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Towards an Unusual *speculum principis*? Virtues in the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*'s *Proemialis Declaratio*¹

Andrea Balbo, Elisa Della Calce, and Simone Mollea

Abstract: The *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687) represents one of the first attempts to translate some fundamental texts of Confucianism into a European language, Latin. In doing this, the Jesuits—and Philippe Couplet in particular—paid attention to the right ways to present Confucius to a Western audience. This appears all the more clear in the *Proemialis Declaratio*, a long introduction to the work. This paper focuses on those value concepts (*pietas*, *iustitia*, and *prudencia*), which are important both to Confucian and Western Greco-Latin Cultures and which contribute to reading relevant passages of this introduction as a *speculum principis*, thereby enhancing the success of this work in the French court of Louis XIV.

Keywords: *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, Jesuits, *speculum principis*, value concepts.

1. INTRODUCTION

By the time of Louis XIV (1643–1715), the Sun King, French monarchs had long established their role of defenders of Catholicism. Louis in particular adopted strong measures against Protestantism, going as far as to revoke the Edict of Nantes by issuing the Edict of Fontainebleau, thereby banishing it from France (October 1685). Around the same years, the role of Jesuits in both the educational and political fields was highly relevant and consistent with the king's policy. But Jesuits were also very active in evangelising non-Christian peoples through missions in the New World and in the Far East. In this context, China attracted not only the Jesuits but also Louis XIV, and the

¹ This contribution originated as a collective presentation at the 50th Annual Conference of the Israel Society for the Promotion of Classical Studies (ISPCS). We thank the organizers for their warm hospitality in Beer-Sheva as well as for the stimulating context the Conference provided. Our work on the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* is part of the broader project SERICA (Sino-European Religious Intersections in Central Asia. Interactive Texts and Intelligent Networks), which is jointly based at the universities of Torino and Pisa. It aims to develop diachronic and global research on the Silk Road(s) through the study of texts in various languages—without neglecting the contribution deriving from material culture artifacts and artistic products—between Asia and Europe. Two anonymous reviewers have given us important advice on improving this paper. We are also grateful to Philip Barras for polishing our English, and to Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz for her final revision. Unless otherwise stated, translations are our own.

Although the authors have worked together closely, section 2 is by Andrea Balbo, sections 1, 3, 5, and 6 by Elisa Della Calce, and sections 4, 7, and 8 by Simone Mollea.

role of Philippe Couplet SJ became that of a *trait d'union*.² A Flemish Jesuit, in the early 1680s he was first appointed procurator of the missions and, after returning to Europe, was particularly appreciated by Louis XIV's entourage.³ It is hard to believe that such appreciation was accidental. As Andreina Albanese has remarked, Jesuits in China would represent France's *longa manus*: their success in the East would in fact strengthen religious, economic, and political control by the French monarch over that area, at the expense of France's competitors, above all Portugal.⁴ The publication of the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, henceforth *CSP*, whose main aim was to spread Confucian thought in Europe⁵ and which can be regarded as the culmination of an 'intense atmosphere of China curiosity and sinophilia',⁶ must be set against this background.

This work came out in 1687 as the result of the cooperation of various authors, Couplet being one of the main ones and the last. It is thanks to his influence in the French court that the publication of this work became possible.

Right from the epistolary preface, addressed to the *Rex Christianissimus* (this title was customary in France by that time⁷), Louis XIV, Couplet aims to gain the king's benevolence.⁸ As was to be expected, Couplet immediately (p. III)⁹ stresses the fame of Louis' virtues¹⁰ but, at the same time, is quick to explain the reasons why he is proposing Confucius to him. As Thierry Meynard rightly puts it, 'this imaginary visit of Confucius to Louis XIV is a rhetorical device: the publication of the *Sinarum Philosophus* is compared to the coming of Confucius to Europe.'¹¹ Confucius is presented as *Sapientissimus et Moralis Philosophiae pariter ac Politicæ Magister et Oraculum* ('Wiseest Teacher and Oracle of both Moral and Political Philosophy', according to Meynard's translation), and we cannot but notice that ethics and politics are put on the same level and are therefore the two fields in which Confucius can serve as a model for the Christian king.¹² This paper argues that the focus was mainly on the political aspect. After all, as Meynard has remarked, Confucius's 'field of expertise does not cover the full range of the discipline according to the European curriculum.

² On the encounter between Western and Chinese cultures and the key role played by the Jesuits see, above all, Mungello (2009³). On French interests towards China during the XVII century, see Lundbaek (1991), 38 and Albanese (1996), who also pays much attention to the figure of Couplet. See also Witek (1990).

³ More details on Couplet's life, especially in the 1680s, in Mungello (1985), 253–57; more generally in Witek (1990), 145–56.

⁴ Cf. Albanese (1996), 381–83.

⁵ On the content and structure of the *CSP*, see Lundbaek (1991), 37–39 and Mungello (1985), 257–99.

⁶ Lundbaek (1979), 7.

⁷ On the title *rex Christianissimus* and its importance in the building of the absolute power in France cf. Krynen (1989).

⁸ See Balbo (2022), 120: 'the *Epistola Praefatoria* to king Louis XIV aims to be a great *captatio benevolentiae*.'

⁹ Roman numbers in brackets refer to the page in the *Editio princeps* of the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687).

¹⁰ Cf. Balbo (2022), 126–27 and n. 34.

¹¹ Meynard (2011), 84 n. 8. Cf. also Balbo (2022), 127.

¹² Cf. Mutschler (2019), 11 with reference to the *Lunyu*.

Metaphysics, mathematics, logic and physics are left out. Only one branch out of the five is acknowledged: Ethics, with its sub-branch, Politics.¹³

But a preface was not sufficient to enable Couplet to show the king why such a work was worth publishing beyond the mere cultural curiosity it could raise in the court of Versailles. Couplet knew that to succeed in this goal, the long *Proemialis Declaratio* (henceforth PD), which Mungello regards as ‘the interpretive core of the whole work’¹⁴, was far more suitable.

In the light of the above, the purpose of this contribution is to show that the PD, and consequently the entire *CSP*, can be read through the lens of the *specula principis* (‘mirrors for prince’): if, on the one hand, the success of this literary genre in France had long been established by the time of Louis XIV,¹⁵ on the other hand, the Chinese tradition too provides evidence for a politically oriented reading of Confucian books. This is the case, for instance, of some works by Zhang Juzheng and his commentaries on the *Four Books* in particular. Zhang Juzheng was a statesman and the regent of the Chinese empire during the first ten years of Wanli’s reign (1572–1582). In educating Wanli he also employed the *Four Books* as a work that could benefit the monarch.¹⁶ When Jesuits then wanted to translate the Confucian classics into Latin to spread them among European leaders first, and ‘common’ readers later, they also resorted to and included ‘extensive segments of [*scil.* Zhang Juzheng’s] commentary which are interlaced throughout the translations.’¹⁷ Thus it looks as if both the Western tradition of *specula principis* and Zhang Juzheng’s interpretation were present to the Jesuits who worked at the *CSP*.

