

Series Editor's Foreword | CARLOS ROJAS

Matteo Ricci's introduction to his 1603 Chinese-language catechism *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* opens with the binome *pingzhi* 平治—in which the first character, *ping* 平, is short for the phrase *ping tianxia* 平天下, meaning “to make peaceful all under heaven,” while the second character, *zhi* 治, is short for *zhiguo* 治國, meaning “to govern the nation.”¹ The phrases *ping tianxia* and *zhiguo* are paired in many classical Confucian texts—including, mostly famously, in the opening section of *The Great Learning*, one of the canonical “Four Books” within the Confucian tradition—and in alluding to these phrases here, Ricci was attempting to draw on the intellectual authority of Confucianism in order to promote Christian thought in China.

Ricci was one of the most important early Jesuit missionaries to visit China. He first arrived in the Portuguese settlement of Macau in 1582, and the following year he traveled to China, where he remained until his death in 1610. Ricci completed the first draft of *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* in 1596, based on conversations he had had with several Chinese thinkers, and in the text, he draws heavily on Confucian vocabulary and concepts to introduce Christian ideas, specifically to make the case for the existence of

God. In 1603 Ricci added the introduction and published the catechism as an independent volume.

The term *tianxia* (all under heaven), embedded within the very first character of Ricci's introduction, also resonates with the first term in the text's Chinese title, *Tianzhu shiyi*—which uses *tian* to refer to the “Lord of Heaven” (*tianzhu*), the term that the Jesuits had adopted to refer to God in Chinese. In both *tianxia* and *tianzhu*, the initial character, *tian*, has a hybrid significance, alluding to the culturally specific concept of “heaven” within both the Confucian and Christian traditions, while simultaneously gesturing to the possibility of establishing an umbrella concept that might bridge these two worldviews. Indeed, the explicit objective of Ricci's text was to present a series of dialogues between himself and Chinese interlocutors, in order to find common ground between the Confucian and Christian traditions.

Often translated as “heaven,” the term *tian*, in early Chinese thought, referred both to the sky and to a divine power associated with the sky, while the binome *tianxia* began to be used as early as the Warring States period (roughly, the fourth century BCE) to refer either to the territory controlled by the Zhou kings or, more generally, to the (proto-)Chinese society that operated under Zhou values.² To the extent that *tianxia* came to refer to a culturally specific realm associated with what is now known as China, however, it is intriguing to consider that the term *tian* itself may be etymologically derived from “non-Chinese” origins like Mongolian (*tengi*) or Tibetan-Burman languages like Adi (*talen*) or Lepcha (*tā-lyan*), and that as early as 1613 (just three years after Ricci's death), the first of several versions of the Chinese term (spelled “tayn”) had entered the English language as a loanword.³

This hybrid significance of *tian* as a figure of both universality and cultural specificity, of continuity and transformation, is also the focal point of Ban Wang's 2017 edited volume *Chinese Visions of World Order: Tianxia, Culture, and World Politics*, which traces the evolution of the Chinese cosmopolitical concept of *tianxia* from the early Zhou up to the present. While this edited volume is sensitive to the ways in which the term's meaning has changed over time, the book as a whole also highlights the important continuities in the ways that the concept has been understood and deployed from early China to the present. With respect to the modern and contemporary periods, meanwhile, the volume also underscores the apparent paradox that *tianxia* designates universality (“everything under heaven”) as well as sociocultural specificity (“everything under [a specifically Chinese-conceived] heaven”).

In the current volume, *China in the World*, Wang focuses more narrowly on the period from the late Qing dynasty (i.e., the late nineteenth and early

twentieth centuries) to the present day. He argues that during this tumultuous period of political transformation, China not only emerged as a modern nation-state but also continued to draw on a notion of polity derived from its premodern dynastic and imperial roots. As Lucian Pye puts it in a line that Wang cites in his opening paragraph, “China is not just another nation-state in the family of nations. China is a civilization pretending to be a state,” and Wang argues that this is true at the level not only of political sovereignty but also of ideology and political philosophy.

At its heart, accordingly, *China in the World* is concerned with the relationship between the two interlinked Confucian concepts to which Ricci elliptically alludes in the first two characters of his seminal 1603 text: “to make peaceful all under heaven” (ping tianxia) and “to govern the nation” (zhiguo)—including attendant questions of the relationship between universalism and particularity, continuity and transformation, inner and outer, self and other, and nation and world.