

Giulio Aleni's Adaption and Interpretation of Chinese Confucian Culture

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Abstract

Giulio Aleni with the mission from Society of Jesus came to China for Catholic missionary work in 1610 and died in Yanping Fujian Province in 1649, altogether living in China for thirty-nine years. Giulio Aleni, who was the most popular Catholic missionary by the literati of China and was called him 'Confucius from the West', was proficient in Chinese language, learned a lot, and wrote many books and had a reputation in China for his quick wit. Giulio Aleni followed the view provided by Matteo Ricci to divide Chinese Confucianism into Pre-Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism; then believed that Catholic righteousness and Pre-Confucianism had some similarities or commonalities in the fields of faith and worship, ethics and etiquette of the highest god; also thought that the taiji, li and qi of Neo-Confucianism are not the original or creator of all things in the world, but something of material and Meta nature; and used western philosophy theory to interpret the inner taiji of Neo-Confucianism in Song and Ming Dynasty as an external material. Through analyzing the similarities and differences between Catholicism and Confucianism, he presupposes a dependency relationship between the God concept of Western Christianity and Chinese Confucian concepts, in order to consciously reduce the status of the metaphysical system of Confucianism, and put it under the theory of Western Christian creationism.

Key words: Giulio Aleni; Adaption and interpretation; Chinese confucian culture

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INTRODUCTION

Giulio Aleni (1582-1649), a Jesuit from Italy, whose Chinese name is Ai Rulue and pseudonym is Siji, arrived at Macau after his promotion as a Roman Catholic priest in the year of Wanli of Ming Danasty (1610) and next year entered the Mainland. He preached in Beijing, Shanghai, Yangzhou, Shaanxi, Shanxi and Hangzhou etc. "Prime Minister of Ming Dynasty Ye Xianggao resigned to go home in 1624 and passed through Hangzhou where visited Jules, then invited him to Fujian because of amazing Aleni's knowledge and got the promise." (Louis, 1932/1995, p.134) From 1625, Giulio Aleni came to Fujian to preach to make promise for Prime Minister of Ming Dynasty Ye Xianggao and died in Yanping Fujian Province in 1649, altogether living in China for 39 years. Giulio Aleni was proficient in Chinese language, learned a lot, and wrote many books and had a reputation in China for his quick wit and the Chinese people called him "Confucius from the West". (Louis, 1932/1995, p.136) "He is the most popular Catholic missionary of the literati in China, and Such a lofty claim is not even acquired by Matteo Ricci." (Fang, 2011, p.130) "No one can be more virtuous, more talented, more meritorious, and more capable of educating the people than Mr. Aleni." (Li, 1640/2002, p.235)

1. TO COMPOSE A CHRONICLE OF THE BIRTH OF GOD'S WORDS AND DEEDS TO ADAPT TO CONFUCIAN CULTURE

A chronicle of the birth of god's words and deeds, which was composed with a total of 8 volumes in Fuzhou from

1635 to 1637, was the earliest gospel translated by a missionary in China. The archives of the Roman Catholic Jesuits had a collection numbered Jap. Sin I.79 which was a photocopy of the Catholic literature of the Ming and Qing Dynasties in the Jesuit Rome Archives edited by Zhong Mingdan and Du Dingke. *A chronicle of the birth of god's words and deeds* consists of three parts: the general preface concluding the ancient scriptures which are the scriptures before the birth of God, and the new scriptures which are four gospels; the text divided into four parts describing the life story of Jesus such as the magical birth, the childhood life, the missionary activities and the crucifixion of Jesus; the appendix which is a poem written by Xu Guangqi. As a version of Chinese translation of the Gospel, a chronicle of the birth of god's words and deeds shows that the Gospel is different from the Gospel, which is the result of the integration of Confucian Culture and the preservation of Gospel innocence.