Given their ends, *specula principis* are usually characterised by a focus on those virtues which are regarded as particularly fitting to educate a monarch. And the works by abbot Fleury, the most influential teacher at the court of Louis XIV, highlight that moral and religious education had to take pride of place, while the search for (encyclopedic) knowledge only came second.¹⁸ Accordingly, this paper will pay particular attention to the role played in the PD by some virtues, especially those which the *Vita Confucii*, another part of the *CSP*, attributes to Confucius. Curiously enough, it will emerge that they also pertain to the Western tradition of the *specula principis*, from classical antiquity to the modern age. See the relevant passage in the *Vita Confucii* (p. XCCIII):

¹³ Meynard (2011), 83 n. 4.

¹⁴ Mungello (1985), 25, who also says: ‘Following the dedication, *Confucius Sinarum philosophus* opened with a 106-page Proemialis Declaratio (Introductory exposition) which was signed, but apparently not entirely written, by Couplet. An examination of the manuscript of the work in the Bibliothèque Nationale Paris by Mr. Lundbaek has revealed two different styles of handwriting in the introduction, the second of which probably belonged to Couplet.’ Cf. also Lundbaek (1991), 37–38.

¹⁵ On the *specula principis* in France, cf. Born (1933), Krynen (1993), 170–204, Ferrari (1995), 552–57 and 570–74, Céard (2004).

¹⁶ Cf. Lundbaek (1981), 4, Meynard (2011), 34–35, 61–62, Meynard (2015), 22–35.

¹⁷ Mungello (1981), 18. On the reasons why the Jesuits endorsed Zhang Juzheng’s interpretation of the *Four Books*, cf. Lundbaek (1981), 9–10 and Mungello (1981), 16–19.

¹⁸ Cf. Pancera (2004), 313, 326–28.

Confucius autem rectam Populorum institutionem proposuit, tria illa (videlicet) vincula (quae sunt Regem inter et subditos, parentes et filios, maritum et uxorem) normam item quinque universalium virtutum (pietatis, iustitiae, prudentiae, fidelitatis, civilitatis) et Sinensis Imperii magnam symmetriam et formam.

Confucius has proposed the correct education for the nations: the three bonds, between the ruler and his subjects, between parents and children, between husband and wife; the norm of the five universal virtues, *pietas*, *iustitia*, *prudentia*, *fidelitas* and *civilitas*, the great order and pattern for the Chinese empire. (trans. Meynard, adapted)

Confucius is, therefore, the starting point and the person who recommends these crucial values. Yet, as we shall see, the classical-Christian literary tradition is the means through which such values are explained throughout the PD. As well as making clearer this paraenetical aim of the PD, the analysis of three of the five mentioned virtues—*pietas*, *iustitia*, and *prudentia*, as they are the most relevant within the genre of the *speculum principis*—will also show that Confucius’s thought does not come into conflict with Catholic orthodoxy.

But before looking in greater detail into the PD, the aforementioned virtues and their classical background, let us 1. provide a short contextualisation of Confucian ethics and its overall similarities with the Western, Roman *Weltanschauung*, as well as of the role classical authors played in Jesuit education and, consequently, in their role of mediators between Chinese and European cultures; and 2. explain what a ‘mirror for princes’ is about and how it relates to some crucial virtues belonging to Western classical thought.

2. CONFUCIANISM AND WESTERN CLASSICISM: THE MEDIATION OF THE JESUITS

Under the label “Confucianism” (*rìxué* 儒学), Chinese philosophy gathered concepts and ideas developed over many centuries, as well as doctrines attributed to Confucius himself (551–479 BC). Its cornerstones are:

1. Having a morally good character, which can then influence the world.
2. One of the most important virtues is *ren*, that is, *humanity* and *courtesy*.
3. Cosmic harmony is influenced by that virtue.
4. Politics as harmony: if the emperor has moral perfection, his reign will be peaceful.
5. Devotion to tradition.
6. Devotion to authority.
7. Filial piety.
8. Virtues depend on education, not on birth.

Some elements of Confucianism are close to the ethical principles of Western classical philosophy, in particular of the Stoic school, and go hand in hand with some traditional Roman values such as *pietas* and *virtus*, or with some keywords of Roman thought, which find their roots in Ancient Greece, as is the case with *humanitas*. Christian missionaries had already seized the opportunity to juxtapose, for instance, Seneca,

Epictetus, and Confucius; but similarities have also been detected between Confucius and Plato, Aristotle, Cicero and, in general, Roman rhetorical and political thought.¹⁹

Among these authors, Cicero takes pride of place. The presence of classical culture in Jesuit education is a topic that has received much, albeit not exhaustive, attention. Yet several scholars have shown how important Cicero was in the school system of Jesuit colleges and how deep his influence was on the thought of the fathers.²⁰ Not only did the reading of ancient Latin texts from the republican and imperial ages provide some basic elements of Latin culture and language along the lines established by the *Ratio Studiorum*, the programmatic manifesto of Jesuit pedagogy, but it also led the Jesuits to internalise the principles of Latin rhetoric. If we wanted to use a metaphor, we might say that, even when they undertook the enterprise of spreading Chinese culture in the West, the Jesuits drank from a twofold source: the classical world and the Christian-medieval world.²¹ To understand this phenomenon better we should rely on the contents of the *Ratio studiorum* (we refer to the 1599 edition).²² To begin with, it is worth recalling that the course included a cycle of general culture of eight years, five humanistically- and three philosophically-orientated. In the first part, which included the study of grammar, literature, and rhetoric, the study of Latin was central; history, geography and elementary ancient Greek were also studied. The second part dealt with the study of philosophy, enriched by scientific knowledge, especially mathematics, astronomy, physics and chemistry. This eight-year course was followed by another four-year course of theological specialisation, designed for future priests and those who chose to enter the Jesuit order.

