

# Matteo Ricci's depictions of Alexander the Great in Late Ming China<sup>★</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

Scholarship has analysed at length the Alexander tradition in the West and the Near East, but almost neglected the flourishing Alexander tradition in China.<sup>1</sup> This lacuna stems from two principal reasons. The first is the lack of a Chinese version of Pseudo-Callisthenes' Greek *Alexander Romance*. The second is the scattered distribution of Alexander stories across a large corpus of Chinese encyclopaedias and Jesuit writings. In addition, extant studies have neglected the peculiarity of Chinese Alexander texts in the global literary network and disregard the origin, parallel dissemination and literary tradition of Alexander texts in China.<sup>2</sup> These shortcomings have further impeded interdisciplinary and cross-cultural investigations of European Alexander stories transmitted by Jesuits in late Ming China (1573–1644).

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<sup>1</sup> For Alexander tradition see George Cary, *The Medieval Alexander* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956); Kenneth R. Moore (ed.), *Brill's Companion to the Reception of Alexander the Great* (Leiden: Brill, 2018); David Zuwiyya (ed.), *A Companion to Alexander Literature in the Middle Ages* (Leiden: Brill, 2011); Richard Stoneman, Kyle Erickson and Ian Netton (eds.), *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East* (Groningen: Barkhuis: Groningen University Library, 2012). For extant studies on Alexander tradition in Chinese scholarship, see Li Sher-shiueh, 'Late Ming Jesuits and Western Classicism', in Thomas J. Sienkewicz and Jinyu Liu (eds.), *Ovid in China* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 49–65; Li Sher-shiueh, 'Rhetorica and Exemplum: The Genesis of Christian Literature in Late Imperial China', *Religions*, 10 (2019), 23–34; Li Sher-shiueh and Thierry Meynard, *Jesuit Chreia in Late-Ming China: Two Studies with an Annotated Translation of Alfonso Vagnone's Illustrations of the Grand Dao* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014); Li Sher-shiueh, *Zhongguo wanming yu Ouzhou wenxue* 中國晚明與歐洲文學 [Late Ming China and Western Literature] (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 2005).

<sup>2</sup> The scholarship on the parallel traditions of the Alexander Romance in Britain and Southeast Asia exemplifies Alexander's worldwide translatability and reflects the interconnectedness of Western and Eastern literary cultures during the early modern period and the cross-cultural encounters of the 'Global' Renaissance. See Su Fang Ng, *Alexander the Great from Britain to Southeast Asia: Peripheral Empires in the Global Renaissance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).

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This article primarily focuses on the origin, the earliest dissemination and the accommodation of European Alexander texts in imperial China by Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610). It first examines the sources of inspiration for Ricci's choice of Alexander as the prominent historical figure in his booklet on friendship, and then explores the reason for and implications of Ricci's allegorical translation of Alexander as Lishan 歷山 in Chinese. The remainder of the article analyses the cultural accommodation and literary tradition of each European exemplum of Alexander anthologized in Ricci's writings, from *Jiaoyou Lun* 交友論 (*Treatise on Friendship*) to *Jiren Shipian* 畸人十篇 (*Ten Discourses of the Man of Paradox*, henceforth *Ten Discourses*). However, before analysing how Ricci adapted European Alexander texts to suit the needs of preaching within an ethnocentric culture, it is constructive to first provide a concise overview of the history of the dissemination of Alexander texts in imperial China.

From the early thirteenth century, commercial, cultural and religious interactions between China and neighbouring countries began bringing Alexander legends to the Chinese consciousness. Two distinct and parallel Alexander traditions coexisted in imperial China and were transmitted throughout the region: a Perso-Arabic tradition and a European medieval and Renaissance tradition.<sup>3</sup> The earliest known reference to Alexander in Chinese literature derives from the Perso-Arabic tradition.<sup>4</sup> In the late Southern Song dynasty (1127–1279), the prosperity of the Maritime Silk Road promoted cross-cultural encounters between overseas merchants and Chinese in Quanzhou, where the regional maritime trade commissioner Zhao Rugua 趙汝适 (1170–1231) obtained significant knowledge of foreign countries from Persian and Arabic merchant-storytellers.<sup>5</sup> *Zhufan Zhi* 諸蕃志 (*The Barbarian Nations*), an encyclopaedia of world geography composed by Zhao Rugua in 1225, first depicted the Islamized Alexander to Chinese readers.<sup>6</sup> In the section on the country Egentuo 遏根陀 (Alexandria), Zhao wrote about an extraordinary man named Cugeni 徂葛尼 who built a great tower by the sea with a large mirror on its summit to

<sup>3</sup> It is worthwhile to note the existence of a fourteenth-century Mongolian *Alexander Romance*, which is an interrelation of the principal texts of the *Alexander Romance* tradition and Chinese cultural-folklore elements. The discovery of the *Alexander Romance* in the Turfan area of the Mongol Empire attests to the cross-cultural literary interactions between Europe, Asia Minor and East Asia within the Chinggis Exchange. It was influenced by the Chinese culture, but it is not suitable to consider it as a part of the 'Chinese' Alexander traditions. I acknowledge the reviewers' corrections and suggestions on this reflection. For Mongolian *Alexander Romance*, Francis W. Cleaves, 'An Early Mongolian Version of the Alexander Romance', *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies*, 22 (1959), 1–99; John A. Boyle, 'Alexander and the Mongols', *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland*, 2 (1979), 123–36. For the Chinggis Exchange, See Timothy May, *The Mongol Conquests in World History* (London: Reaktion Books, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> For the transmission of the Chinese accounts featuring Islamized Alexander in Japan, see Yuriko Yamanaka, 'The Islamized Alexander in Chinese Geographies and Encyclopaedias', in *The Alexander Romance in Persia and the East*, 263–74.

<sup>5</sup> Li Zhongjun 李仲均, 'Zhao Rugua yu Zhufanzhi 赵汝适与《诸蕃志》 [Zhao Rugua and *Zhufan Zhi*]', *Haijiao shi yanjiu* 海交史研究, 18 (1990), 38–43.

<sup>6</sup> For a new English translation of *Zhufan Zhi*, see Yang Shao-yun, *A Chinese Gazetteer of Foreign Lands* (online): <<https://storymaps.arcgis.com/stories/39bce63e4e0642d3abce6c24db470760>> (accessed 12 June 2021).

preempt possible invasions.<sup>7</sup> A few folios later, Zhao described an anonymous man in the country Chabisha 茶弼沙 (Jabulsa), where the sun goes down in the West. This anonymous man was later identified as Zugeni 祖葛尼 by Chen Yuanliang 陳元靚 in *Shilin Guangji* 事林廣記 (*Guide through the Forest of Affairs*, 1264): 'The sage Zugeni was the first and only person who reached Jabulsa in ancient times. The later written records document Zugeni's arrival in Jabulsa in detail and note Jabulsa as the land of the setting sun.'<sup>8</sup> Cugeni, or Zugeni, is the Chinese transliteration of Dhū'l-Qarnayn (the 'Two-Horned'), a legendary Islamic figure who first appeared in Qur'an and was generally identified with Alexander the Great.<sup>9</sup> These descriptions of Jabulsa in Chinese literature originate from popular legendary narrations of the Jabulqa and Jabulsa in Islam.<sup>10</sup> These geographical and legendary accounts mentioning an Islamized Alexander were widely imitated and popularized in later encyclopaedias, such as in *Yiyu Zhi* 異域志 (*Record of Strange Countries*), composed by Zhou Zhizhong 周致中 in 1366, in the illustrated popular Ming dynasty gazetteer of foreign countries entitled *Luochong Lu* 羸蟲錄 (*Record of Naked Creatures*), and the illustrated encyclopaedia *Sancaituhui* 三才圖會 (*Collected Illustrations of the Three Realms of Heaven, Earth, and Man*) compiled by Wang Qi 王圻 and Wang Siyi 王思義 in 1607.

