

LEIBNIZ'S POSITIVE VIEW OF CHINA

China's discovery, after Marco Polo, in terms of information, goods, news, and missions, was a seventeenth-century event. When Leibniz joined the intellectual world of his day, China was already a topic of debate and item of interest in Europe. First-hand reports and discussions on nearly all conceivable aspects of China were being published in leading European journals. But what distinguished Leibniz from most contemporaries was his continuous and persistent curiosity about all Chinese things, an interest that resonates in his various projects. His earliest mention of China is in *De Arte Combinatoria* in 1666; his last text on China is a letter to Areskine of August 1716 (with the offer of his calculation machine as a gift to the Chinese emperor). For 50 years, Leibniz took a lively interest in China. He was well informed about land and culture, and he engaged in a variety of endeavours related to China.¹

1. LEIBNIZ'S PROJECT OF SINO-EUROPEAN KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

As his early letters to Christian Müller illustrate, Leibniz was first interested in Chinese speech and script in the context of his quest for a universal language. At the same time, he tried to obtain more information about Chinese history and other areas of knowledge by writing to Papebroch, who was in close contact with the Belgian missionaries in China. Originally, Leibniz was not particularly interested in Chinese religion and philosophy. Put another way, he remained dissatisfied with the relevant publications of the day, as *Sapientia Sinica* by Prosper Intorcetta, *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas* by Matteo Ricci, and even with the famous *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* by Philippe Couplet (1687).² In his exchanges, Leibniz emerges as up to date about Chinese publications and reports.

WENCHAO LI, professor, Institute for Philosophy, Freie Universität Berlin and Dalian University of Technology (China). Specialties: Leibniz, Chinese philosophy of science and technology, Sino-European cultural relations. E-mail: wenchao.li@tu-berlin.de. HANS POSER, professor emeritus, Institute for Philosophy, Technical University Berlin. Specialties: history of modern philosophy, philosophy of science and technology. E-mail: hans.poser@tu-berlin.de

But in early letters and tracts, he was not particularly curious about Chinese metaphysics and mathematics. Apart from the interest in Chinese language and characters, he was seeking information about the range of China's technology and practical skills: In medicine, anatomy, pyrotechnics, paper production, glass making, communication technology, silkworm breeding, wind energy, and in the chemistry of bleaching.

The encounter with the Jesuit Philip Grimaldi in summer 1689 furthered Leibniz's engagement with China. The meeting in Rome with this lively priest from China resulted in diverse answers to specific questions and inspired his project of a Sino-European information exchange.³ The Jesuits, so Leibniz in a letter to Grimaldi, "brought our mathematical findings to China, but I hope you [Grimaldi] can bring some of its own things back, for a genuine European benefit."⁴ In another letter Leibniz writes that the Chinese "are superior to us in observational skills, as we are superior in theoretical skills—thus let's trade each other's talents, and let us catch fire with fire!"⁵ In subsequent years Leibniz would expand this idea of a Sino-European knowledge exchange to a global joint venture including Russia:

I regard it as a unique plan by the fates [Leibniz writes in *Novissima Sinica*] that human cultivation and refinement happens today to be clustered, as it were, on the two poles of our continent, in Europe and in China . . . which adorns the Orient just as Europe does the opposite edge of the Earth. Perhaps Supreme Providence has ordained such an arrangement, so that as the most cultured and distant peoples stretch out their arms to each other, those in between may gradually be brought to a better way of life.⁶