The list of recommended Graeco-Roman authors is considerable, but at all levels Cicero's role is crucial. Moving from the lower to the higher classes, we see that *Common rule for the lower classes n. 30* specifies that compositions should 'be modeled on Cicero as much as possible', and that in the *Rules of the teacher of rhetoric* we read that 'Cicero is to be the one model of style', especially as far as his orations are concerned. Nor does the situation change when we look at the *Rules for the teacher of humanities*, as it says that 'knowledge of the language involves correctness of expression and ample vocabulary, and these are to be developed by daily readings in the works of Cicero, especially those that contain reflections on the standards of right living.' Finally, the *Rules for the highest grammar class* go as far as to name the Ciceronian works which help 'achieve a complete and perfect knowledge of grammar': these are letters *Ad Familiares*, *Ad Atticum*, *Ad Quintum Fratrem*, and the treatises *De Amicitia*, *De Senectute* and *Paradoxa*.²³

The *Ratio studiorum* aside, Cicero's preeminence in Jesuit education was also emphasised by many leading Jesuit humanists from the second half of the sixteenth century and beyond. Diego de Ledesma (1519–1575) for one, in his *De Ratione et Ordine Studiorum Collegii Romani* (1565), stressed that 'whatever is dictated by the

¹⁹ Cf. the papers collected in Balbo – Ahn (2019) and Balbo – Ahn – Kim (2022).

²⁰ Cf. Maryks (2008), Cueva – Byrne – Benda (2009).

²¹ Cf. Balbo (2020).

²² Quotations are taken from Farrell (1970).

²³ Further details on this in Balbo (2020), 169–71.

teacher ought to be directed as much as possible to the imitation of Cicero.²⁴ Two important personalities in this construction of a Jesuit-Ciceronian rhetoric are Cipriano Soares (1524–1593), author of *De arte rhetorica*, and Pedro Juan Perpiñan (Valencia, 1530 – Paris 1566), professor at the Collegio Romano and author of the speech *De rhetorica discenda* as well as of other works on this subject. They both highlighted the pivotal role that Cicero played in Jesuit education. Some years before the definitive publication of the *Ratio Studiorum*, in 1593, Antonio Possevino, one of the most important Jesuit thinkers of the sixteenth century, published his *Bibliotheca Selecta*, where he built a sort of canon of recommended readings for Catholics against all heresies and in defense of the Tridentine Church.²⁵ In this book, too, Cicero occupied a pivotal place, and his role was also maintained in the disputes among the French Jesuit theorists of eloquence in the seventeenth-century court, as Marc Fumaroli has shown.²⁶

Since Cicero was so relevant to the Jesuits, it is unsurprising that his knowledge could influence the fathers who were engaged with Chinese culture. As Maryks puts it:

Ciceronian imitation became an important part of the new Jesuit identity after 1548 and perhaps had an influence on non-Western thought as well. It is emblematic that the first book written in Chinese by the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610)—the symbol of the Jesuit rhetorical principle of accommodation—was a treatise on friendship Jiaoyou lun (1595), echoing obviously Cicero’s *Laelius on Friendship (De amicitia)*. His later *The Memory Palace* introduced to Chinese culture the Western rhetorical tradition of Aristotle, Quintilian and Cicero. I believe that we can talk here about a kind of Jesuit literary Renaissance—a Jesuit journey from Jerusalem to Athens and Beijing.²⁷

Actually, as Filippo Mignini has persuasively demonstrated, Ricci’s treatise, which includes 100 sentences in the final edition of 1601, probably derives in large part (at least three quarters of it) from a text by the Portuguese Jesuit Andres de Resende (*Andrea Eborensis*) and includes among its sources not only the wide and well-organised Ciceronian treatise, but also Aristotle and the Greek tradition.²⁸ Nonetheless, the importance of the Ciceronian reference is clear and allows the possibility to extend the analysis to the Jesuit texts concerning China²⁹.

3. VIRTUES AND SPECULUM PRINCIPIS: AN OVERVIEW

Once clarified the ways and extent to which Western classical education affected the Jesuits’ mind, we now turn to the second premise of our discourse, namely, what a *speculum principis* is and the role some virtues play within this genre.

A *speculum principis* is a kind of text which has two closely connected main purposes: didactical and political. The addressee is generally a ruler to whom the writer

²⁴ Maryks (2008), 90.

²⁵ See Balsamo (2006).

²⁶ Cf. Fumaroli (1980).

²⁷ Maryks (2008), 4.

²⁸ Cf. Mignini (2005).

²⁹ Cf. Balbo (2020), 155.

tries to suggest the best way to run a country. This he does by resorting to noble examples to follow and virtues to embody and show. Such virtues are often listed in sorts of catalogues and then explained throughout the course of the treatise. In this respect, classical antiquity provides a lot of case studies. Although there is uncertainty as to the origin of the expression *speculum principis*, most critics agree that the first fully-fledged ‘mirror for princes’ was Godfrey of Viterbo’s *Speculum regum*, written around 1180.³⁰ All the same, there is no denying that its roots are to be found in ancient Greek literature. Very little has come down to us from Aristotle’s *Peri basileias*, addressed to Alexander the Great, but even before that we can find hints of the future *specula principis* in some of Isocrates’s speeches (*Evagoras*, *Ad Nicoclem*). And the images of several Hellenistic sovereigns, as they are portrayed in different sources, back up the idea of the generous and benevolent monarch. Yet the term *speculum* is clearly Latin, and with general reference to the political sphere it appears for the first time in Cicero’s *De republica*, 2.69. Moreover, his oration *In defense of Marcellus* is often regarded as the forerunner of the *specula principis* in the Latin world and it was likely one of Seneca’s models for his *De clementia*.³¹ It is, in fact, in this treatise that Seneca addressed to Nero during the first years of his reign that the term *speculum* clearly appears with its didactical and political aims: *Scribere de clementia, Nero Caesar, institui, ut quodam modo speculi vice fungerer et te tibi ostenderem perventurum ad voluptatem maximam omnium* (‘I have undertaken to write on mercy, Nero Caesar, in order to act as a kind of mirror, showing you to yourself on the point as you are of attaining the greatest of pleasures’, trans. Cooper/Procopé). The idea is, therefore, that the king should look at himself as in a mirror, become judge of himself, then look at his subjects’ behaviour in order to be a sovereign who is capable of exercising his power conveniently without being hated by them. As the title itself suggests, Seneca gave pride of place to the virtue of *clementia*. This had already been exalted as a Caesarian attitude and, albeit implying an utterly different political programme, was reinvented by Augustus.³² In 27 BC, the *Senatus Populusque Romanus* consecrated the Shield of Virtues in the Curia Iulia. The text, as is reported in *Res gestae* 34.2, reads thus:

Quo pro merito meo senat[us consulto Au]gust[us appe]llatus sum et laureis postes aedium mearum v[estiti] publ[ice corona]ue civica super ianuam meam fixa est, [et clu]peus [aureu]s in [c]uria Iulia positus, quem mihi senatum pop[ulumq]ue Rom[anu]m dare uirtutis clement[iaequ]e iustitiae et pieta[tis caus]sa testatu[m] est pe[r e]ius clupei [inscription]em.

