

= Chinese Rites controversy =

The Chinese Rites controversy was a dispute among Roman Catholic missionaries over the religiosity of Confucianism and Chinese rituals during the 17th and 18th centuries . The debate centered over whether Chinese ritual practices of honoring family ancestors and other formal Confucian and Chinese imperial rites qualified as religious rites and thus incompatible with Catholic belief . The Jesuits argued that these Chinese rites were secular rituals that were compatible with Christianity , within certain limits , and should thus be tolerated . The Dominicans and Franciscans , however , disagreed and reported the issue to Rome .

Rome 's Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith sided with the Dominicans in 1645 by condemning the Chinese rites based on their brief . However , the same congregation sided with the Jesuits in 1656 , thereby lifting the ban . It was one of the many disputes between the Jesuits and the Dominicans in China and elsewhere in Asia , including Japan and India .

The controversy embroiled leading European universities ; the Qing dynasty 's Kangxi Emperor and several popes (including Clement XI and Clement XIV) considered the case ; the offices of the Holy See also intervened . Near the end of the 17th century , many Dominicans and Franciscans had shifted their positions in agreeing with the Jesuits ' opinion , but Rome disagreed . Clement XI banned the rites in 1704 . In 1742 , Benedict XIV reaffirmed the ban and forbade debate .

In 1939 , after two centuries the Holy See re - assessed the issue . Pope Pius XII issued a decree on December 8 , 1939 , authorizing Christians to observe the ancestral rites and participate in Confucius - honouring ceremonies . The general principle of sometimes admitting native traditions even into the liturgy of the church , provided that such traditions harmonize with the true and authentic spirit of the liturgy , was proclaimed by the Second Vatican Council (1962 - 65) .

= = Background = =

= = = Early adaptation to local customs = = =

Unlike the American landmass , which had been conquered by military force by Spain and Portugal , European missionaries encountered in Asia united , literate societies that were as yet untouched by European influence or national endeavour .

Alessandro Valignano , Visitor of the Society of Jesus in Asia , was one of the first Jesuits to argue , in the case of Japan , for an adaptation of Christian customs to the societies of Asia , through his *Résolutions and Cérémonial* .

= = = Matteo Ricci 's policy of accommodation = = =

In China , Matteo Ricci reused the *Cérémonial* and adapted it to the Chinese context . At one point the Jesuits even started to wear the gown of Buddhist monks , before adopting the more prestigious silk gown of Chinese literati . In particular , Matteo Ricci 's Christian views on Confucianism and Chinese rituals , often called as " the Directives of Matteo Ricci 's Chinese ? - { } - ? " (Chinese :) , was followed by Jesuit missionaries in China and Japan .

In a decree signed on 23 March 1656 , Pope Alexander VII accepted practices " favorable to Chinese customs " , reinforcing 1615 decrees which accepted the usage of the Chinese language in liturgy , a notable exception to the contemporary Latin Catholic discipline which had generally forbidden the use of local languages .

In the 1659 instructions given by the Sacred Congregation for the Propagation of the Faith (known as the *Propaganda Fide*) to new missionaries to Asia , provisions were clearly made to the effect that adapting to local customs and respecting the habits of the countries to be evangelised was paramount :

Do not act with zeal , do not put forward any arguments to convince these peoples to change their rites , their customs or their usages , except if they are evidently contrary to the religion [i.e. ,

Catholic Christianity] and morality . What would be more absurd than to bring France , Spain , Italy or any other European country to the Chinese ? Do not bring to them our countries , but instead bring to them the Faith , a Faith that does not reject or hurt the rites , nor the usages of any people , provided that these are not distasteful , but that instead keeps and protects them .

= = = Reception in China = = =

The Kangxi Emperor was at first friendly to the Jesuit Missionaries working in China . He was grateful for the services they provided to him , in the areas of astronomy , diplomacy and artillery manufacture . The Jesuits also made an important contribution to the Empire 's military , with the diffusion of European artillery technology , and they directed the castings of cannons of various calibres . Jesuit translators Jean @-@ François Gerbillon and Thomas Pereira took part in the negotiations of the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689 , where they helped translating . By the end of the seventeenth century , the Jesuits also had made many converts .

In 1692 , Kangxi issued an edict of toleration of Christianity (Chinese : ??? or Chinese : ????) :

The Europeans are very quiet ; they do not excite any disturbances in the provinces , they do no harm to anyone , they commit no crimes , and their doctrine has nothing in common with that of the false sects in the empire , nor has it any tendency to excite sedition ... We decide therefore that all temples dedicated to the Lord of heaven , in whatever place they may be found , ought to be preserved , and that it may be permitted to all who wish to worship this God to enter these temples , offer him incense , and perform the ceremonies practised according to ancient custom by the Christians . Therefore let no one henceforth offer them any opposition .

