray of Chinese culture and ethnocentric hermeneutics there is a beginning (in light gray) of an understanding of European culture and hermeneutics. In this first case (Version 1a), we might say that the European hermeneutics dominate over the Chinese hermeneutics in the process of cross-cultural interpretation. The situation is reversed in Version 2a. In this case we might say that the Chinese hermeneutics dominate over the European hermeneutics in the process of cross-cultural interpretation. Their relationship is correlative, not dichotomous; inclusive, not exclusive. The *Yinyang* symbol does not represent a static and symmetrical relationship, but a snapshot of a single moment in an ongoing process of constant change,

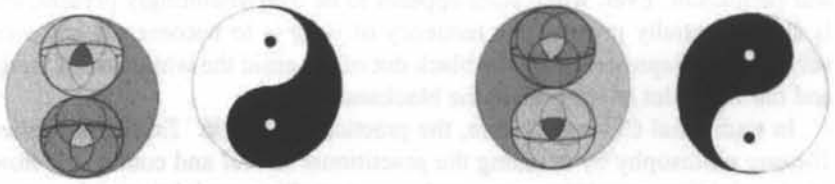
interchange and exchange. Each part therein includes potentially the essence of the other; any change in one part implies automatically a corresponding and therefore correlative change in the other; each part turns into the other; the process of alternation between the essential qualities of each part is constant and permanent. Even when *yang* appears to be overwhelmingly present, *yin* is also potentially present; the tendency of *yang* is to become *yin* and vice versa. This is represented by the black dot of *yin* amid the whiteness of *yang*, and the white dot of *yang* amid the blackness of *yin*.

In traditional Chinese culture, the practice of 太极拳 *Taijiquan* applies *Yinyang* philosophy by teaching the practitioner to feel and control the flow of *yin* (yielding, weightlessness) and *yang* (repelling, weightiness) in a continuous dance of changing proportions.[10] Part of the practice of *Taijiquan* is a form of 'sparring' called 推手 *tuishou* (pushing hands), in which each person advances or withdraws in response to the withdrawal or advance of the other while both maintain contact in order to learn how to control contact in movement under constantly changing circumstances. 'Pushing hands' could be a metaphor for the application of this model to translation and comparative cultural studies. *Yang* implies the presence of something, *yin* its absence. In the case of ethnocentrism, one's own cultural horizon and hermeneutic circle are present, but transparent to oneself. The universe of cultural referents, and more especially the hermeneutics of another culture, are absent, are opaque to oneself. Acculturation makes the opaqueness of the cultural references of another culture more transparent, but ethnocentrism tends to apply the pressure of its own hermeneutics to the cultural referents of the other. Acquiring the hermeneutic circle of the other culture, as well as its cultural references, allows one to yield to the advance of different forms of meaning; at the same time it offers a way to advance toward other cultural referents with meanings of one's own, while maintaining equilibrium. Figure 12 illustrates how Ricci and Longobardi reacted in opposite ways to the differing cultural referents and hermeneutic circles of their own and Chinese culture (although both were dominated in the end by their own ethnocentrism).

Because they had a hidden ideological agenda (they did not reveal the full extent of their intentions to their interlocutors), both Ricci and Longobardi applied their knowledge of Chinese culture to its conversion from Confucianism into Confucian Catholicism. Their strategies differed. Ricci assimilated Chinese cultural references to Catholic hermeneutics to make them compatible. Longobardi applied Chinese hermeneutics to Catholic concepts and found them to be incompatible. Both were ethnocentric. In Ricci's case, the radical differences between Chinese and European cosmology were

[10] I would like to acknowledge Martha Cheung's invaluable help in working out this proposal of a *Taijiquan* metaphor for comparative cultural studies, perhaps an ironic repetition of the process under study: the Ricci-ness of my use of *Taijiquan* to explain the role of European hermeneutics in a cross-cultural context, counterbalanced by a Longobardian cross-check with a native authority.

hidden (perhaps not even understood) because of the ethnocentric application of Catholic hermeneutics. In Longobardi's case, they were understood, highlighted and rejected for ethnocentric reasons, but on the basis of Neo-Confucian hermeneutics.



Ricci highlighted Chinese cultural references (light gray, white) as amenable to the explication of Catholic texts and concepts, but his own hermeneutics (dark gray, black) conditioned his interpretation of Chinese referents, despite his admiration for aspects of Confucianism.

Longobardi rejected Neo-Confucian cultural referents and hermeneutics (dark gray, black) as inimical to the explication of Catholic texts and concepts and highlighted the values of his own culture (light gray, white) in a hostile reaction to Chinese cosmology.

Figure 12. Contrasting Approaches of Ricci and Longobardi

4. Conclusion

The understanding provided by the Three World conjecture, together with the concepts of cultural horizon and hermeneutic circle, makes evident the need for a careful selection of strategies for comparative cultural studies, cross-cultural transfer and translation. There is a range of strategies from which to choose, beyond the dichotomous choice of domestication or foreignization faced by Ricci and Longobardi. If we return to the *Taijiquan* model for the interpretation of cultural referents – and consider the hermeneutics of one's own culture to be *yang* (transparent, visible, familiar), and the hermeneutics of a different culture to be *yin* (opaque, invisible, unfamiliar) – we could make the interaction of one with the other correlative and inclusive rather than dichotomous and exclusive. We can do that by applying one or the other in turn, as the need arises, in response to changing circumstances, and thus produce a dynamic equilibrium full of multiple possibilities. This model respects the parity of cultures and promotes mutual understanding, without imposing approaches or conditioning outcomes and without separating oneself from the other or pushing the other away.[11]

The model proposed here helps to explain the differing strategies of Ricci

[11] The scope of this paper does not allow me to work out in concrete detail how this approach could be applied in practice.

and Longobardi, and also to explain their lack of comprehension – or outright rejection – of Chinese culture on its own terms. It helps to identify the key elements of ethnocentrism by demonstrating the link between hermeneutics and cultural referents. As with *yin* and *yang*, which are relations, not things, it is not a static, absolutist and exclusive either/or prescription for cross-cultural transfer but a set of relations among cross-cultural referents that are inclusive and correlative. The model does not suggest that there is a uniquely correct, cross-cultural hermeneutic circle available to interpret any and all forms of cross-cultural transfer according to one determinate criterion. On the contrary, it suggests the need to take into consideration as many hermeneutic circles as necessary in order to respond in a dynamic way to changing perspectives. What it asks of the translator or cross-cultural mediator is consciousness of and sensitivity to the implications of the elements that configure the model.

In this sense the model helps to situate translation studies in relation to other comparative cultural studies such as postcolonialism, where it has become very important to be able to sort out one's own culture from another's. It also has implications for the development of strategies for negotiating concepts or interpretive frameworks across cultures, because it offers a theoretical and methodological framework for distinguishing how and why meanings are understood in each culture in terms of that culture's respective cultural horizons and hermeneutics. In the international arena, contemporary transcultural difficulties are frequently the result of the failure of communicative strategies to take sufficiently into account the importance of understanding how differing hermeneutic circles may interpret apparently similar cultural referents in different, even incompatible ways. On a more local level, in the context of immigration and integration, contemporary intercultural difficulties have a similar explanation. The model proposed here could also serve to orientate strategies for learning how to translate texts across very different cultural horizons and hermeneutic circles, or for explaining translators' choices.

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