Although the legends of the Islamized Alexander, represented by the figure of Dhū'l-Qarnayn, were widely spread in China through encyclopaedias and gazetteers for centuries, Sinocentrism limited the curiosity and exploration of Chinese intellectuals regarding the origin and meaning of these exotic legends.<sup>11</sup> None of the forenamed writers or readers cultivated a further interest in Dhū'l-Qarnayn or the exotic legends about him. For the Chinese literati, Zugeni or Cugeni was just one of the thousands of foreigners belonging to the 'barbarian countries.' However, the circulation of Islamic Alexander texts from the Islamic world to China suggests that both trader-storytellers from the Maritime Silk Road and those active in the Chinggis Exchange transmitted exotic and fascinating literary knowledge

<sup>7</sup> Zhao Rugua notes that Egentuo 邊根陀 is a vassal of Wusili 勿斯里 (*Misr*, Egypt). For the sources of the great tower in Alexandria, see Doris Behrens-Abouseif, 'The Islamic History of the Lighthouse of Alexandria', *Muqarnas*, 23 (2006), 1–14.

<sup>8</sup> '前後並無人到。惟古來有聖人名祖葛尼曾到其國，遂立文字，該載其國係太陽沒入之地。' Chinese text transcribed and translated by the author from the fourteenth-century xylographic testimony (FC-M4682) collected at Harvard-Yenching Library. Yamanaka first brought the Chinese description of Jabulsa to Alexander scholars' attention, but her translations were imprecise, and she incorrectly concluded that the description first appeared in the sixteenth-century Chinese encyclopaedias. see Yamanaka, 'The Islamized Alexander', 266–70.

<sup>9</sup> Mario Casari, 'Alessandro e Utopia nei Romanzi Persiani Medievali', *Rivista degli Studi Orientali Supplemento*, 72.1 (1999).

<sup>10</sup> Robert W. Lebling, *Legends of the Fire Spirits: Jinn and Genies from Arabia to Zanzibar* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010), 26–7.

<sup>11</sup> Roy Bin Wong, 'Beyond Sinocentrism and Eurocentrism', *Science & Society*, 67. 2 (2003), 173–84. For the Jesuits' preaching strategy in confrontation with the Sinocentrism, see Qiong Zhang, *Making the New World Their Own* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

to the Chinese, and the transmission of Islamic legends of Alexander was just a small part of this global literary network. The Chinese literati worked as information compilers rather than inquirers or explorers of the Islamized Alexander, and their reactions to the Jesuits' Alexander texts was similar. However, the Chinese knowledge of Alexander, including his anecdotes and the places associated with him, was largely shaped by the Jesuits' Chinese literary and cartographic works.

Matteo Ricci, one of the pioneers of the Jesuit mission in China, was the first European to introduce Chinese intellectuals to the Alexander texts arising from the European medieval and Renaissance tradition. Through the Chinese books and cartographic works compiled by Ricci and other Jesuits, local Jesuit interlocutors and readers could finally approach Alexander as King of Macedonia. The stories of this Western king, while profoundly different from a historical-sociocultural perspective, were morally similar to the exemplary or unethical Kings in the Chinese classics, as this article will explore further.

ALEXANDER IN *JIAOYOU LUN* 交友論 (TREATISE ON FRIENDSHIP, 1601)

The earliest extant printed edition of Matteo Ricci's *Jiaoyou lun* 交友論 (*Treatise on Friendship*, hereafter *Treatise*), which is the third edition printed in Beijing in 1601, edited and prefaced by Feng Yingjing 馮應京 (1555–1606), is notable for being the first instance of Chinese literature incorporating Alexander stories from European sources.<sup>12</sup> From anecdotes ninety-one to ninety-four,<sup>13</sup> Ricci praises Lishan Wang 歷山王 (Alexander the Great)'s art of making friends and selects this 'ancient Occident king of kings' as the primary rhetorical figure in the *Treatise*.<sup>14</sup> Of the one hundred sayings he selects from eminent Western writers, Ricci mentions only four historical figures, out of which Alexander occurs three times, while the other three historical-exemplar figures – Theophrastus, Croesus and Megapito – appear only once.

Prior studies have reached a false consensus that the translation of Alexander as King of Lishan 歷山 in Chinese scholarship first appeared in 1595.<sup>15</sup> This inaccuracy likely arises from scholars' philological carelessness of the compositional history of the *Treatise*, which was revisited several times between 1595

<sup>12</sup> For the friendship between Feng and Ricci, see R. Po-chia Hsia, *A Jesuit in the Forbidden City: Matteo Ricci 1552–1610* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 221–5.

<sup>13</sup> The number of the anecdotes is indicated in the order of their appearance as in the definitive edition of the *Treatise*, compiled and printed by Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1565–1630), an intimate friend and former collaborator of Ricci, in *Tianxue chuhan* 天學初函 (*First Writings of Heavenly Studies*, 1629).

<sup>14</sup> For English translation of the *Treatise*, see Timothy James Billings, *On Friendship: One Hundred Maxims for a Chinese Prince* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

<sup>15</sup> Scholars such as Li Sher-shiueh, Yamanaka, and Gościwit Malinowski have reached the same conclusion. See Yamanaka, 'The Islamized Alexander', 263–74; Li, 'Rhetorica and Exemplum'.

and 1601.<sup>16</sup> Although a discussion of the *Treatise's* compositional history exceeds the scope of the present study, it is important to briefly illustrate some crucial details in order to date and clarify Alexander's first appearance as King of Lishan 歷山 in Chinese literary tradition.