For this service, I was named Augustus by senatorial decree, and the doorposts of my house were publicly clothed with laurels, and a silk crown was fastened above my doorway, and a golden shield was set up in the Iulian senate house; through an inscription

³⁰ Cf. Bratu (2010), 1921. For a very rich bibliography on the genre of the *speculum principis* from antiquity to the modern age, see *ibid.*

³¹ Cf. Malaspina (2009), 50 and n. 111.

³² For a general overview of *clementia* in classical Latin texts, cf. Borgo (1985), Konstan (2005), and Malaspina (2009), 42–52.

on this shield the fact was declared that the Roman senate and people were giving it to me because of my valour, clemency, justice, and piety. (trans. A. Cooley)

The *clipeus* lists what the Romans regarded as the main virtues on which the State should be rebuilt after several years of civil wars. Interestingly enough, two of them, *iustitia* and *pietas*, also appear in the aforementioned list in the *Life of Confucius* and will crop up again in a passage of the PD we will be looking into in the next section: they are therefore worth investigating in detail.

4. *IUSTITIA, PIETAS, AND PRUDENTIA*

The *Oxford Latin Dictionary* defines *pietas* ‘an attitude of dutiful respect towards those to whom one is bound by ties of religion, consanguinity; towards a State or ruler, but also of government towards citizen [as is the case with the *clipeus*] and of troops to a commander.’³³ Although other, partly more recent, studies have shown that this concept is likely to be far more nuanced and already changed during the ancient period—even before the Christian authors reinvented it³⁴—this dictionary entry allows us to get a general idea of its meaning(s) and implications. What is particularly relevant for the purposes of a *speculum principis* is that the relationship that *pietas* establishes is mutual: subjects have duties towards the ruler and the State, but at the same time, the ruler and the State have to take care of the citizens.

In the Shield of Virtues *pietas* comes after *iustitia*. *Wertbegriffe* are always difficult to define once and for all, and *iustitia* is no exception.³⁵ Joseph Hellegouarc’h points out that in the *De officiis* Cicero went so far as to regard *iustitia* as the first virtue upon which Roman society as a whole was based.³⁶ The *OLD* defines it as ‘justice, fairness, equity’,³⁷ but to understand its implications better, let us give a couple of examples in which it is linked to other virtues, *pietas* in particular.

In the religious context of the *De natura deorum*, Cicero explicitly connects *iustitia* to *pietas*, defining the latter as justice towards gods (1.116: *est enim pietas iustitia adversum deos*).³⁸ As Stéphane Benoist and Anne Gangloff have remarked with reference to this passage, ‘cette typologie met en lumière toute la complexité de la vertu de justice, attachée à des champs d’activités très divers et à d’autres vertus (*clementia*, *liberalitas*, *pietas*), dont elle est à la fois distincte et interdépendante.’³⁹ On the other

³³ *OLD* (1968), s.v. *pietas*. Cf. also Bon – Guerreau-Jalabert (2002), 80–82.

³⁴ The bibliography on classical *pietas* is vast: cf., e.g., Hellegouarc’h (1963), 276–79, Schröder (2012), Alekna (2020). On the development of *pietas* in medieval Latin, cf. Bon – Guerreau-Jalabert (2002), 78–80.

³⁵ On the meaning of *iustitia* and its uses in classical and late-antique Latin, cf. Hellegouarc’h (1963), 265–67 and Benoist – Gangloff (2019). Cf. Mantovani (2017), 38–39, 51–53 on the relationship between *iustitia* and *aequitas*.

³⁶ Hellegouarc’h (1963), 266, with reference to Cic. *Off.* 3.28.

³⁷ *OLD* (1968), s.v. *iustitia*.

³⁸ On the religious aspect of *iustitia*, cf. Benoist – Gangloff (2019), 26–27.

³⁹ Benoist – Gangloff (2019), 27.

hand, Pliny the Younger, in an utterly different situation, praises Titius Aristo, one of Trajan's legal advisors, for his virtues, which include *pietas* and *iustitia* (*Epist.* 1.22.7). But perhaps most significantly, at *De republica*, 6.16 Cicero writes: *Sed sic, Scipio, ut avus hic tuus, ut ego qui te genui, iustitiam cole et pietatem quae, cum magna in parentibus et propinquis, tum in patria maxima est* ('But, Scipio, just as your grandfather here has done, as I who have begotten you have done, cultivate justice and piety. That is important with respect to your parents and relatives, but most important with respect to your fatherland'). This passage is taken from the *Dream of Scipio* and was also quoted by Macrobius in his commentary (1.4.4): it highlights the close connection between *iustitia* and *pietas* as well as their relationship to both the private and public spheres.

In the *Epistula ad Lucilium* 92.19, then, Seneca mentions the great importance of some virtues while speaking of the sage, and adds *prudentia*, *fides* and *fortitudo* to *pietas* and *iustitia*: *veneranda [...] sunt iustitia, pietas, fides, fortitudo, prudentia* ('For reverence is due to justice, duty, loyalty, bravery, and prudence'). While we note in passing that also *prudentia* and *fidelitas*, a close cognate of *fides*, are listed because of their prominence in the *Life of Confucius*, we linger a little on *prudentia* for a reason that will become clear soon. Let us look at the *OLD* once again: *prudentia* is 'practical understanding or wisdom', but also 'intelligence, providence.'⁴⁰ In short, it is the Latin for the Platonic *phronesis*.⁴¹

Pietas, *iustitia* and *prudentia*, as well as appearing together in the *Life of Confucius*, also come up in a fundamental passage of the PD. On p. XLVII, the PD reads:

Kien humanitatem significat, sive modestiam demissionemque animi [...] Kien [...] utraque sui parte tam superiori quam inferiori, designat Caelum materiale, a quo, ceu emblemate quopiam, formam Regis ac regiarum virtutum Confucius petit. [...] Quen, tota similiter designat Terram, estque subditorum emblema quodpiam sive symbolum: Coelum vero ac terra ambo sunt fundamenta quaedam, et quasi principia naturalia rerum omnium, quibus adeo per metaphoram patris matrisque nomen tribuitur. Exemplum vero institutionis Regum et subditorum Philosophus petivit in primis a caelo et terra, hoc est, ab illa tam perenni firmitate, tam equabili ordine cursuque rerum omnium, qui ordo quatuor literis Yven, hem, li, chim, hoc est, amplo ac perpetuo, claro ac manifesto, congruo ac decenti, recto ac solido, exprimitur. Haec autem per quatuor veluti virtutes Cardinales videlicet Gin, li, y, chi, id est, pietatem, convenientiam, iustitiam, prudentiam, Philosophus studet explanare.