This edict elevates Christianity on equal status with Confucianism in China . The Kangxi Emperor also hired several Jesuits in his court as scientists and artists .

= = Controversy = =

The Society of Jesus (the Jesuit order) was successful in penetrating China and serving at the Imperial court . They impressed the Chinese with their knowledge of European astronomy and mechanics , and in fact ran the Imperial Observatory . Their accurate methods allowed the Kangxi Emperor to successfully predict eclipses , one of his ritual duties . Other Jesuits functioned as court painters . The Jesuits in turn were impressed by the Chinese Confucian elite , and adapted to that lifestyle .

The Jesuits encountered a problem with their missionary work in China , and gradually developed and adopted a policy of accommodation on the issue of Chinese rites . The Chinese elite were attached to Confucianism , while Buddhism and Daoism were mostly practiced by the common people and lower aristocracy of this period . Despite this , all three provided the framework of both state and home life . Part of Confucian and Taoist practices involved veneration of one 's ancestors .

Besides the Jesuits , other religious orders such as the Dominicans , Franciscans , and Augustinians started missionary work in China during the 17th century , often coming from the Spanish colony of the Philippines . Contrary to the Jesuits , they refused any adaptation to local customs and wished to apply in China the same tabula rasa principle they had applied in other places , and were horrified by the practices of the Jesuits .

They ignited a heated controversy and brought it to Rome . They raised three main points of contention :

Determination of the Chinese word for " God " , which was generally accepted as ?? Ti?nzh? (Lord of Heaven) , while Jesuits were willing to allow Chinese Christians to use ? Ti?n (Heaven) or ?? Shàngdì (Lord Above / Supreme Emperor)

Prohibition for Christians to participate in the season rites for Confucius .

Prohibition for Christians of the use of tablets with the forbidden inscription " site of the soul " , and to follow the Chinese rites for the ancestor worship .

In Rome , the Jesuits tried to argue that these " Chinese Rites " were social (rather than religious)

ceremonies , and that converts should be allowed to continue to participate .

The Jesuits argued that Chinese folk religion and offerings to the Emperor and departed ancestors were civil in nature and therefore not incompatible with Catholicism , while their opponents argued that these kinds of worship were an expression of native religion and thus incompatible with Catholic beliefs .

= = Pope Clement XI 's decree = =

Pope Clement XI condemned the Chinese rites and Confucian rituals , and outlawed any further discussion in 1704 , with the anti @-@ rites decree Cum Deus optimus of November 20 , 1704 . It forbade the use of " Ti?n " and " Shàngdì " , while approving Ti?nzh? (? Lord of Heaven ?) .

In 1705 , the Pope sent a Papal Legate to the Kangxi Emperor , to communicate to him the interdiction of Chinese rites . The mission , led by Charles @-@ Thomas Maillard De Tournon , communicated the prohibition of Chinese rites in January 1707 , but as a result was banished to Macao .

Further , the Pope issued the 19 March 1715 Papal bull Ex illa die which officially condemned the Chinese rites :

Pope Clement XI wishes to make the following facts permanently known to all the people in the world ...

I. The West calls Deus [God] the creator of Heaven , Earth , and everything in the universe . Since the word Deus does not sound right in the Chinese language , the Westerners in China and Chinese converts to Catholicism have used the term " Heavenly Lord " (Ti?nzh?) for many years . From now on such terms as " Heaven " [Ti?n] and " Shàngdì " should not be used : Deus should be addressed as the Lord of Heaven , Earth , and everything in the universe . The tablet that bears the Chinese words " Reverence for Heaven " should not be allowed to hang inside a Catholic church and should be immediately taken down if already there .

II . The spring and autumn worship of Confucius , together with the worship of ancestors , is not allowed among Catholic converts . It is not allowed even though the converts appear in the ritual as bystanders , because to be a bystander in this ritual is as pagan as to participate in it actively .

III . Chinese officials and successful candidates in the metropolitan , provincial , or prefectural examinations , if they have been converted to Roman Catholicism , are not allowed to worship in Confucian temples on the first and fifteenth days of each month . The same prohibition is applicable to all the Chinese Catholics who , as officials , have recently arrived at their posts or who , as students , have recently passed the metropolitan , provincial , or prefectural examinations .

IV . No Chinese Catholics are allowed to worship ancestors in their familial temples .

V. Whether at home , in the cemetery , or during the time of a funeral , a Chinese Catholic is not allowed to perform the ritual of ancestor worship . He is not allowed to do so even if he is in company with non @-@ Christians . Such a ritual is heathen in nature regardless of the circumstances .