Leibniz viewed the China mission primarily as the promise and opportunity for creating a Sino-European knowledge exchange. The East Asian missionary activity initiated by the Jesuit order, in the so-called flowering of the mission at the threshold to modern times, should be developed into a cultural and civilizing era for a comprehensive program to promote innovation and science, shared by Europe and China. The trade of "merchandise and spice" ought to be elevated to a "commerce" of "ideas," discoveries, "light, and wisdom." The missionaries need to import Chinese knowledge to Europe, as on naturalistic observation, crafts, technology, language and literature, astronomical, geophysical, and historical data, and on ethics and natural theology. Doing so would result in a tremendous boost of knowledge, reason, and morality; of quality of life and of welfare of the commonwealth—not just for China, but also for Russia and Europe. Leibniz's euphoria is palpable in his letter to Electress Sophie Charlotte; he announces he wants to nail the sign "China-Office" to his office door; and he expresses the hope that overland

travel to China will be doable by travelling through Russia and the Tartar-regions on dog sledges.⁷

Extraordinary among his contemporaries was this early recognition by Leibniz that the discovery of China's advanced culture promises more to Europe than the spread of the Gospel. In light of its territorial expansion, population size, historical depth, common morality, and its cultural and social achievements—and not the least because of its present king—China was for Leibniz a cultural and political power that constitutes both an opportunity and a challenge.

Leibniz adopted a universal and globalized perspective in his reflections on China. The Great Commission of Christianity, in its various senses, plays a comparatively minor role in his arguments. What appears more important is the recognition and admiration of this ancient and distant culture, which also implies caution and a warning: He urgently warns the Jesuits to refrain from giving all European knowledge promptly away, as the order was doing at the Beijing court, for this risks contributing to China's eventual superiority. It would be better, so Leibniz, if Western disclosures were compensated by Eastern information, especially since Europe and China are mutual complements. Apparently, Leibniz had gathered from the many overseas mission reports that China is superior in empirical and observational knowledge, while Europe is superior in formal, scientific, and theoretical knowledge. On medicine, he wrote to Spitzel in 1672:

Whereas our compatriots are outstanding in anatomy and chemistry or physiology, as well as in the knowledge of theoretical principles of the [mechanical] art, [the Chinese] are distinguished in the empirical area, which is actually more appropriate for medicinal purposes of health and, so to speak, closer to botany, pathology, and therapeutics; that is, in the knowledge of simple things, and in the practical treatments of diseases.⁸

Later, Leibniz wrote to Grimaldi (1689):

Physics relies more on practical observations, and mathematics needs considered understanding. In these two fields Europe is excellent. But the Chinese are superior in practical experience, since the flourishing of their empire over so many millennia let them retain old traditions that had been largely lost in Europe through the Peoples' Migrations.⁹

But Leibniz's project of Sino-European knowledge exchange was threatened more and more by the Chinese Rites Controversy.

2. "MOSES OR CHINA?"¹⁰

The seventeenth-century China Mission was fraught with bitter debate¹¹. Theologically there were two burning problems that

divided missionaries in China, and their divisions quickly spread back to Europe. The first problem—the Chinese Term controversy—was whether the Chinese language contained a close lexical equivalent for the Christian concept of God. This discussion was joined by another and even more intense debate, the Chinese Rites controversy. This second problem was about whether the rites performed by Chinese people to their ancestors, and by Chinese scholars to Confucius, were just civil and secular etiquette, or whether they were idolatrous superstitions. If they were the former, there would be no harm done in tolerating their continued performance among Christian converts. But if they were the latter, the Chinese would have to abandon the rites completely as a precondition for baptism into the true faith.

On both problems, the Jesuits were largely in agreement. They believed that terms such as *shangdi* (Lord-on-High) and *tian* (Heaven/Sky) did not corrupt the notion of the Christian God. They also found in most ancestral or Confucian rites essentially only a social and ethical meaning, and consequently free from idolatry. Thus rites should be allowed for Christian converts. Against these opinions—the so-called Accommodation—stood the view that native Chinese terms tainted God with pagan associations, and that ancestral and Confucian rites were in essence heretical.