1.1 To Rewrite the Background of the Birth of Jesus With the Help of Chinese Mythology

The story of the birth of some important characters was recorded in the classics of Chinese culture. For example, *the Book of Songs* said: "A woman eats swallow eggs, bears the ancestors of the Shang Dynasty and their lives had flourished since then". (Fang, 1986, p.647) *The Emperor's History Book* described the scenes of Fuxi, Yin Qi and Shaohao when they were born: "in the age of fusiliers, a giant came out of the pool, leaving a huge footprint, Huaxu stepped on it, miraculously pregnant, gave birth to Fuxi in the Chengji. While bathing in the Xuanqiu river, she ate the egg a swallow born, then slit her stomach and gave birth to the Qi. When the Emperor likes a rainbow of stars fell in Huazhu. Nvjie has a sense of the dream, then born Shaohao who is also known as Xuanqi". (Huang, 1997, p.2) There were also records of the miraculous birth of Confucius: "Confucius was born on the Gengwu day of October, which is August 27 at present. There were two dragons hovering over the roof that night, and the five old men which are actually five star fairies came into home." (Kong, 1936, p.205) In this book, Jules quoted ancient Chinese mythological ideas to speak to the literati and to preach Jesus Christ as a way to show his divinity. So in telling the story of the birth of Jesus, he abandoned the speculative "Tao into the flesh" in the Gospel of John and chose the narrative of the Gospel of Luke and the Gospel of Matthew about the birth of Jesus. In addition, similar to the birth of ancient Chinese saints, Jesus was born with a variety of natural phenomenon, such as solar eclipses in Spain, the collapse of the pagan temple of eternal peace in Rome, and in places where "the sweet spring changed into the polluted spring" and so on. Jesus was able to finish Exorcism and treatment in his infancy, showing God's powers. Therefore, Gilmia, the sage of the vintage, often traveled to this country, the pre-language magic temple people said: "A little girl came here with

a baby, the magic image into dust." (Giulio, 1642/2003, p.661) He used the mythological stories which were not found in the Gospels to illustrate the divinity of Jesus.

1.2 To Apply the Confucian Culture of Filial Piety to Rewrite Jesus' Missionary Activities

Considering there were great differences between the teachings of Christianity and the orthodox ethics of Confucianism, Giulio Aleni adjusted the content of Jesus' missionary activities in order to reduce the impact of Christianity as a heterogeneous culture on Chinese orthodoxy.

At the ninth chapter of *Luke Gospel* Jesus let a man follow him, and the man said, "Lord, let me first go and bury my father", Jesus said, "let the dead bury the dead, and preach the word of the kingdom of God", and another said, "Lord, I will follow thee, but let me go and say good-bye to my families". (Giulio, 1642/2003, p.157)

The practice of Jesus here teaching dead fathers not to manage their fathers' funerals was clearly not in line with the late Ming mainstream of Confucian filial piety. The relationship between the ministers and the monarch was equivalent to the relationship between the son and the father, when the monarch and father were alive, the ministers and the son should respect them, when the monarch and father were dead, the ministers and the son would mourn them. Therefore, to be truly faithful and filial, it was necessary to use all kinds of means, not a little false. The analects of Confucius also recorded: "parents in, not far away, travel must be good." That is to say, when parents are alive, do not go far, if you must go far, there must be a certain place to go. Confucius and Mencius both advocated the three-year period of death set by Zhou Li, that is, children should be filial piety for the dead parents for three years to do filial piety. (Liu, 1982, p.157)

Since Han Dynasty, the decree also clearly stipulated that when their parents were dead the children must observe filial piety for three years. To conform to the Confucian culture of filial piety these two words were rewritten by Jules, and Jesus said. Giulio rewrote these words into another, saying: "my god, please give me some time to bury my father," Jesus said: "follow the meaning of the dead, let them bury themselves, and you can follow me to the kingdom of heaven to preach." Another man appeared on the road, saluted Jesus and said he wanted to follow him. Then he said, "I need to temporarily return home and then quit home to follow you." Giulio slightly replaced "father" and "farewell to the family" with the vague words "ancestors" and "go to home and resignation", avoiding the content that caused trouble. (Giulio, 1642/2003, p.668)

1.3 To Expound the Course of Interpreting the Crucifixion of Jesus Through the Classical Allusions of Chinese Confucianism

In his famous book, *Kouduorichao*, Giulio Aleni borrowed from the story of Chengtang coming across

difficulties from *Book of Documents*, which was the Chinese Confucian Classic, to give the literati and officials evidence of the difficult experience of Jesus. Here is a talk from the book *Kouduorichao*.