In short, Ricci compiled the first draft of the *Treatise* in Nanchang between 4 November and 15 December 1595. The first draft, entitled *You Lun* 友論 (*Essay on Friendship*, hereafter *Essay*), contains a preface and seventy-six maxims and anecdotes. No reference to Alexander was made. This information is attested by the Ricci's autograph of the *Essay* (BL Add. MS 8803, hereafter BL autograph), which was enclosed in Ricci's letter to Girolamo Costa sent on 14 August 1599.<sup>17</sup> The BL autograph, Ricci's letter to Costa and Feng's preface to the *Treatise*, provide clues to the assumption that Ricci added the twenty-four new sayings between 14 August 1599 and 9 February 1601.<sup>18</sup> In other words, Ricci's anecdotal sayings about Alexander were not composed until 14 August 1599, and the Chinese literati had not yet encountered Alexander as King of Macedonia in written form before that date. But most probably, as attested in the *Ten Discourses*, Ricci had orally referred to the exempla of Alexander on several occasions while in dialogue with local interlocutors, for the following reasons: Chinese curiosity about the Taixi 太西 (Far West), the historical and rhetorical authority of Alexander in the European literary tradition, especially Alexander's frequent occurrences in books of exempla and commonplace books,<sup>19</sup> and the rhetorical association of Alexander with worldwide trade of the European travellers and 'Spiritual Conquest' of the Jesuits, who saw themselves as another Alexander or saw Alexander as symbolic guide for themselves in the early modern era.<sup>20</sup>

The primary reference material Ricci consulted in composing the *Treatise* was the fifth edition of the *Sententiae et exempla, ex probatissimis quibusque scriptoribus collecta et per locos communes digesta* (*Collected sayings and anecdotes by the most esteemed writers digested into commonplaces*, 1590, hereafter *Sententiae*), a well-known sixteenth-century Latin commonplace book in Renaissance Europe.<sup>21</sup> Prior studies have deduced that nearly three-quarters of the

<sup>16</sup> For scholarship on the *Treatise*, see at least Pasquale D'Elia, *Fonti Ricciane* (Roma: Libreria dello Stato, 1942–49); Pasquale D'Elia, 'Il Trattato sull'Amicizia. Primo libro scritto in cinese dal p. Matteo Ricci S.I. (1595)', *Studia Missionalia*, VII (1592), 425–515; Maurus Fang Hao, 'Notes on Matteo Ricci's De Amicitia', *Monumenta Serica* 14 (1949), 576; P. D'Elia, 'Further Notes on Matteo Ricci's De Amicitia', *Monumenta Serica* 15.2 (1956), 356–77; Filippo Mignini (ed.), *Dell'amicizia* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2005).

<sup>17</sup> In the letter, Ricci recounted the popularity of the *Essay* among local intellectuals and enclosed the trilingual BL autograph for Costa.

<sup>18</sup> For Feng's preface, see Mignini, *Dell'amicizia*.

<sup>19</sup> Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, 143–62.

<sup>20</sup> Ng, *Alexander the Great*, 3; M. Antoni J. Üçerler, *The Samurai and the Cross: The Jesuit Enterprise in Early Modern Japan* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2022), 272–93.

<sup>21</sup> The *Sententiae*, compiled by the Portuguese Andreas Eboensis (1498–1573), is a collection of apophthegms selected for their moral value and edifying nature from the proverbial wisdom and anecdotes of classic writers. See D'Elia, 'Il Trattato sull'Amicizia'; D'Elia, 'Further Notes'.

sayings compiled by Ricci have their immediate counterparts in the *Sententiae*, except for all the anecdotes about Alexander. No prior research has convincingly uncovered Ricci's sources for the episodes about Alexander.<sup>22</sup> Accordingly, before exploring in detail Ricci's sayings of Alexander from the literary critical approach, it is important to examine the sources of inspiration that led Ricci to choose Alexander as a prominent historical figure in his first single-authored and most notable Chinese work, the *Treatise*.

First, Ricci's cultural identity as an Italian Renaissance reader and a missionary trained at Jesuit colleges meant that he was familiar with the flourishing body of Alexander texts in the Italian Renaissance, including but not limited to Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*, the *Alexander Romance* tradition, Marco Polo's *Il Milione*, books of exempla, Renaissance commonplace books and Conimbricenses.<sup>23</sup> This meant that Ricci would have encountered Alexander texts frequently in Europe and retained them in his memory.

Second, due to the rhetorical and historical authority of Alexander in the European literary tradition, late sixteenth-century European writers usually linked Alexander the Great to the Jesuit enterprise of the 'Spiritual Conquest' and the worldwide trade of European travellers in the New World.<sup>24</sup> The circulation of European books, as well as the Jesuits' establishment of their missionary libraries in China, made Alexander materials available for Ricci to draft Chinese books for preaching.<sup>25</sup>

Third, Ricci encountered Alexander texts in China from other Jesuits and their Japanese students. One of the most profound and immediate Jesuit masterpieces that stimulated Ricci to compile rhetorical anecdotes about Alexander in Chinese was Hara Martinho's Latin panegyric.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> According to Mignini, only around half of the maxims in the *Treatise* have a counterpart in the *Sententiae*. Spence, on the other hand, suggests that Ricci recalled all these sayings from his powerful artificial memory, see Mignini, *Dell'amicizia*, 15–20; Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1984). Based on Mignini's studies, Harbsmeier explored how Ricci adapted the maxims taken from Eborensis's *Sententiae*, Christoph Harbsmeier, 'Matteo Ricci, *On Friendship*, and Some Latin Sources for his Chinese Book', in I. Amelung, J. Kurtz (eds.), *Reading the Signs: Philology, History, Prognostication. Festschrift for Michael Lackner* (München: Iudicium, 2018), 175–212.

<sup>23</sup> *Il Milione* is one of the most referenced books in Ricci's letters. For Alexander the Great and Marco Polo, see Barbara Blythe, 'Medieval and Renaissance Italian Receptions of the Alexander Romance Tradition', in *Brill's Companion*, 503–24. For the Conimbricenses, see <http://www.conimbricenses.org> <accessed 12 December 2022>.

<sup>24</sup> For instance, see the dedication to Cardinal Azzollino in Guido Gualtieri's report on the first Japanese delegation in Europe and the Jesuits referred to exempla of Alexander in their local preaching materials. Guido Gualtieri, *Relazioni della Venuta degli Ambasciatori Giaponesi a Roma* (1586).

<sup>25</sup> The European books brought to China contain noticeable references to Alexander available to Ricci or future Jesuit writers. See Pei-T'ang Library, *Catalogue of the Pei-T'ang library* (Peking: Lazarist Mission Press, 1949) 3407, 2926, 1281, 1282, 3154.

<sup>26</sup> The Tenshō embassy, a Jesuit-built milestone in the history of the Church, was the first Japanese embassy to Europe and a triumphal manifestation of the achievements earned by the Jesuits in the East Indies, J. F. Moran, *The Japanese and the Jesuits: Alessandro Valignano in Sixteenth-Century Japan* (London: Routledge, 1993), 6–7; M. Antoni J. Üçerler, 'Alessandro Valignano: Man, Missionary, and Writer', *Renaissance Studies* 17, no. 3 (2003), 337–66.



Martinho, member of the Tenshō Embassy and a devout Japanese nobleman trained in European humanities and other sciences in 'seminarios' founded by the Jesuits in Japan, delivered a Latin panegyric on 4 June 1587 at the Goa Jesuit College upon his return from Europe. In this humanist oratorical display, Martinho praised the mastermind of the embassy, Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606), for his achievement in spreading the Christian faith on Japanese soil and proclaimed that the spiritual conqueror, Valignano, was greater by far than Alexander the Great. He even went as far as to raise Valignano to the position of Alexander's teacher, Aristotle.<sup>27</sup> This Latin panegyric was printed in Goa in 1588 and several copies were likely brought to Macau with sail of the Japanese emissaries. The Latin panegyric and the chronological dialogue on the topic of the Japanese expedition, entitled *De Missione Legatorum Iaponensium ad Romanam Curiam* (On the Mission of the Japanese Ambassadors to the Roman Curia), which was printed in Macau in 1590, contributed to Ricci's knowledge of the triumphal Japanese embassy and the rhetorical reference to Alexander in Jesuit oratories.