The dispute peaked in the time of Leibniz and the Kangxi Emperor, and ended in disaster. In 1700 Kangxi confirmed the Jesuit accommodationist position with a decree that all rites were civil and social in nature, a confirmation rejected by Rome as the meddling of a civil authority in a religious matter.¹² The Sorbonne Theological Faculty condemned several Jesuit books in 1700.¹³ The Roman Holy Office initiated an extensive investigation that led to the clerical decree *Cum Deus optimus* in 1704, which was ratified by Pope Clement XI and published by the papal legate Carlo Tommaso Mailard de Tournon in Nanking (1707).¹⁴ The 1704-bull served as the basis of the Papal decrees of 1715 and 1742, which banned Chinese Rites and forbade further discussion.

The Rites Controversy ultimately amounted to the problem of whether it is necessary to modify China's culture in order to convert it to a foreign religion such as Christianity, and whether it is necessary to modify Christianity for the sake of its possible wider acceptance by the Chinese. "The problem is," as J. D. Spence noted, "how much one should adapt to other cultures and other civilisations while still holding on to the core of one's faith."¹⁵ Prior to any effort of such kind, the foreign culture first requires an interpretation that can relate it to the own cultural background. In this sense, the specific controversy over rites as such was less the problem than the inexorable

vehemence of this encounter—involved were the Chinese Emperors, the Holy Office, and the Jesuit, Franciscan, Dominican, and Augustinian orders, as well as theologians and philosophers. As a result, the Rites Controversy was not only a religious dispute but also a political quarrel, which was conducted more within Europe than in the exchange of Europe and China. The sides of the controversy, which grew into a Western rift, originated in the Jesuit accommodation over terms and rites, versus the rejection of terms and rites by members of other missionary orders.

The accommodationist position and its opposite were more or less equally successful in missionary practice. Even if we had something like a perfect grasp on the truth of the matter, empirical outcomes of the implementation of either position make it impossible to decide which view was the better one. Had the famous controversy been much ado about nothing? In any event, the papal decrees of 1704 and 1715, prohibiting the rites, were obeyed. But it was not a judgment perceived as being theologically correct that caused this obedience, but rather the circumstance that the controversies over terms and rites had turned out to be inconclusive.

3. LEIBNIZ AND THE CHINESE RITES CONTROVERSY

Given his early interest in China, Leibniz paid relatively late attention to the Rites Controversy. He reacted to the incipient hostility to the Jesuits in France and elsewhere in Europe.¹⁶ His arguments involved a pragmatic consideration: Since certain rites, especially the ones regarding polygamy, are incompatible with Church doctrine, there is little hope of a religious conversion of the Chinese; only Western science (especially geometry and astronomy) had opened the door to China.¹⁷ Revealing is his view on the rites in *Examen Religionis Christianae* (1686): China would not give up this “bad habit,” Leibniz thinks, but neither would Rome give in, even if we find nothing against polygamy in the Scripture.¹⁸

The view sounds rational, and all the more so since Leibniz tried to give the China mission a new direction, especially since the meeting with Grimaldi in Rome in summer 1689. At that time, he articulated his proposal for a Sino-European information exchange: Europeans would teach geometry, metaphysics, and revealed religion to Chinese, while Chinese would teach natural religion and practical philosophy to Europeans. Behind this proposal stood his interest in Chinese language and concepts and his quest for the *characteristica universalis*.

So we can describe Leibniz's situation with a Chinese poem, "tree wants rest/but wind won't let him" (*shu yu jing er feng bu zhi*). When the Rites Controversy was brought to public attention, it grew to such alarming proportions that both mission and knowledge transfer were threatened by failure. Leibniz found himself compelled to step in and deal with such *bagatelles*, because all his grand projects and ideas were closely tied to the success of the China mission.¹⁹ His *Novissima Sinica* is a direct reply to the "great lawsuit in Rome between Jesuits and other missionaries".²⁰ Its second edition (2 years later, 1699), as well as the tract *De cultu Confucii civili* (early 1700s), are demands for a rational solution to the problem of rites; a closer look shows them to be reactions to the Jesuit quarrel with the Dominicans and some other missionaries.²¹