Qian means kindness, modesty and humility of the soul [...] Both the upper and lower parts designate the physical heaven. Confucius draws from this emblem a model for the king and for the kingly virtues. [...] *Kun* designates the Earth, likewise in both parts. It is an emblem or symbol for subordinates. Heaven and earth are together the basis and the natural principles of all things. Metaphorically, the names of father and mother are attributed to them. In fact, the philosopher [Confucius] mostly took heaven and earth as model for establishing kings and subjects, because they represent such an everlasting

⁴⁰ *OLD* (1968), s.v. *prudentia*. Cf. also Hellegouarc'h (1963), 256–58.

⁴¹ Cf. Aubert-Baillet (2015).

stability, such a balanced order and direction of everything. This order is expressed by four letters: *Yuan, Heng, Li, Zhen*, that is, great and perpetual, clear and manifest, fitting and pleasing, correct and perfect. The philosopher strives to explain these through the four Cardinal virtues: *Ren, Li, Yi, Zhi*, that is, piety, convention, justice and prudence. (trans. Meynard)

Meynard comments: ‘The *Sinarum Philosophus* suggests a similarity between the four Confucian virtues and the four Christian Cardinal virtues. [...] While *yi* can approximate *iustitia*, however, the meaning of *ren* [...], *li* [...] and *zhi* [...] are quite remote from the Christian *prudentia, fortitudo* and *temperantia*.’⁴² Meynard’s reasoning calls for some clarification. First, he claims that the *CSP* draws a parallel between Confucian and Christian virtues. Secondly, as the Christian Cardinal virtues include *fortitudo* and *temperantia*, he mentions them although there is clearly no hint of them in the passage under investigation. Eventually, he concludes that Couplet’s comparison does not stand up to scrutiny, for the meanings of *prudentia, fortitudo* and *temperantia* are too different from their supposed Confucian equivalents. Clearly, the problem is that Meynard’s own parallelism does not stand up to scrutiny: in fact, Couplet does not mention *temperantia* and *fortitudo* at all in this context, which induces us to believe that Couplet’s point of reference was perhaps something else. Unlike Meynard, we are much more inclined to focus on the Latin meaning of the PD, without using the Chinese texts which lie at its roots as the main starting point. Accordingly, if we look at the Latin text with greater attention, we find out that all these virtues—*pietas, iustitia, and prudentia*—ultimately originate from the prince’s *humanitas*. Indeed, the passage first reveals the equivalence of *humanitas*, heaven and sovereign, and then claims that from heaven, that is, from the sovereign and *humanitas*, derive all the main royal virtues. Next, heaven is opposed to earth in the same way as a sovereign is opposed to his subjects, and this equation is brought forward through a metaphor: heaven corresponds to the father, earth to the mother, which shows a paternalistic understanding of sovereignty, the same we can also find in a very successful French *speculum principis* like Guillaume Budé’s *De l’institution du prince* (Paris 1547, on p. 31), as Jean Céard has highlighted.⁴³ Eventually, the virtues of the sovereign play the fundamental role of maintaining the cosmos stable.

Humanitas therefore emerges as the unifying principle of all the other virtues, an idea which dates back to Latin imperial encomiastic literature and, in particular, to Pliny the Younger’s *Panegyricus* in praise of Trajan.⁴⁴ This oration, of which the *Panegyricus* as we have it today represents a revised and published version, was delivered by Pliny in AD 100 to thank the emperor for bestowing the consulate on him. Among other virtues, Pliny exalts Trajan’s *humanitas* with special emphasis—there are as many as 7 occurrences of the term throughout—and does so right from the beginning, thereby setting a clear direction to his *gratiarum actio*. Following the old precept *Ab Iove principium*, the *Panegyricus* opens by invoking the gods and stating that Trajan is very

⁴² Meynard (2011), 148 n. 4.

⁴³ Céard (2004), 68.

⁴⁴ On the importance of *humanitas* in Pliny’s *Panegyricus*, cf. Rieks (1967), 244–48, and Braund (2012²), 93, 98.

similar to any one of them (§ 1.3: *dis simillimus princeps*). Yet, unlike his predecessor Domitian, he behaves and rules like a man among men—and this is his most extraordinary quality (2.4: *et hoc magis excellit atque eminent, quod unum <ille se> ex nobis putat nec minus hominem se quam hominibus praeesse meminit*, ‘and his special virtue lies in his thinking so, as also in his never forgetting that he is a man himself while a ruler of men’, trans. Radice). The term *humanitas* has not yet been mentioned, but it is sufficiently clear that the theme of Trajan’s humanness, or, more generally, of his human qualities, will be at the core of the speech. This becomes explicit soon, when at 2.7 *humanitas* is strikingly opposed to *divinitas*: *Quid nos ipsi? Divinitatem principis nostri an humanitatem, temperantiam, facilitatem, ut amor et gaudium tulit, celebrare universi solemus?* (‘What about us? Is it the divine nature of our prince or his *humanitas*, his moderation and his courtesy which joy and affection prompt us to celebrate in a single voice?’, trans. Radice). This juxtaposition, albeit rare, was not new in the literature of Pliny’s day. Cicero had regarded *divinitas* as superior to *humanitas*, identifying the former with the (high) qualities of the gods, the latter with the (lower) qualities of human beings. In contrast, not only does this passage seem to put humanness and divinity on the same level, but it implicitly suggests that *humanitas* could even be more important, at least to an emperor. As Roger Rees puts it, Trajan’s ‘simple *humanitas* sets him apart from the arrogance of former emperors and is clearly presented as being of great credit to him. Trajan is not a god, is not called a god and does not want to be treated as a god.’⁴⁵ Like in the passage from the PD under investigation, also in Pliny’s *Panegyricus humanitas* is therefore the presupposition, as it were, to the development of the ruler’s other main virtues.

Furthermore, not unlike the PD, in the same opening of the *Panegyricus*, Pliny reveals his paternalistic understanding of the principate. Just a few lines before opposing *humanitas* to *divinitas*, Pliny in fact claims: *Nusquam ut deo, nusquam ut numini blandiamur: non enim de tyranno sed de cive, non de domino sed de parente loquimur* (2.3: ‘Nowhere should we flatter him as a divinity and a god; we are talking of a fellow-citizen, not a tyrant, one who is our father not our over-lord’, trans. Radice), where we note in passing that the contrast between *tyrannus* and *civis* evokes another of the virtues mentioned in the *Life of Confucius*, that is, *civilitas*.