Fourth, Ricci's practices of European mnemonic techniques and his insights into the mnemonic-encyclopaedic natures of world maps inspired him to recall and compose stories about historical figures and events related to the places and toponyms listed on the maps.<sup>28</sup> The imaginary encounters with Alexander were made possible through the exhibition of Abraham Ortelius's world map and the composition of the first European-style world map in Chinese in 1584 at Zhaoqing.<sup>29</sup> Both maps would have prompted Ricci to connect his journey for the 'Spiritual Conquest' to the East with Alexander's expedition to India. Furthermore, the relationship/translatability between images and words, here exemplified by Ricci's visualization of maps/toponyms and the following remembrance of Alexander, was a crucial component of the European *Ars Memorativa* tradition in the Renaissance.<sup>30</sup> Therefore, the significance of artificial memory in the composition of the *Treatise* seems obvious. It is reasonable to assume that Ricci

<sup>27</sup> For the thorough analyze of the allegorical reference of Alessandro Valignano to Alexander the Great in Martinho's Latin panegyric, see Stuart M. McManus, *Empire of Eloquence: The Classical Rhetorical Tradition in Colonial Latin America and the Iberian World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 130–43.

<sup>28</sup> For a detailed examination of the collaborative authorship, the sources and cultural adaptation of Ricci's treatise on mnemonic arts, *Jifa* 記法, as well as an in-depth look into Ricci's practices of artificial memory in late Ming China, refer to my forthcoming doctoral dissertation.

<sup>29</sup> Ortelius also published a map entitled 'Alexandri Magni Macedonis Expeditio' (The Expedition of Alexander the Great) in 1595. For mnemonic function of Ricci's map, Giorgio Mangani, 'La Geografia dei Gesuiti', in Filippo Mignini (ed.), *La Cartografia di Matteo Ricci* (Roma: Libreria dello Stato, 2013), 41–56.

<sup>30</sup> For the European practices of artificial memory in the Renaissance, see Lina Bolzoni, *The Gallery of Memory Literary and Iconographic Models in the Age of the Printing Press* (Toronto: Buffalo; London: Toronto University Press) 2001. An example of the contemporary Jesuit practice of artificial memory, Andrea Torre, 'Paolo Beni's Trattato della Memoria Locale and Applied Mnemonics', *Agorà. Estudios Classicos em Debate*, 24.1 (2022), 129–43.

retrieved some of the newly added twenty-four maxims and anecdotes, including the Alexander accounts, from his ‘memory palace’ when he was revising the drafts of the *Treatise*.<sup>31</sup> However, the idea that all the maxims and anecdotes were quoted from memory seems less convincing: Ricci’s frequent reference to European books, especially the existence of a copy of the fifth edition of *Sententiae* and other books mentioning Alexander the Great among Jesuit collections at the library of Beitang 北堂 (Church of the North), reveals that the first Jesuits travelled with books and utilized them for their Catholic mission in China.<sup>32</sup>

The ultimate likely inspiration was Ricci’s authorial intent to introduce the most important Western ruler to Chinese intellectuals through rhetorical anecdotes, after mastering the rhetorical prose on Chinese monarchs from the Confucian classics.<sup>33</sup> Ricci’s introduction of Alexander to Chinese knowledge of the ‘Far West’ allowed the Western classical tradition to enter into direct dialogue with Confucianism, thus contributing to the cultural exchanges between China and the West.

In sum, the primary sources of inspiration for Ricci in compiling Alexander sayings were experiences of reading Alexander texts in Italy and Confucian classics in China, the rhetorical exercises in the Jesuit colleges, the availability of European books in China, maintenance of regular correspondence with Jesuits in Italy and Macau, and the visual interpretation of maps/toponyms, a mnemonic device, which led to the relevant remembrance of Alexander stories.

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An interpretation of Ricci’s allegorical translation of Alexander from ‘Alessandro’ or ‘Alexandri’ to Lishan 歷山 is crucial to comprehending the accommodation of Ricci’s sayings of Alexander. Lishan is not a simple transliteration of Alexander in Chinese, especially in comparison with Ricci’s transliteration of Alexandria as Yalishande 亞歷山的 in his 1602 world map.<sup>34</sup> Lishan 歷山, which literally means ‘traverse the mountains’, is a metaphorical and symbolic sketch of Alexander’s life and expeditions. In addition, Ricci adopted a phonetic trick in his translation and skillfully linked Alexander’s Chinese name to the Chinese literati’s knowledge of the mythological Emperor Yao 堯 and his successor Emperor Shun 舜. In China at the time of

<sup>31</sup> Spence, *The Memory Palace*, 142, 295.

<sup>32</sup> D’Elia, ‘Il Trattato sull’Amicizia’, 464; D’Elia, *Fonti Ricciane*, I, 368–9; D’Elia, ‘Further Notes’, 356–77. For Jesuits’ preaching by book in China, see Nicolas Standaert, ‘The Transmission of Renaissance Culture in Seventeenth-century China’, *Renaissance Studies* 17, no. 3 (2003), 367–91.

<sup>33</sup> The Four Books (*Great Learning*, *Golden Means*, *Analects*, and *Mencius*) and Five Classics (*Classic of Poetry*, *Book of Documents*, *Book of Rites*, *Book of Changes*, and *Spring and Autumn Annals*).

<sup>34</sup> Pasquale D’Elia, *Il Mappamondo Cinese Del P. Matteo Ricci S.I. (Terza Edizione Pechino 1602) Conservato Presso La Biblioteca Vaticana* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica Vaticana, 1938).



Ricci, Lishan 歷山 (Mount Li) was the well-known locus of the topos where the legendary Chinese ruler, Emperor Yao, recognized the distinguished personality of Sage Shun and passed the throne to him.<sup>35</sup> The *Sishuzhangju jizhu* 四書章句集注 (*Commentaries on the Four Books*) by Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200) and the *Sishu zhijie* 四書直解 (*Commentary on the Four Books*) by Zhang Juzheng 張居正 (1525–1582), the primary textbooks Jesuits used to learn Chinese and Confucian classics, collect and comment on this historical and mythological anecdote.<sup>36</sup> Ricci probably mastered this anecdote while learning the Confucian classics and accommodated it while thinking of an appropriate translation for Alexander, who was conceived of as the most outstanding king by contemporary European intellectuals, for instance, Michel de Montaigne.<sup>37</sup> In the preface to the *Treatise*, Ricci clarified that the motivation for his journey to China was his respect for the Chinese emperor's learning and virtue, and the teachings of the ancient kings.<sup>38</sup> This narration further explains why Ricci introduced Alexander in the *Treatise*. Ricci assigned a noble virtue to the first Western ruler introduced to Chinese scholars by associating Alexander with the legendary Chinese sage-emperor. Although anecdote ninety-two depicts Alexander's morally inferior qualities compared with Phocion, a close literary examination of the text and Ricci's translation of Phocion reveal that the core of anecdote ninety-two centres on the moral value rather than degrading Alexander.