Leibniz's efforts were in vain. His warnings fell on deaf ears in Paris and Rome. The decision of the Chinese Emperor in favor of the Jesuits; the Roman confirmation of the decree by Maigrot; the Sorbonne prohibition of some important Jesuit works (after thirty-three meetings, on 10 October 1700); and the publication of the edict *Cum Deus optimus* by Clemens XI (1707), all conspired to create systematic interruptions of Leibniz's exchange with the Jesuits in China. But these complications did not stop him from continuing to get information about and from China. Examinations of records in the Leibniz archives prove that he knew a lot about the trajectory of the discussions and the efforts at diplomacy between Rome and Peking; they also show that the events disappointed him time and again.²²

Around the time the pontifical legate Maillard de Tournon arrived in Peking (Nov 1705), Leibniz wrote to Father Joachim Bouvet that De Tournon had been sent by the Pope in favor of the Jesuits; Leibniz associated with the journey the hope that the outcome would be a happier turn than the disappointment 5 years earlier at the Sorbonne in Paris.²³ As it turned out, the legate's mission to settle the accommodationist issue was a failure. In Nanking, De Tournon made the decree *Cum Deus optimus* publicly known in 1707; as a result, he was deported to Macao and put under house arrest. One year later, Leibniz remarked that this cardinal had gotten off rather lightly; after all, De Tournon had condemned the Confucius cult as evil idolatry in an audience with the stunned Chinese Emperor.²⁴ Leibniz accused the pontifical legate of a political conduct that would have been utterly unacceptable at other royal courts, as in Paris or in Madrid.²⁵ China's Emperor reacted to De Tournon's legation by sending two Jesuit priests, Joseph-Antoine Provana and Raimundo de Arxo, as his personal legates back to Rome. In 1709, Leibniz inquired whether China's legate, Father Provana, had already arrived at the Vatican.²⁶

Next the Chinese Emperor issued his own public statement, the so-called *Décret Rouge* or “Red Manifesto.” Leibniz informed La Croze that he had read a version of the imperial decree; he assumed the royal court in Peking knew of the “revolution in Japan,” and he strongly warned against endorsing the misgivings of De Tournon.²⁷ After the *Mémoires pour Rome sur l'état de la Religion Chretienne dans la Chine* were published in Batavia in 1709, Leibniz wrote to Des Bosses that the Christian authors of the *Mémoires* were critical of the Jesuits but failed to convince him.²⁸

In order to improve the Jesuit standing at Rome, Tolomei (the agent of the Jesuits at the Vatican) requested from Leibniz a copy of the *Novissima Sinica*, so that others could see what a famous Protestant scholar was thinking about the Chinese. Tolomei wrote to him how pleased he had been about Leibniz's observations on the Chinese Rites in particular.²⁹ Leibniz replied that the *Novissima Sinica* had already been sent by Magliabechi to Rome a year ago.³⁰ Two weeks later he mailed his *Annotationes de cultu religioneque Sinensium*.³¹ De Bosses immediately forwarded one copy of the *Annotationes* to Tolomei and reported to Leibniz on September 6, 1709, that the work had been very positively received. But, so Des Bosses, this “help after the war” may have been too late; the situation was such that there was no hope for a happy resolution.³²

In fact, the massive efforts of Leibniz, of the Chinese Emperor, and by the Jesuits failed to have any influence on the developments in Rome. In 1710 Clemens XI forbade Chinese Rites. Shortly after that, Leibniz confessed his incomprehension for the Roman exercise in hair-splitting, revealed his surprise at the turn of events, and voiced his doubts whether the Chinese Emperor would be amused.³³ There was now reason to fear that the China mission would be destroyed.³⁴ Two years later, the imperial legate Provana returned to China without having achieved anything. Still, Leibniz hoped that Provana would bring something from Rome to appease the Emperor.