Literati said: "God is the most honorable who was born with difficulties. I am very confused why the most honorable God was suffered the pinning." (Giulio, 1630/2003, p.467)

The priest said: "The suffering of the nail cone is the grace of God, and it would not have been so easy to understand it if it had not been carefully studied the classics. Well, I'll give you a little explication. In the history books of China, I have only seen Chengtang pray in the mulberry forest, cut off his hair, cut off his claws, and wear white thatched grass as a sacrifice. What response would be the bystanders make to the aboveboard emperor who crawled down to replace the sacrifice? However, Tang was able to forget his dignity and was so sincere that gave his compassion for his people. Now God is very noble, listening to the people by himself, surveying the sufferings of the people, and doing his best to restrain his majestic majesty, but the redeemer who has endured his tribulation is the true monarch who can give it to others." (Giulio, 1630/2003, p.468)

As an interpretation of the crucifixion of Jesus in ancient China, Jules took the example of the sacrifice of the emperor of the Shang Dynasty for the people. In addition, in the records of ancient Chinese history, the death of great men will always be accompanied by some strange natural phenomena. When he described the crucifixion of Jesus, Jules also highlighted the obvious images of "solar eclipses over many countries on the day of doom", "the sudden fall of the stone of the banshee in front of the main hall" and "the opening of the curtain in the temple" to mean that Jesus is also the "true Lord". (Giulio, 1642/2003, p.661)

From these three aspects we can know, when he preached the story of Jesus, referring to the mainstream cultural background of the late Ming Dynasty society, Giulio Aleni adopted naturalized interpretation to adapt his gospel to Chinese Confucian ethics as much as possible, thus reducing his resistance to spreading Christianity among the literati and officials.

2. AGREE WITH RECOGNITION OF CATHOLICISM AND "PRE-CONFUCIANISM"

Giulio Aleni inherited the idea, provided by Matteo Ricci, which was of Recognition of Catholicism and "pre-Confucianism" and believed that Catholic righteousness and Confucian culture had some similarities or commonalities in the fields of faith and worship, ethics and etiquette of the highest god.

First of all, the commonalities between Catholic righteousness and Confucian culture were reflected in the faith and worship of the highest god.

The book of Jules Kouduorichao had the following records:

The premier said: "The establishment of the city god is not by human beings. Those who think they have a surname, the common man see him." (Giulio, 1630/2003, p.633)

The priest said: "That is well, but a bulletin board should be built, that is "God's order is to protect the god of this city." That is to say, the sacrament of the holy religion is used, not Buddha, the old false, false gifts for its righteous." (Giulio, 1630/2003, p.633)

When Chinese Confucians repeatedly spread the order that the God of the city was indeed the true God to guard the city and its place, not the self-shaping human statue to get fortune, Giulio Aleni make original Chinese folk worship God of protecting the city into the Christian God system through the symbolic conversion of the writing wooden card, so that China's traditional "Native God" and Western Christianity "Foreign Gods" were tolerant of each other.

Secondly, the commonalities between Catholicism and Confucian culture were reflected in the ethical aspects.

Giulio Aleni gave wide publicity to his believers:

"You should adhere to the five-judge division regularly since you have learned the Tao! You Must. You must correctly and regularly see, hear, say, and do anything by your eyes, ears, mouths, hands and feet. Make people know you are a man of high moral and virtuous character." (Giulio, 1630/2003, p.610)

Giulio Aleni here used the famous Confucius proverb "if you are not polite, please do not see, hear, say, acts anything." (Giulio, 1630/2003, p.610) Its meaning to do a change and extension, indicating that the first to China's day science still have to use the long-standing traditional Confucianism to achieve their own purposes, in order to deep public opinion.

Giulio Aleni here changed and extended its meaning into realizing his purpose through the famous Confucius proverb which is "if you are not polite, please do not see, hear, say, act anything," showing Christianity just coming into China had to connect Chinese traditional Confucianism for winning the will of the Chinese people.

Thirdly, the commonalities between Catholic righteousness and Confucian culture are reflected in the ritual customs of sacrificing the dead.

On the one hand, Giulio Aleni gave an affirmative for the grand degree of the traditional etiquette about the Chinese memorial ceremony of sacrifice. He said: "when I observed the manners of the China, I think it shows the sincerity of the son of the deceased to set up a portrait of the deceased and a wooden owner." (Giulio, 1630/2003, p.610)

On the other hand, he tried to limit and restrain this ritual custom with the invisible "Tao" of the Catholic Church, and admonished the faithful who held the traditional sacrifice of the undead, "Today's action, for

the Tao, not for the world. If one cannot be out of the ordinary, then go a long way.” (Jules, 1630/2003, p.610) In order to Integrate Chinese traditional customs and Christian theory Giulio Aleni put forward the principle of coordination that it’s better to be ignorant of Tao and filial piety, so advocated that the believer should carry on a set of sacrifice ceremony of Integration not only Chinese and Western but also Tao and filial piety.