In addition, the hostile Chinese attitude towards the *Folangji* 佛朗機 (Portuguese and Spaniards) both before the arrival of Jesuits and during Ricci's mission in China, as well as several instances of aggressive and suspicious treatment encountered by Ricci, were crucial factors in Ricci's authorial decision to omit the most prominent perception of Alexander's identity as the most outstanding and influential conqueror of the Orient in European history.<sup>39</sup>

To clarify the genre of his sources and give his words more authority, Ricci emphasized that he quoted some sayings of Alexander from historical writings. This illustrates Ricci's intent to narrate authentic events rather than fictional descriptions, such as those found in the *Alexander Romance* or the *Huaben* 話本 (novellas in the vernacular).<sup>40</sup> Ricci, familiar with the *Alexander*

<sup>35</sup> Zhang Juzheng, *Sishu zhijie* 四書直解 [Commentary of the Four books] (Jiuzhou chubanshe: Beijing, 2010).

<sup>36</sup> For the Jesuit learning of Confucian classics and their reference books, see Thierry Meynard, *The Jesuit Reading of Confucius* (Leiden: Brill, 2015); Liam Matthew Brockey, *Journey to the East: The Jesuit Mission to China 1579–1724* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2008), 263–8.

<sup>37</sup> Michel de Montaigne, *The Essays of Michel de Montaigne*, trans. and ed. by Michel A. Screech (London: Allen Lane/Penguin Press, 1991), 854.

<sup>38</sup> Billings, *On Friendship*, 86–90.

<sup>39</sup> For the encounter between Folangji and Chinese, see Zhang, *Making the New World*, 12–26.

<sup>40</sup> *Huaben* is the fictional novella that originated in the Song dynasty and flourished in China at the time of Ricci. Wu Yenna, 'Vernacular stories', in Victor Mair (ed.), *The Columbia History of Chinese Literature* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 595–619.

Romance tradition, decided to focus on selecting exempla for the *Treatise*. The distinction between historical facts, or the rewriting of historical facts, and Romance fiction was vital for both Renaissance European literati and Ming Chinese intellectuals in conceptualizing and elaborating on their literary sources. By referencing historical writings from the 'Far West', Ricci sought to give his booklet more authority in order to make it more appealing and convincing to Chinese readers.

The Alexander stories narrated by Ricci in the *Treatise* are not linear, but the main arguments remain consistent throughout. In four Alexander anecdotes derived from historical accounts by Curtius, Cicero and Plutarch, Ricci delineated to Chinese readers the importance of building genuine, virtuous friendships and avoiding corruptible friendships.

Ricci began his exemplum of Alexander with a favourable attitude towards him in anecdote ninety-one, portraying Alexander as a valorous king with full confidence in his officials:

King Lishan 歷山 (Alexander the Great), an ancient Occidental king of kings, took control of a critical situation by personally entering a great battle – at which moment one of his ministers stopped him, saying: 'This is dangerous! How will Your Majesty be able to save yourself?' The king replied: 'You protect me from crafty friends and open enemies – these, I can defend myself against!'<sup>41</sup>

The earliest historical account containing a similar passage is found in Book IX of Quintus Curtius's *Historiae Alexandri Magni* (hereafter *Historiae*). In Chapters V to VI, Curtius narrates the Mallian campaign in India in which Alexander advanced his conquest of the world. Alexander was wounded by enemies but was rescued by his guards. Despite this, he reappeared in public before he had recovered from his wounds. He refused his friends' suggestion to prioritize his own and the public's safety by announcing his determination to conquer the world.<sup>42</sup> Ricci was likely inspired by an unknown book that contains Curtius' narration of the Mallian battle, rather than the *Historiae* or *Sententiae* directly.

Ricci continues his sayings on friendship with an episode from Plutarch's *Parallel Lives*. In anecdote ninety-two, Chinese readers encountered the story of Phocion, to whom Alexander sent a delegation offering one hundred talents for making a pact of friendship:

Also King Lishan 歷山 was hoping to make friends. There was a wise scholar named Shan Nuo 善諾 (Phocion), and Alexander sent ahead someone to present him with a vast quantity of gold. Shan Nuo got angry and said: 'If the king would bestow gifts like this upon me, what kind of person must he think I am?'

<sup>41</sup> All translations of Matteo Ricci's writings from Chinese to English are my own. For the Chinese text, see Zhu Weizheng, *Li Ma Dou Zhong Wen Zhu Yi Ji* 利瑪竇中文著譯集 [Matteo Ricci's Collected Works in Chinese] (Shanghai: Fudan daxue chubanshe, 2001), 114.

<sup>42</sup> Quintus Curtius Rufus, *History of Alexander the Great*, trans. by John C. Rolfe (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1946), vol. 2, 416–17.

The messenger replied: 'No, Master, it is not so. The king knows you to be incorruptible. That is why he offers this.' To which he answered: 'If this is so, then I will also maintain the appearance of my incorruptibility.' And he indicated that he would not accept it. Historians conclude the story with the following judgement: 'The king wanted to buy the friendship of the scholar, but the scholar would not sell it.'<sup>43</sup>

Ricci named Phocion Shan Nuo 善諾 (the good promise keeper). This allegorical translation of Phocion indicates that Ricci knew well the story and ethos of Phocion through his reading and Jesuit training in Europe. The first character, Shan 善 (good), was taken from Phocion's nickname ὁ χρηστός (The Good), while the second character, Nuo 諾 (promise keeper), was inspired by Phocion's internationally known personality and loyalty.<sup>44</sup> In addition, the adoption of Nuo 諾 implies Ricci's constant reference to the sixteenth-century commentaries on the Confucian classics: the *Analects* of Confucius record a saying of Zixia 子夏: 'If a man withdraws his mind from the love of beauty, and applies it as sincerely to the love of the virtuous; if, in serving his parents, he can exert his utmost strength; if, in serving his prince, he can devote his life; if, in his intercourse with his friends, his words are sincere: although men say that he has not learned, I will certainly say that he has.'<sup>45</sup> In his *Commentary on the Four Books*, Zhang Juzheng comments on Zixia's saying that keeping promises (nuo 諾) is crucial in making friends. Therefore, Ricci's choice of Nuo 諾 provides further evidence to support the earlier interpretation of Lishan 歷山 as deriving from commentaries on Confucian classics.

This anecdote originates from Plutarch's *Life of Phocion*.<sup>46</sup> At the beginning of the Italian Renaissance, the rediscovery of Plutarch's literary heritage stimulated humanists and Renaissance writers, including later compilers of Jesuit manuals and Jesuit missionaries worldwide, to incorporate the edifying stories from the *Parallel Lives* into their literature. The Jesuit strategy of 'preaching by books' in China made Plutarch one of the most referenced classical authors in both Ricci's *Treatise* and other Jesuit Chinese writings.<sup>47</sup> A close reading of the catalogue of the Library of Beitang reveals that the 1607 edition of *Vite di Plutarco Cheroneo degli huomini illustri Greci et Romani* was one of the primary sources of reference on Plutarch for Jesuits in early seventeenth-century China.<sup>48</sup> However, Ricci may have recalled this story from memory or sourced

<sup>43</sup> For the Chinese text see Zhu, *Matteo Ricci*, 114.

<sup>44</sup> Lawrence Tritle, *Phocion the Good* (Routledge: London, 1988).