The Rites Controversy was also a topic at the royal court in Vienna. “The Prince,” so Leibniz, “argued against the Jesuits in the case of the worship of Confucius, whereas I agreed with them.”³⁵ Next he wrote to Des Bosses that the Rites strike him as civil in type, not the least since the Chinese neither hope nor expect anything in return from ancestors or from Confucius.³⁶

On the papal bull *Ex illa die*, which doomed the Jesuit China mission, Leibniz remarked, “Sometimes I am more amazed by papal worries than capable of possibly understanding them.”³⁷ Nevertheless, until the bitter end he hoped that someone could eventually be sent to China who would be less narrow-minded than the erstwhile emissary De Tournon³⁸.

4. LEIBNIZ'S ASSESSMENTS OF THE RITES CONTROVERSY

We saw that Leibniz was well informed about the Rites Controversy and that he was up to date with the unfolding events. But to return to the earlier question: Are Chinese Rites, as ancestral worship and Confucian reverence, a “cultus religiosus” and “une véritable Idolatrie”?; or are they only a “cultus civilis” that posed no threat for Christianity?³⁹ Time and again Leibniz reiterated that those forms of worship are more “riti civiles” and “politici” than anything else.⁴⁰ Nevertheless we are not dealing here with an informed judgment, but instead with a principle, the famous *praejudicium Leibnitii*, which means:

If I were wrong, I would like to err in favor of other persons, and not be mistaken to their disadvantage.⁴¹

According to his definition in *De Cultu Confucii civili*, a religious cult is for Leibniz a cult in which we attribute to the object of reverence a superhuman power capable of granting us rewards or of inflicting punishments upon us.⁴² He does not deny that “the cult, which the Chinese show to Confucius and to other deceased persons of merit, especially their ancestors, appear[s] to involve rites that elsewhere may be regarded as religious ones” in particular in the more excessive forms of ceremonial pomp; and neither does he deny that some Chinese hold this worship (*pietas*) as useful because they hope for some rewards.⁴³

Despite sympathies for the Jesuit position, articulated especially in *Novissima Sinica*, Leibniz took other arguments and reports seriously, and he was prepared to deal with them. Nevertheless he pointed out that the Rites worship can equally be understood as a political cult, since the relevant symbols are largely ambiguous—the excesses alone, so Leibniz, do not require a strict interpretation. The Chinese practice of calling the place on which the image of the deceased is displayed, and to whom gifts are offered, a “throne or seat” of the “soul or spirit” can just as well be understood in an anthropomorphic or poetic fashion. That is, so Leibniz, a fashion of describing the glory attributed to immortality, and not as if the Chinese thought “the soul would actually return to this place and rejoice in the offerings.”⁴⁴

The central element of religion is the *cultus*, Leibniz argues, but to understand a foreign religion and community, one must engage with the cultural context over and beyond the *cultus*; the latter “consists not so much of rituals but more of spirit or *animus*.”⁴⁵

Therefore, the question of whether Rites are religious or civil cults can only be settled by determining the *animus* of the ancestral worship, which means concretely to determine whether the Chinese

expect something from their ancestors.⁴⁶ This will require going beyond the acts of veneration, to study systematically documents and textual sources, and to do so by trying to understand them from a Chinese vantage point as well as by using European logic and criticism. The purpose of such analysis is differentiation: To distinguish ancient from recent writers, truth from falsehood, and cultural authority from personal opinion.⁴⁷ Leibniz did not rule out that Europeans might be able to understand the Chinese texts better than the Chinese themselves, just as Christian scholars understood the ancient Hebrew documents better than the Jews had:

Who does not know in our day that Christian scholars are much better interpreters of the most ancient books of the Hebrews than the Jews themselves? How often strangers have better insight into the histories and monuments of a nation than their own citizens! This is even more likely concerning doctrines more than twenty centuries removed from the Chinese, who are quite possibly not as equipped with the interpretive aids as we are, informed about Chinese literature, and especially aided by European methods.⁴⁸