Once established that *humanitas*, so to speak, sets the agenda in the PD, and that this goes hand in hand with a practice which we already see present in the Western classical tradition, we can now move on to a deeper analysis of the other virtues listed in the *Life of Confucius*, as well as, in part, on p. XLVII of the PD. We do not intend to look at all the instances of these virtues throughout the PD, but at a selection, starting with *pietas*.

5. PIETAS

On p. XV of the PD (§ 1), Couplet talks about the authority of those Chinese classical texts, which he believes may also be of use to European readers. Within this discourse, he opens a historical parenthesis, and it is in this very context that we come across an interesting occurrence of *pietas*:

⁴⁵ Rees (2001), 163.

Etenim cum ipsis Confucii temporibus et fides, et pietas, et familiae Imperatoriae maiestas a multis negligereetur, et multum sane deflexisset de spatio curriculoque suo consuetudo Maiorum; nec multo post civilia Regulorum bella alia ex aliis exardescerent, quibus deinde regiae domus prope omnes implicatae fuerunt; commune etiam maximeque atrox librorum incendium extitisset, quale nec Alexandria, nec ulla pars orbis vel sensit unquam, vel audivit.

Thus, at the time of Confucius, the faith, piety and reverence for the imperial family had already been neglected. Many had completely strayed away from track and course of their Ancestors. Not long after, wars between minor kings raged, involving almost all the royal houses. Then, a huge and terrible burning of books occurred, such as neither Alexandria, nor any other part of the world has seen or heard about. (trans. Meynard)

Pietas is perceived as a traditional value in that it is related to the devotion towards the fathers, and the author blames those who distanced themselves from such a value. Couplet's description reaches its climax with the burning of books, which is seen as the total neglect of the noble cultural memory. This event, which is usually referred to as *fenshu*, took place in 213 BC, during the reign of emperor Qin Shi Huang. The use of the term *pietas* here is consistent with its Western classical understanding, that of respect and devotion towards family and homeland. After all, the influence of the pagan Latin tradition is made all the more clear by a precise quotation from Cicero's *Laelius de amicitia* 40: *deflexit iam aliquantum de spatio curriculoque consuetudo maiorum*, where we note in passing that this adds to other Ciceronian echoes in the PD that have been highlighted by Andrea Balbo.⁴⁶ What is more, the quotation from Cicero is absolutely relevant here, for the Latin author is talking about the growing distancing of senatorial oligarchy from the *mos maiorum*. But if we keep our focus on *pietas*, who would not immediately think of the *pious Aeneas* when speaking of this virtue in Roman culture?⁴⁷ The PD makes no exception in this respect, thereby offering us also an occurrence of *pietas* towards the divine. The chapter itself in which Aeneas crops up is titled, according to Meynard's translation, *More proofs of the Knowledge of God*. The text reads:

Cum igitur nulla sciantur olim hic fuisse portenta communia cum aliis gentibus, quibuscum China commercium aeternum per leges etiam interdixerat, non est cur hic expectes, aut fuisse existimes sacrificia sanguinolenta, aut turpia, qualia fuere Priapeia, Floralia, Sathurnalia, quibus sacer ille Senatus Populusque Romanus, et omnium gentium Dominator, iuventutem suam depravari patiebatur; non victimas infantium quas Sathurno suo Latini, et Diis quoque alienis Iudaei immolabant, non victimas hominum, quas pius Aeneas ille mortuorum manibus mittebat inferias, et huius exemplo Romani deinde Imperatores ac Senatores, non ludi theatrorum in sanguine humano, nec alia huiusmodi, quae Lactantius copiose commemorat, et explodit; a quibus omnibus adeo fuit semper

⁴⁶ Cf. Balbo (2020), 163–68, (2022), 127–30.

⁴⁷ On *pietas* in the *Aeneid*, cf. at least McLeish (1972), Wagenvoort (1980), 1–20, Rutledge (1987), Fernandelli (1999), Griffin (2014), Traina (2022²).

aliena gens Sinarum, ut vel referri ea ab Europaeo, aequis auribus animisque minime sustineret. (PD p. LXXXIII)

While no regular exchanges are known to have existed in the past with foreign countries, China has prohibited by law a permanent trade with them. There is no reason for you to expect or think that there were bloody victims, or shameful things, such as Priapeia, Floralia, Saturnalia, with which the venerable Senate and Roman People and the rulers of all nations allowed their youth to be perverted. There was no sacrifice of children, like the ones offered by the Romans to Saturn or by the Jews to the foreign gods. There were no human sacrifices like the ones that the pious Aeneas offered to the dead by his own hands (later, the Roman Commanders and Senators followed that example). There were no grandiose games with human blood, or the other things which Lactantius mentioned in detail in order to rebuke them. In all these things, the Chinese nation has always been different and could barely stand to hear of such practices from Europe if they were told of them. (trans. Meynard, adapted)

The reference is clearly to an episode from *Aeneid* 10, on which we quote a few words by Alessandro Barchiesi:

After Pallas's death Aeneas gives up any self-control and his actions recall, through explicit allusions, Achilles' raging slaughter in the Iliad to avenge Patroclus (cf. books 20 and 21). Deaf to supplications, sarcastic and cruelly dismissive even of family bonds (cf. especially 10.595–601), even ready to ritually sacrifice prisoners (517ff.), *pious Aeneas* strides the battlefield like Aegaeon.⁴⁸

The figure of Aeneas serves a twofold aim in Couplet's discourse. First, the presence of the phrase *pious Aeneas* in this context is striking and dissonant: it is not simply formulaic, for it shows that it is the gods who incited him to slaughter. Accordingly, Aeneas resorts to human sacrifices for the very reason of being *pious* by Roman pagan religion. It follows that *pietas* is understood in pagan terms, but is employed through the lens of Couplet's Christian view, which would be corroborated by the mention of Lactantius, who blames these bloody practices. Secondly, if Aeneas, the model *par excellence* of pagan *pietas*, is portrayed in rather darkened tones, this clearly strengthens, by contrast, the image of the *gens Sinarum* and of their ritual practices, which are therefore not condemned from Couplet's Christian viewpoint.