<sup>45</sup> Translation quoted from James Legge, *Confucianism: Four Books and Five Classics* (eBook: Delphi Classics, 2016), 80–1.

<sup>46</sup> Plutarch, *The lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. by John Dryden and Arthur Clough (New York: Modern Library), 905–6.

<sup>47</sup> Li and Meynard, *Jesuit Chreia*.

<sup>48</sup> *Vite di Plutarco Cheroneo degli Huomini Illustri Greci et Romani* (1607), 109. See Pei-T'ang Library, *Catalogue*, 991.

it out from an unknown book rather than referring directly to the 1607 edition of the *Parallel Lives* in the Jesuit book collection in China.

Ricci's variant abridges Plutarch's original story by removing details such as the transportation of talents to Athens and the description of Phocion's house. This anecdote of Phocion and Alexander contains the most edifying scenario in the *Treatise*, as it contrasts Alexander's morally inferior qualities with Phocion's superior attributes. To add authenticity and persuasion, Ricci concludes the story with a historian's comment. This anecdote focuses on the moral value of Phocion's just and incorruptible character, rather than Alexander's vain prodigality in buying friendship. It is like the anecdotal materials collected in the books of exempla, where the universal moral conveyed by the stories is of primary importance, while the individual's character is only secondary. By praising Phocion's incorruptible ethos, Ricci transmitted a universal moral value to his Chinese audience with exotic literary tastes and presented a just and incorruptible Greek figure who had not been seduced by the money and who refused the king's offer of friendship.

Ricci's anecdote of Phocion and Alexander also influenced later Jesuit writers. Martino Martini (1614–1661), who aimed to write another treatise on friendship after Ricci in order to introduce more Western sayings on friendship to Chinese readers, referred to this anecdote to write his own in *Qiyou pian* 速友篇 (*Treatise on Friendship*): 'Alexander always gave gifts to a wise man of his state. He asked the messenger: "The inhabitants of a state are very numerous. Why does the King give gifts only to me?" The messenger answered: "Because he considers you a sage." "So, if he considers me a sage, he should not treat me with gifts."<sup>49</sup>

Anecdotes ninety-three and ninety-four present a portrait of the wise and generous crown prince Alexander, who gives all his wealth to his faithful followers. The topos is the political use of judicious liberality in making friends:

[Ninety-three.] At a time when King Lishan 歷山 (Alexander the Great) had not yet assumed his imperial position and had no state treasury, he generously gave to others all the wealth that he had gained. The king of an enemy state who was extremely wealthy and who did everything in the service of filling up his own treasury mocked him, saying: 'Where is your lordship's treasury?' To which he replied: 'In the hearts of my friends.'<sup>50</sup>

[Ninety-four.] Many years ago, there was a man who treated his friends very well and who was so abundantly generous, such that he finally depleted his family property. Those around him asked: 'When your wealth and possessions have all

<sup>49</sup> Giuliano Bertuccioli, 'Il Trattato sull'Amicizia di Martino Martini (1614–1661): Parte Seconda', *Rivista Degli Studi Orientali* 66, no. 3/4 (1992), 344.

<sup>50</sup> Plutarch, *Plutarch Lives: Demosthenes and Cicero. Alexander and Caesar*, trans. by Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1967), 263.

been given to your friends, what will you have left for yourself?' To which he replied: 'The savour of having been generous to my friends.' Commentary: in another version of the story, he replies: 'I will still have the desire to be generous to my friends.' The thoughts are different but equally beautiful.<sup>51</sup>

In the *Treatise's* preface, Ricci writes of the origin of the sayings by stating that they were sourced from those 'I had heard since my youth.'<sup>52</sup> The composition of anecdotes ninety-three and ninety-four attests to the earlier statement and indicates the role of natural and artificial memory in Ricci's mission to China. Anecdote ninety-three is a consequence of the authorial confusion of two accounts regarding Alexander. It constitutes the immediate source of anecdote ninety-four, in which Ricci eliminated the historical personage's identity, expanded the anecdote's content and added a commentary at the end to strengthen the moral principle contained within it.

The first part of both anecdotes stems from the Ciceronian account in which Philip reproaches Alexander for being hypocritical in liberality and exposes his false political motives in the acquisition of loyal followers.<sup>53</sup> Pseudo-Callisthenes' *α Romance* and its earliest Latin translation – Julius Valerius's *Res Gestae Alexandri Macedonis* – also contain a similar narrative, but with a favourable judgement towards Alexander: in their letter to Philip and Zeuxis, Aristotle and Alexander explain that such behaviour is a careful policy of judicious liberality based on the teachings of Aristotle.<sup>54</sup> The second part of these anecdotes echoes the scenario of how Alexander gains the loyalty of his companions by giving them a stake in the enterprise, as Plutarch narrates in the *Life of Alexander*.<sup>55</sup>

Anecdote ninety-three seems like an incomplete variant from the account of the condemnation of Alexander's liberality in the classical sources or a similar passage in the *Alexander Romance*, transmitted to learned medieval writers with a completely different moral judgment on his liberality, and then incorporated into the courtly Alexander tradition in Renaissance Italy.<sup>56</sup> Both anecdotes attest to the evolution and coexistence of two distinct opinions on Alexander's liberality in medieval and Renaissance Europe. The moral condemnation in the Ciceronian account, which Cary summarizes as 'mistaken liberality does not make friends but prepares enemies', is reiterated in Curtius with a favourable attitude in the concluding summary.<sup>57</sup> These Senecan and Ciceronian anecdotes of Alexander furnished later medieval writers with

<sup>51</sup> For Chinese texts see Zhu, *Matteo Ricci*, 114.

<sup>52</sup> Billings, *On Friendship*, 89.

<sup>53</sup> Marcus Tullius Cicero, *De Officiis*, trans. by Walter Miller (London: Heinemann, 1913), 223–7.

<sup>54</sup> Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, 87.

<sup>55</sup> Plutarch, *Plutarch Lives*, 263.

<sup>56</sup> For the proverbial reputation of Alexander's liberality from Dante to Castiglione in Renaissance Italy, see Corrado Bologna, 'La generosità cavalleresca di Alessandro Magno', *L'Immagine Riflessa*, 12 (1989), 367–404; Jane E. Evarson, 'Storie di Alessandro Magno nella tradizione volgare: Medioevo, Rinascimento, e tempi moderni', *Rassegna Europea di Letteratura Italiana*, 41 (2013), 31–58.

<sup>57</sup> Curtius, *History of Alexander the Great*, vol. 2, 523.

knowledge of Alexander's liberality via Valerius Maximus and the Fathers of the Church. In parallel, the  $\alpha$  version of the *Alexander Romance* and *Res Gestae Alexandri Macedonis* were known to medieval and Renaissance writers as part of the Western tradition of Alexander Romance.<sup>58</sup>

In addition, both anecdotes resemble maxim seventy-seven of the *Treatise*, which reads: 'A country can do without a treasury, but it cannot do without friends.' Another similar passage is exemplum twenty in the section entitled 'The Ruler-Official Relationship' of Alfonso Vagnone's *Dadao jiyuan* 達道記言 (*Illustrations of the Grand Dao*). Vagnone's rhetorical sayings were modelled on Ricci's anecdotes and Eusebius's *Life of Constantine* (154), conveying the same moral value.<sup>59</sup>

In summary, Ricci's anecdotes of Alexander are remarkably similar in their basic plot to the original form of these classical accounts, subject to medieval and Renaissance influence. They are descendants from the European conception of Alexander in the books of exempla and commonplace books.