This systematic determination of the spiritual nature of the rites, Leibniz was convinced, had not been done.⁴⁹ We can read this conviction as a critique of the Jesuits and of other orders. Clearly, as long as this research was lacking, it is impossible to determine what will be the authentic, true, and official Chinese doctrine.⁵⁰ In such a situation, it would be best to follow the example of St. Paul and other Church Fathers.⁵¹ As role models, they imposed a Christian reading on Plato and on other philosophers; similarly, one should construct a benevolent interpretation of Chinese texts and documents, if at all possible. This strategy is for Leibniz a “general rule”;⁵² it demands a careful treatment of foreign religions and societies, because every culture is the result of its own history, while involving a spectrum of different schools and figures. This manifold structure yields a certain intercultural overlap and consequently the possibility of communicating between cultures. Accordingly Leibniz compared the Confucian worship in China with the veneration of Aristotle, which is permissible in Europe. Concerning ancestral worship, he points out that “just as to Moses, God promises longevity to those honoring father and mother”; as far as rules of living are concerned, he reminds that “neither in the Pentateuch nor in other books of the Old Testament are there conclusive discussions of incorporeal substances or of just rewards in another life.”⁵³ In sum, Leibniz concludes that “as a general rule, nothing prevents us from thinking well of the ancient doctrines unless we are compelled to proceed differently”;⁵⁴ and “nothing prevents us from reading what ancients teach about divine and spiritual things in a more favorable sense.”⁵⁵

Leibniz's demand for a systematic China scholarship as a precondition on any European verdict on the Rites takes the tension out of the controversy and pushes the mission in a new direction. Nevertheless, all of his arguments concern ultimately matters of global politics, which had no traction in the pontifical commission. Leibniz saw the mission as a unique opportunity for a mutual Sino-European information transfer. This is why he failed to appreciate the worth and need of the Rites Controversy. In light of the expected benefits, Europeans should be ashamed of themselves for quarrelling about such trifles:

Il est honteux à nous Europeans . . . qu'on s'occupe à des bagatelles, et qu'on neglige les plus grandes choses où la conscience, la gloire et l'utilité sont également interessées.⁵⁶

5. CONCLUSION: LEIBNIZ'S *DISCOURS SUR LA THÉOLOGIE NATURELLE DES CHINOIS* (1716)

Originally Leibniz paid little attention to Chinese philosophy in particular, and Intorcetta's work on the subject, *Sapientia Sinica*, left him dissatisfied. He read *De Christianiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu, ex P. Matthaei Ricci ejudem Societatis Comentariis* (Rome 1615), published by Nicolas Trigault from Ricci's notes and memoirs, and which was in Leibniz's day the most reliable source on China's people, government, legislation, and mores. But even here, Leibniz's attention was elsewhere, as is illustrated by his references to Trigault in his paper *Annotatio de quibusdam ludis, inprimis de ludo quodam Sinico, differentiaque Scachici et Latrunculorum, et novo genere Ludi Navalis*.⁵⁷ Even the influential anthology *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus*, translated and edited by Couplet and other missionaries (Paris 1687), did not stir Leibniz's interest in Chinese philosophy. Instead Leibniz pointed out the importance of Chinese historiography for settling the European controversies over Biblical chronology.⁵⁸ And even in the intense talks with Grimaldi in Rome 1689, Chinese philosophy was queried only once.⁵⁹

Leibniz's first mention of Chinese philosophy in particular occurs in *Novissima Sinica* (1697; 2nd ed. 1699). He expresses his admiration for China's culture that "surpasses ours in comprehending the precepts of civil life," because "all laws of the Chinese, in contrast to those of other peoples, are directed to attaining public peace [ad tranquillitatem publicam] and creating social order."⁶⁰ He saw a Chinese superiority in "practical philosophy; that is, in the precepts of ethics and politics adapted to the present life and to the use of mortals."⁶¹ Elsewhere he sees a superiority in "natural theology":