6. *IUSTITIA*

In the sequence of *Wertbegriffe* mentioned in the *Life of Confucius*, *pietas* is followed by *iustitia*. In the PD, *iustitia* appears in the catalogue of virtues we have already seen and is also employed to evoke the light originating from true faith, as is made evident by the phrase *Sol iustitiae* as an epithet of Jesus Christ. Furthermore, what is more interesting for the purpose of this paper is a passage in which the concept of justice is associated

⁴⁸ Barchiesi (2015²), 4. Cf. also Traina 2022², 378.

with the Western ancient idea of a Golden Age.⁴⁹ In Part 2, Chapter 5 of the PD Couplet aims at proving God's original uniqueness before the subversions caused all over the world by different forms of paganism. Of particular interest in this context is a quite long quotation from Lactantius:

Lactantius, errant, inquit, qui Deorum cultus ab exordio rerum fuisse contendunt et priorem esse gentilitatem quam Dei Religionem. Et alibi, regnante, inquit, Saturno, nondum Deorum cultibus institutis, nec adhuc ulla gente ad divinitatis opinionem consecrata, Deus utique colebatur.

Quo etiam spectat illa a Poetis tam decantata aurea aetas, qua exacta finxere iustitiam offensam vitiis hominum cecidisse e terris et in coelum remigrasse. (PD p. LXXV)

Lactantius has said: 'Wrong are the people who claim that many gods were worshipped from the very beginning and that paganism existed before God's religion.' And elsewhere he also said: 'In the age of Saturn, the worship of gods was not yet established; until then people did not vow any opinion about their divine power; God alone was worshipped.' This golden age, so praised by the Poets, was turned toward God, but, after it finished, justice became hurt by human vices, left the earth and returned to heaven. (trans. Meynard, adapted)

All this discourse comes from Lactantius' *Divinae Institutiones* 5.5.1–2, a book entirely devoted to the concept of justice. In particular, the passage related to the *aurea aetas* in Lactantius reads thus:

Hi [scil. poetae] plane intellexerunt abesse hanc [scil. iustitiam] a rebus humanis eamque finxerunt offensam vitiis hominum cecidisse terra in caelumque migrasse ('The poets clearly understood that justice was remote from human activities, and they created a story that it had fled the earth and migrated to heaven because it was offended at people's wickedness', trans. Bowen/Garnsey). As Umberto Boella put it: 'Lactantius gives an interpretation of the Golden Age as well as of the transition from Saturn's to Jupiter's reign which is consistent with his apologetic purpose. The Golden Age is that in which one sole God is worshipped. The disappearance of that age is the consequence of religious distortion.'⁵⁰ As is evident, these words equally apply to Couplet,⁵¹ while the image of justice that abandons the earth is already in Hesiod's *Erga* 190–201, Aratus's *Phaenomena* 100–105, Vergil's *Georgica* 2.473–74 (*iustitia excedens terris*). In a specular manner, during the Golden Age justice is represented as untouched by evil (*inviolata malis*), as emerges from the Latin translation of the *Aratea*, attributed to Germanicus, in line 104.

Often quoted in the PD within lists of virtues, justice also appears as an imperial value, which is important but should be mitigated by clemency. This is what Couplet writes on p. LXXXIV of the PD:

⁴⁹ On the Golden Age in Western classical literature, cf. Epps (1934), Baldry (1952), Reckford (1958), Wallace-Hadrill (1982), Guastella (1992), Perkell (2002, with reference to Vergil).

⁵⁰ Boella (1973), 479 n. 37.

⁵¹ Cf. Von Collani (1990), 43–45.

Tametsi vero erga criminum reos iustitiae rigor servaretur, erat tamen etiam hic suus clementiae locus, quatenus scilicet per tam vastum Imperium, ab nemine fas erat damnatum quempiam capitis, morti addici, nisi prius ab ipsomet Imperatore sententia fuisset approbata, ut nihil iam dicam de publica subinde noxarum condonatione, et carcerum relaxatione.

When it comes to criminals, rigorous justice was maintained, but there was room for clemency, to the extent that if someone was lawfully condemned to death penalty in such a vast empire, the sentence was carried out only if it was first approved by the Emperor himself. I think I don't have to mention here public forgiveness and release from prison. (trans. Meynard, adapted)

Once again, we face here a topic that is common to the genre of the mirror for princes, as emerges, for example, from Seneca's *De clementia* 2.3–4.1 and Pliny the Younger's *Panegyricus* 80: *Quid? In omnibus cognitionibus, quam mitis severitas, quam non dissoluta clementia! Non locupletando fisco sedes, nec aliud tibi sententiae tuae pretium, quam bene iudicasse* ('Now let me turn to judicial matters, where you showed how strictness need not be cruel nor mercy weak. You did not mount the tribunal for the purpose of enriching your private exchequer, and the only reward you sought in passing sentence was knowledge that justice had been done', trans. Radice). And to come closer to the *CSP* both in terms of time and space, in the *Grant Monarchie de France* (1519), Claude de Seyssel had regarded justice as one of the main limitations to the power of French kings.⁵²

7. PRUDENTIA

No less interesting, neither in terms of its relationship to the Greek and Latin ancient authors nor within the domain of the mirror of princes, is the case of the already mentioned *prudentia*, on which we want to focus now. Plato (*Phd.* 69a–c, *R.* 433b–c, *Lg.* 631c–d, 964b, 965c–d) regarded its Greek equivalent, *phronesis*, as one of the four main virtues, alongside courage (*andreia*), temperance (*sophrosyne*) and, of course, justice (*dikaiosyne*), with which we have just dealt. *Phronesis* also became crucial to Aristotle's thinking, especially in *Nicomachean Ethics* Book 6. Its etymology links it to *phren*, which in Homer indicates both the heart as the seat of passions and the mind as the seat of thought. Accordingly, by and large, *phronesis* indicates the act of thinking, perception through intelligence, reason, and wisdom.⁵³ Yet, if we focus on its political dimension in Isocrates's educational programme, as it emerges, for example, from the *Antidosis*, *phronesis* also becomes 'the highest form of practical intelligence' as well as 'a wise

⁵² Cf. Céard (2004), 67.

⁵³ Aubert-Baillet (2015), 69.

practice of decision-making [...], a practice that merged together wisdom, eloquence and statesmanship, all in one'.⁵⁴

In translating the Greek virtues into Latin, the Romans seemed to take for granted that the natural equivalent of *phronesis* was *prudentia*. But at the same time, they were well aware that *prudentia* derives from *pro-videntia*, from the root of *video*, thereby connecting it to the idea of seeing in advance—a passage from Cicero's *De republica* makes this all the more clear: *Totam igitur expectas prudentiam huius rectoris, quae ipsum nomen hoc nacta est ex providendo* (*Rep.* 6.1 fr. 1, apud Non. p. 60.2–4 Lindsay: 'Therefore, you expect the complete prudence of this guide, the very name of which originated in foreseeing', trans. Fott). In his early treatise *De inventione*, by resorting to a definition which also the Stoics liked (Stob. 2.7.5b1, p. 59.5–6 W. (= *SVF* 3.262 = *LS* 61H), Cicero explains it as *rerum bonarum et malarum <ne>utrarumque scientia* ('knowledge of what is good, what is bad and what is neither, 2.160), and adds that, together with *iustitia*, *fortitudo*, and *temperantia*—here are Plato's quartet—*prudentia* forms the *honestum*, that is, *quod aut totum aut aliqua ex parte propter se petitur* ('what is searched for in its own, either in its entirety or in part', *Inv.* 2.159).