ALEXANDER IN *JIREN SHIPIAN* 畸人十篇 (*TEN DISCOURSES OF THE MAN OF PARADOX*)<sup>60</sup>

The last two episodes featuring Alexander in Ricci's writings appear in the *Ten Discourses*. Written and revised between 1605 and 1607, the *Ten Discourses* is a collection of dialogues between Ricci and local interlocutors on Confucianism, Christianity, ethics, culture and morals. Ricci incorporated the Catholic faith into the *Ten Discourses*, which consists of selected fables from Aesop, proverbs from ancient Western sages, and considerable rewordings of Epictetus, among others.<sup>61</sup>

Chapter IV, entitled 'Constant Thought of Death Enables Man to Prepare for the Forthcoming Judgement', records a dialogue featuring reflections on death between Ricci and Xu Guangqi 徐光啓 (1562–1633).<sup>62</sup> In this chapter, Ricci lists five advantages of constantly contemplating death: first, it encourages self-discipline, which helps us to avoid great suffering after death; second, it represses unbridled desires so that they do not corrupt our virtue; third, it makes people disregard wealth, fame and social status; fourth, it can dispel the vanity of our heart, which is poison to virtue; and finally, it helps us not to fear death blindly, but to accept it calmly.<sup>63</sup>

The first episode featuring Alexander in the *Ten Discourses* appears as an exemplum in support of the fourth advantage given by Ricci. Ricci claims that arrogance corrupts morals, because such a characteristic is established on a fragile foundation and can lead someone to confuse the false with the

<sup>58</sup> Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, 279.

<sup>59</sup> Li and Meynard, *Jesuit Chreia*, 196.

<sup>60</sup> For an introduction of the *Ten Discourses*, see Hsia, *A Jesuit*, 268–86.

<sup>61</sup> For an complete translation see Suna Wang, *Dieci Capitoli di un Uomo Strano* (Macerata: Quodlibet, 2010).

<sup>62</sup> For Xu Guangqi, see Catherine Jami, Peter Engelfriet, and Gregory Blue (eds.), *Statecraft and Intellectual Renewal in Late Ming China: The Cross-Cultural Synthesis of Xu Guangqi (1562–1633)* (Leiden: Brill, 2001).

<sup>63</sup> Wang, *Dieci Capitoli*, 69–71.



true, non-existence with existence and another person with oneself. The constant thought of death can help us avoid such self-deception. To illustrate this point, Ricci narrates the well-known account of the sayings of philosophers around the tomb of Alexander:

In ancient times, a king of kings named Lishan 歷山 ruled over a hundred kingdoms in the West. His territory extended to over ten thousand *Li* 里 (Chinese miles). No one was richer than him. So, he was very proud and unsatisfied with everything he owned. After his death, a pompous and lavish funeral was held. A renowned sage of the time ridiculed him while looking at the tomb: 'Yesterday the king walked upon the earth, today the earth is upon the king's body; yesterday he was the one who guarded treasures, today it is the treasures that guard him; yesterday the whole universe was not sufficient to hold him; today he needs only a pit *Chi* 尺 (unit) deep.' When people are still alive, the consciousness of superiority and inferiority exists; but such consciousness disappears after death. As in the *Xiangxi* 象戲 [Chinese chess], on the board, the king and the soldiers are in different hierarchical positions and travel by different routes; but after the game, when shuffling the pieces, both king and soldiers are in an identical situation and take the same route.<sup>64</sup>

This episode, known as laments or sayings of philosophers at the tomb of Alexander the Great, enjoyed great popularity in both the Afro-Asiatic Alexander tradition and its European counterpart. It first appeared in the Arabic world, probably in Ḥunayn ibn Ishāq's (809–873) *Kitāb ādāb al-falāsifa* (*Book of the Maxims of the Philosophers*), and was later translated into Castilian Spanish in the thirteenth century under the title *El Libro de los Buenos Proverbios*. A contemporary Spanish book, *Los Bocados de Oro*, contains the same episode.<sup>65</sup> These two Spanish works made up a significant part of the medieval Spanish didactic tradition, where the sayings at Alexander's tomb flourished in the West.<sup>66</sup> Additionally, this episode also appears in Petrus Alphonsus' (1076–1140) *Disciplina Clericalis* and in the I<sup>3</sup> recension of Archpriest Leo of Naples's *Historia de Preliis*. From the *Disciplina Clericalis*, the episode passed into manuals for preaching, with a primary emphasis on the inevitability of death, and started circulating with a rhetorical accusation that 'the conqueror of all the world was conquered' in European literature, especially in books of exempla.<sup>67</sup> On the other hand, from the I<sup>3</sup> interpolations, this episode passed into the large corpus of medieval and Renaissance Alexander books and was then became a part of the *Alexander Romance* tradition.<sup>68</sup>

<sup>64</sup> For Chinese texts see Zhu, *Matteo Ricci*, 459.

<sup>65</sup> Sebastian P. Brock, 'The Laments of the Philosophers over Alexander in Syria', *Journal of Semitic Studies*, no. 15 (1970), 205; Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, 22.

<sup>66</sup> Harlan Gary Sturm, *The Libro de los Buenos Proverbios: a Critical Edition* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1971), 16.

<sup>67</sup> All the aphoristic comments singled out by Ricci find their counterparts in the popular books of exempla, for instance, *Disciplina Clericalis* and *Gesta Romanorum*. See Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, 98–9.

<sup>68</sup> See Brock, *The Laments of the Philosophers*, 206; Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, 38.

Ricci's rewriting and adaptations of this exemplum make it distinct from other European variants in several aspects. Firstly, the textual structure of Ricci's exemplum differs from its original form as diffused in the West. In the European tradition, the episode only consists of the sayings of philosophers given at Alexander's tomb, without a description of Alexander's life or a commentary at the end to emphasize the moral value. The Chinese version, however, is composed of three parts: a brief introduction to Alexander's status, personality and luxurious funeral; three ironic comments by a sage over his tomb; and a commentary on the moral value of the inevitability of death at the end. Secondly, the number of sayings narrated by Ricci is relatively modest compared to the Western variants, but Ricci likely included all the remembered sayings in this exemplum. Thirdly, the order of the sayings in the *Ten Discourses* does not align with any European version. The philosopher's sayings in Ricci's version seem like a random collection, while they were more stable in the European tradition.