3. TO INTERPRET CORE CONCEPT OF NEO-CONFUCIANISM OF SONG AND MING DYNASTIES

Giulio Aleni’s exposition of Neo-Confucianism in Song and Ming Dynasty was mainly reflected at the book “Sanshanlunxue” which discussed God between Jules and Ye Xiangguo, a famous premier at the end of Ming Dynasty, in Fuzhou. Giulio Aleni analyzed some issues about qi and li in this book, and he said,

One asks two qis work well, don’t they, the principle of inhibition. One says that two qi can’t produce changing material, form the appearance of things, and reason is the criterion of things, which depends on things, but can’t make full use of them. The book of songs says, if there is some material, then there is some principle that is li. There must be some material first, and then there is li. Li can’t produce all things, for example, legal prohibition, which is the principle of governance, refers to legal prohibition. If the law is forbidden, the principle of governing the country, and points out the legal prohibition, it’s you, who gives orders for him, and four districts?

If li comes early than material, I will attribute the principle, which material is earlier, to God’s wisdom from creator. This is that nature still has everything, and his infinite wisdom must first contain the li of all things, and then, according to its inclusion, make all kinds of things. Take writing an article for example, before writing it a good idea collocated the real topic is a must, which is called li. However, But whose destiny is to organize the main idea and structure, let this li Jump like this? We can see that li can’t be given ownership; there must be one who describes his own article. From these facts, the li of living things can’t be biological, and there is no doubt about the other owner of creating the living things. (Giulio, 1625/2003, p.331)

Giulio Aleni also talked about relationship between taiji, qi and li in this book, and he said,

The explanation of taiji is only two characters li and qi, and there is not meaning of spiritual perception in it. Since there is no spiritual perception, how can they control the changes of all things? I think that the relation between sky and earth is as same as that of shingles and the official room. The li is almost like the scale of the room. One of them is not allowed, but there is also craftsman, who makes the front hall and the back bedroom, the kitchen door wall, the pillar beam and the rafter of the room. The scholars also say: Everything

has a Taiji, is not taiji the essence of matter and is it the same with the things? Since they are in the same body with things and are limited to things, they can’t be the masters of heaven and earth. Therefore, you always say so much in your country but do not say anything exact about Taiji. (Giulio, 1625/2003, pp.331-332)

From these two paragraphs we can know that the way Giulio Aleni explains Neo-Confucianism of Song and Ming Dynasty that yin and yang are the raw materials of forming things, which can’t surpass the things, and “can’t change the materials and form the shape of things”; he borrowed the famous sentence “there is material where there is rule (li)” in *the Book of Songs* and used the analogy of writing the articles to deduce the material earlier appears than li and li should depend on but not create the material, so that the creation and fundamental significance of li can’t be depended. Giulio Aleni also points out that the connotation of taiji is nothing more than two characters of li and qi, since li and qi have no “spiritual perception”, they can never dominate the change of all things. Finally, through Confucianism’s “each thing has its own taiji”, Jules points out that taiji is only “the meta quality of thing” (a basic material), like the first material of Aristotle’s theory of form and quality, which is the same with thing and can’t be the master of heaven and earth, and can’t be the source of all things. In a word, his strategy is using western philosophy theory to interpret the inner taiji of Neo-Confucianism in Song and Ming Dynasty as an external material.

CONCLUSION

To sum up, Giulio Aleni believed that Catholic righteousness and Pre-Confucianism had some similarities or commonalities in the fields of faith and worship, ethics and etiquette of the highest god. He also thought that the taiji, li and qi of Neo-Confucianism are not the original or creator of all things in the world, but something of material and Meta nature, and the materials used for creation. Their position was lower than that of the creator God, which was the creation of God, not be the origin of all things. Through analyzing the imitation of core philosophy concept about Neo-Confucianism in Song and Ming Dynasty such as taiji, li and qi, he presupposed a dependency relationship between the God concept of Western Christianity and these Chinese Confucian concepts, in order to consciously reduce the status of the metaphysical system of Confucianism, and put it under the theory of Western Christian creationism.

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