Along the lines we have followed so far, we keep our focus on the political aspect of *prudentia*. In this respect, Cicero's definition at *De republica* 6.1, just quoted, is crucial, as the context is clearly political—*prudentia* is what we should expect by any ruler (*rector*), and, more generally, we have already stressed that the *De republica* is a sort of *speculum ante litteram*. Cicero sets himself as a follower of the Aristotelian tradition, which was later reinvented by the Christian and scholastic traditions and reached its climax with Thomas Aquinas. Couplet seems to reveal his knowledge of the political ideology of Aristotle through the mediation of Thomas, whose name is explicitly mentioned in the PD. But on a couple of occasions in particular, he resorts to an expression, *politica prudentia*, which is extremely rare in all Latin—in classical Latin, in particular, it does not occur, and the adjective *politicus* itself is infrequent—but appears quite often in Giles of Rome's *De regimine principum*. Giles of Rome was a pupil of Thomas Aquinas and, as Christian Bratu remarks, his 'the *De regimine principum* was commissioned by Philip the Bold for his son (the future Philip the Fair) and written around 1277–1279. Giles's book is probably the most successful mirror for princes of the Middle Ages, as it was transcribed in over 300 manuscripts and translated in various European languages.'⁵⁵ Of the two occurrences of *politica prudentia* in the PD, of particular relevance is that on p. XXXVII, at the beginning of Chapter 5, titled *School of the Literati, or Philosophers; Basis and Principle Established by Ancient and Modern Interpreters* (that is, Chinese Interpreters of Confucian thought):

Prisca Sinarum aetas, sapientiae, prudentiae, ac reliquarum virtutum syncera cultrix et Magistra, cum admirabilem coeli terraeque ordinem et constantiam semper admirata fuit, tum etiam perquam sollicite studioseque conata est imitari: [...] Politicae vero prudentiae

⁵⁴ Poulakos (2004), 56 and 57 respectively. More extensively on *phronesis* in Isocrates, cf. Depew (2004), 159–73, and Poulakos (2004), 56–62.

⁵⁵ Bratu (2010), 1937. More extensively on the figure of Giles of Rome, Briggs (1999) and Briggs – Eardley (2016). Cf. also Krynen (1993), 179, 187.

industriæque summa hæc erat, ut qui imperabant, filiis imperare se crederent; qui parebant, patribus se parere.

In cultivating and teaching wisdom, prudence and the other virtues, Ancient China has always considered the order and constancy of heaven and earth, striving to imitate them thoroughly, with enthusiasm and zeal. [...] This political prudence and arrangement was so perfect that those who commanded believed that they were giving orders to their own sons; those who obeyed believed that they were obeying their own fathers. (trans. Meynard)

Several notions that we have already found before also appear in this passage. First, politics as a practice, which should aim at a good balance between the different components of Chinese society, in the same way as the equilibrium between heaven and earth safeguards the cosmos. Secondly, once again we meet the paternalistic view of sovereignty. What this passage adds is that political *prudentia* is one of the premises to both. Indeed, following in Aristotle's footsteps, Giles of Rome had explicitly formulated the importance of *politica prudentia* when it comes to the virtues a ruler should possess. Take, for example, what he says in two places of *De regimine principum* Book 1: *Cum igitur perfecta virtus secundum Philosophum in vita politica sit Prudentia* (ed. Rome 1607, 1.12, p. 37: 'Since, according to the Philosopher, the perfect virtue in political life is *prudentia*') and *Si autem est homo, quia homo [...] est naturaliter animal sociale, civile, et politicum, sequitur quod regatur secundum prudentiam, et vivat vita politica* (1.4, p. 12: 'If this is truly a man, since man is by nature a social, civil and political animal, it follows that he must be guided by *prudentia* and must live a political life').

Of the other occurrences of *prudentia* we can find in the PD, particularly interesting seems to be the one attributed to Matteo Ricci SJ, 'a pioneer in formulating the Jesuit missionary approach to China.'⁵⁶ The last chapter of Couplet's PD is entirely devoted to the praise of Matteo Ricci and his crucial role as a missionary who succeeded in reconciling the Catholic moral with Confucianism and Chinese culture. Having listed some of the Jesuits' main achievements in China, Couplet concludes (p. CXI): *haec, inquam, omnia cum divinae potissimum bonitati sapientiaeque referri debeant accepta, tum etiam Riccio nostro, cuius virtus ac prudentia Deo tam feliciter hic famulata est, suae debentur gratiae, sua laus est tribuenda* ('Really, all these things should be attributed, first, to divine benevolence and wisdom, and then to our Ricci. Since his virtue and prudence served God so perfectly, he should be thanked and praised', trans. Meynard, adapted).

8. CONCLUSION

In translating some of the most important Confucian texts into Latin with the aim of spreading their knowledge across Europe, Couplet resorted both to an epistolary preface and quite a long *Proemialis Declaratio*: while in the former he looked for Louis XIV's endorsement, with the latter he took on a broader perspective on sovereignty in general.

⁵⁶ Mungello (2009), 19.

The PD reveals an ample use of both pagan and Christian classical sources, and very often these are mentioned in connection to *Wertbegriffe*. Our focus has been on those value concepts which are regarded as crucial to Confucianism in the *Life of Confucius*, another part of the *CSP*. As we hope our analysis has shown, *pietas*, *iustitia*, and *prudentia* tend to preserve their classical meanings while not ignoring their later developments. In this respect, in addition to Christian authors, like Lactantius, Couplet seems to reveal knowledge of the later Aristotelian tradition as embodied by Thomas Aquinas and, perhaps even more, as far as the political sphere is concerned, by Giles of Rome. The juxtaposition in the PD of these virtues and their connection with the notion of *speculum principis*, from Seneca's *De clementia* to the *De regimine principum* of Giles of Rome, reveals the vitality, on the one hand, of pagan and Christian intersections and, on the other hand, of the relationships between Eastern and Western cultures as seen through the lens of the Jesuits. Accordingly, along these same lines, the analysis of further Latin translations of Chinese texts may also contribute to expanding our knowledge of an interesting literary genre as that of the mirror for princes.

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