Ricci's last exemplum of Alexander appears in Chapter VIII, entitled 'The Nemesis of Good and Evil Occurs after Death'. This chapter records a conversation between Ricci and Gong Daoli 龚道立, which took place in Beijing in 1605.<sup>69</sup> Gong stated that nowadays many people believe that the consequences of one's actions occur in this life, and thus there is no need to believe in Buddhism's six realms of rebirth or the existence of heaven and hell in the afterlife. He asked Ricci to explain how Christian doctrines respond to this viewpoint. One of the exempla Ricci recounts to answer and convince his interlocutor is an anecdote relating to Alexander's liberality:

The Western historical annals chronicle the following legend: King Alexander was extremely wealthy. One day, a beggar asked him for alms, and the king gave him a lot of treasure. The beggar refused, saying: 'I am a humble beggar. All I need is a small sum of money. How can I expect so much?' The king answered him: 'You only know that a small amount of money is enough for a beggar. You do not know that I, Alexander, cannot give less than ten thousand gold coins to the people!' And then he ordered him to go away with the wealth. Is it possible that the Lord of Heaven is less generous than a king? A great evil in the world consists in believing only in the things heard with the ears and seen with the eyes, without recognizing the existence of pleasures that the ears and the eyes cannot reach; also, in being afraid only of the punishments and troubles of this world without considering the greatest sufferings and adversities of others.<sup>70</sup>

The story of Alexander giving a city or a large sum of gold to a poor man was a well-known tale among medieval and Renaissance writers. Since its first appearance in Seneca's *De Beneficiis* (II, XVI), the popularity of this story in the European tradition has been well documented by the evolution of the moral, exemplary

<sup>69</sup> For the biography of Gong, see Wang, *Dieci Capitoli*, XCIX-C.

<sup>70</sup> For Chinese texts see Zhu, *Matteo Ricci*, 481–2.

and secular interpretations of this anecdote throughout history.<sup>71</sup> The moral of this Senecan anecdote focuses on the Stoic critique of Alexander's false liberality and disregard for the feelings of others. From William of Conches's *Moralium dogma philosophorum*, this anecdote passed into Brunetto Latini's (1220–1295) *Liures dou Trésor*, through which it reached Dante's *Convivio* (IV, 11, 14) and then flourished in the Italian Renaissance.<sup>72</sup> Additionally, modelled on exemplum 176 in the *Tabula Exemplorum*, this anecdote was altered considerably and incorporated into one of the most influential didactic treatises in the Duecento, *Fior di Virtù*, from where it flourished in books of exempla.<sup>73</sup>

Although this anecdote was modified by various writers with different perspectives, the topos of the story remains the same, focusing on the theme of liberality as established in Seneca's version. All versions of this tale share the same underlying idea: an exchange between goods of unequal value. Ricci's variant contains all the elements listed in *Fior di Virtù*, from which we can suppose that this account of Alexander also descends from the European conception of Alexander in the books of exempla and commonplace books. Ricci's variant depicted to his Chinese readers an arrogant Western king who has a mistaken reaction towards others.

*Aijin Xingquan* 哀矜行詮 (*De operibus Misericordiae*), a practical instruction book for Catholics to exercise charity written by Italian Jesuit Giacomo Rho (1593–1638) and published in 1633 by Wang Yuantai 汪元泰, contains an abbreviated version of the same story. In the first volume, entitled 'General Discussion of the Corporal and Spiritual Works of Mercy', Rho recounts an exemplum in which Alexander gives a city to a meritorious statesman, but expresses a positive moral judgement towards Alexander's political reaction.<sup>74</sup>

## CONCLUSION

The spread of Alexander texts in imperial China, arising from both Perso-Arabic tradition and European medieval and Renaissance tradition, stands for an exemplary testimony of cross-cultural encounters and interactions between Western and Eastern literary culture during the early modern period. As explored in this article, Ricci's allegorical translation of Alexander as Lishan 歷山, his rewritings of European Alexander exempla, and his sources of inspirations showcase Ricci's thoughtful accommodation of Western culture in an ethnocentric culture for preaching needs, and demonstrates his literary sophistication as both a European humanist and a Confucian scholar. Ricci's portraits of Alexander contributed to the Chinese knowledge of the

<sup>71</sup> Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, 86; Morosini, 'The Alexander Romance'.

<sup>72</sup> Bologna, 'La generosità', 390.

<sup>73</sup> Cary, *The Medieval Alexander*, 154.

<sup>74</sup> Qinghe Xiao, 'Aijin Xingquan (*De operibus Misericordiae*) and the Catholic Doctrine of Merit-making during Late Ming', *Logos & Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology*, 42 (2015):147–77.

Macedonian King, both legendary and historical, shaping and impacting their conception of the world and the culture of 'Others'. The *Treatise* and the *Ten Discourses* achieved great popularity among local intellectuals and brought Ricci remarkable reputation that survives until today.<sup>75</sup> The popularity of Ricci's writings among those with a Sinocentric 'worldview' illustrates how the universal moral of the exotic stories transcends the individual's character and the protagonist's identity. However, though the Chinese audience found Ricci's exempla of Alexander valuable and convincing, they did not cultivate further interest in exploring Alexander's identity or relevant literary tradition in the West. The Chinese interest in the Western learning was rooted in the practical science like mathematics, astronomy and calendar, among others, rather than Western humanities.<sup>76</sup>

Additionally, Europeans' reactions to Ricci's Alexander stories are worth noting. On the one hand, The Jesuits following Ricci were aware of and used Ricci's Alexander stories as references for their own writings. An examination of Chinese books compiled by Jesuits from 1595 to 1644 shows that at least sixty-four Alexander exempla were composed and accessible to late Ming intellectuals.<sup>77</sup> On the other hand, the circulation of Jesuit Chinese books from China to Europe made Chinese Alexander stories available to European-based intellectuals as early as the seventeenth century. For example, the donation of over three hundred Chinese books to the Vatican Library by the Jesuit Procurator Philippe Couplet (1623–1693) in 1685, made nearly all Chinese Alexander texts available to Europeans.<sup>78</sup> However, those Europeans' inability to read Chinese limited their exploration of the literary productions by Jesuits. As a result, these books, including all Chinese Alexander stories, remained as material and symbolic achievements of the Jesuits completed in the antipodean empire for centuries without being explored for their literary value. My research will continue to delve into other Alexander stories compiled in imperial China by Jesuit writers.

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<sup>75</sup> The Qing scholars selected both works to incorporate them in the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete Collection of the Four Treasures), the largest collection of books in China.

<sup>76</sup> Standaert, *The Transmission of Renaissance Culture*.

<sup>77</sup> A complete repertory will be furnished in the next work on the reception of Alexander in China.

<sup>78</sup> Clara Yu Dong, 'Chinese Language Books and the Jesuit Mission in China: a Study on the Chinese Missionary Books Brought by Philippe Couplet from China', in *Miscellanea Bibliothecae Apostolicae Vaticanae. VIII* (Città del Vaticano: Biblioteca apostolica vaticana, 2001), 507–54.

## Abstract

This article primarily focuses on the origin, the earliest dissemination and the accommodation of European Alexander texts in imperial China by Italian Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610). After providing an overview of the Chinese Alexander traditions, it first examines the sources of inspiration for Ricci's choice of Alexander as the prominent historical figure in his booklet on friendship, and then explores the reason for and implications of Ricci's allegorical translation of Alexander as Lishan 歷山 in Chinese. The remainder of the article analyses the cultural accommodation and literary tradition of each European exemplum of Alexander anthologized in Ricci's writings, from *Jiaoyou Lun* 交友論 (*Treatise on Friendship*) to *Jiren Shipian* 畸人十篇 (*Ten Discourses of the Man of Paradox*). The article shows that all Ricci's accounts of Alexander are mainly derived from the European Medieval and Renaissance Alexander tradition and were adapted in China by the strategy of cultural accommodation.