Despite the above decisions , I have made it clear that other Chinese customs and traditions that can in no way be interpreted as heathen in nature should be allowed to continue among Chinese converts . The way the Chinese manage their households or govern their country should by no means be interfered with . As to exactly what customs should or should not be allowed to continue , the papal legate in China will make the necessary decisions . In the absence of the papal legate , the responsibility of making such decisions should rest with the head of the China mission and the Bishop of China . In short , customs and traditions that are not contradictory to Roman Catholicism will be allowed , while those that are clearly contradictory to it will not be tolerated under any circumstances .

In 1742 Benedict XIV reiterated in his papal bull Ex quo singulari Clement XI 's decree . Benedict demanded that missionaries in China take an oath forbidding them to discuss the issue again .

= = Kangxi 's ban = =

In the early 18th century , Rome 's ensuing challenge to the Chinese Rites led to the expulsion of Catholic missionaries from China .

In July 1706 , the Papal Legate led by Charles @-@ Thomas Maillard De Tournon irritated the Kangxi Emperor , and the emperor issued an order that all missionaries , in order to obtain an imperial permit (piao) to stay in China , would have to declare that they would follow ? the rules of Matteo Ricci ? .

In 1721 , the Kangxi Emperor disagreed with Clement 's decree and banned Christian missions in China . In the Decree of Kangxi , he stated ,

Reading this proclamation , I have concluded that the Westerners are petty indeed . It is impossible to reason with them because they do not understand larger issues as we understand them in China . There is not a single Westerner versed in Chinese works , and their remarks are often incredible and ridiculous . To judge from this proclamation , their religion is no different from other small , bigoted sects of Buddhism or Taoism . I have never seen a document which contains so much nonsense . From now on , Westerners should not be allowed to preach in China , to avoid further trouble .

Chinese converts were also involved in the controversy through letters of protest , books , pamphlets , etc . The Controversy debate was most intense between a group of Christian literati and a Catholic Bishop (named Charles Maigrot de Crissey) in Fujian province , with the Chinese group of converts support the Jesuits and the bishop supported by less accommodating Iberian mendicants (Dominicans and Franciscans) .

= = The Qianlong Emperor 's reinforcement = =

Although the Jesuits ' defense of Christianity in China was still grounded in the accommodation policy first practiced by Matteo Ricci , it ended in failure in the eighteenth century : The persecution of Chinese Christians that began with his father 's , the Yongzheng Emperor 's 1724 proscription of the Heavenly Lord sect (Tianzhujiào , the name given Catholicism in China in that period) steadily increased during the reign of Qianlong Emperor . While the Qianlong Emperor appreciated and admired the Jesuit Giuseppe Castiglione 's artwork and western technologies , the emperor reinforced anti @-@ Christian policies in 1737 .

= = Dissolution of Jesuits = =

Pope Clement XIV dissolved the Society of Jesuits in 1773 , on the issue over Jesuit accommodation policy ; in particular , the 1773 decree did not accept that Chinese Rites can be placed on equal footing with Europe and Christianity .

= = Pope Pius XII 's decision = =

The Rites controversy continued to hamper Church efforts to gain converts in China . In 1939 , a few weeks after his election to the papacy , Pope Pius XII ordered the Congregation for the Evangelization of Peoples to relax certain aspects of Clement XI 's and Benedict XIV 's decrees . After the Apostolic Vicars had received guarantees from the Manchukuo Government that confirmed the mere " civil " characteristics of the so @-@ called " Chinese rites " , the Holy See released , on December 8 , 1939 , a new decree , known as Plane Compertum , stating that :

Catholics are permitted to be present at ceremonies in honor of Confucius in Confucian temples or in schools ;

Erection of an image of Confucius or tablet with his name on is permitted in Catholic schools .

Catholic magistrates and students are permitted to passively attend public ceremonies which have the appearance of superstition .

It is licit and unobjectionable for head inclinations and other manifestations of civil observance before the deceased or their images .

The oath on the Chinese rites , which was prescribed by Benedict XIV , is not fully in accord with

recent regulations and is superfluous .

This meant that Chinese customs were no longer considered superstitious , but were an honourable way of esteeming one 's relatives and therefore permitted by Catholic Christians . Confucianism was also thus recognized as a philosophy and an integral part of Chinese culture rather than as a heathen religion in conflict with Catholicism . Shortly afterwards , in 1943 , the Government of China established diplomatic relations with the Vatican . The Papal decree changed the ecclesiastical situation in China in an almost revolutionary way . As the Church began to flourish , Pius XII established a local ecclesiastical hierarchy , and , in 1946 , named Thomas Tien Ken @-@ sin (Chinese : ???) SVD , then Apostolic Vicar of Qingdao , as the first Chinese national in the Sacred College of Cardinals and later that year appointed him to the Archdiocese of Beiping .