Certainly the condition of our affairs, slipping as we are into ever greater corruption, seems to be such that we need missionaries from the Chinese who might teach us the use and practice of natural theology, just as we have sent them teachers of revealed theology. And so I believe that if someone expert, not in the beauty of goddesses but in the excellence of peoples, were selected as judge, the golden apple would be awarded to the Chinese unless we should win by virtue of one great but superhuman thing, namely, the divine gift of the Christian religion.⁶²

How is it possible for China to reach such moral sophistication that one can speak of natural theology? In *Novissima Sinica* Leibniz suggests only that Confucianism could be seen as a kind of Chinese Platonism, but Plato learnt of the idea of the good not from a Christian source.

In 1700, when the Rites Controversy entered its most heated phase, the Foreign Mission at Paris published Longobardi's *Traité sur quelques pointes de la religion des Chinois* and Antoine de Sainte Marie's *Traité sur quelques points importants de la mission de la Chine*. Upon the request by the scholar Nicolas-François Rémond for Leibniz's judgment on these treatises, Leibniz wrote his famous letter to Rémond on Chinese philosophy, the so-called *Discours sur la théologie naturelle des Chinois*—a text that has not yet been comprehensively researched.

Proceeding from the Confucian translations contained in the two missionary treatises, Leibniz demonstrated in his *Discours* that Longobardi's interpretation was flawed. For Leibniz, and contrary to Longobardi, one must rather assume that the Chinese had a notion of God that completely corresponds to the Christian notion of God, apart from the lack of revealed contents. Leibniz's fascination of interpreting Chinese thought consequently concerned the possibility of an essential philosophical correspondence of China and Europe. Avoiding simple misinterpretations of Chinese terms, he inquired into ontological structures and convergent metaphysical terms. In this universalistic thrust, he differed from other philosophical and theological figures of the day (an epoch that was rather biased against all foreigners), but he also differed from those who tended to idealize the Far East for the sake of launching into systematic critiques of domestic affairs. Certainly Leibniz could not refute all objections raised by Longobardi and the other missionaries. But even when pressed by critique, he usually argued apologetically for Chinese vantage points. Frequently he points out that some evidently mistaken view by the Chinese had also been held by several scholars in Europe, and that an error cannot be worse just because Chinese had made it.

For instance, Longobardi tried to buttress his charge that Confucius was an atheist with Confucius' pointed silence on the relevant topics. Leibniz replied that "at all times Christian writers" had done the same, without having any bad intentions.⁶³ Another example is the case of Spinoza: China's Sung-Confucianism was often accused by Western critics to be just another form of Spinozism and consequently to constitute atheism. Leibniz, however, argued that some Chinese maintained what some European scholars had maintained as well, which only went to show that even Europeans are not immune to atheism. Indeed, in no other work did Leibniz try more clearly to search for the *one* truth that can and should bind all cultures together.

Judged from a philological and sinological perspective, one could say that Leibniz misinterpreted a number of Chinese texts.⁶⁴ In distinguishing between classical authors and modern writers, he contended that classical authors had pure knowledge of God and misidentified some modern terms as classical ones. When finding passages that seemed to contradict a reasonable interpretation, he regularly attributed them to modern writers. Largely relying on the texts of Longobardi and Sainte Marie, he introduced some confusions; for instance, he viewed the term "*li*," a central concept in neo-Confucianism, as a classical term and accordingly attributed it to Confucius and Mencius. He also held out hopes for the Kangxi Emperor, appealing to an imperial verdict on disputed issues, as if the question of truth is nothing but a question of decree.

Still, the *Discours* is not a systematic study of China's natural theology, but rather an occasional piece based on the two tracts mentioned, and intended as a refutation of Longobardi's interpretation. This raises the questions of whether his critique on Longobardi is logical, and also whether Leibniz's alternate reading would have been a more fruitful approach for understanding Chinese texts.

In sum, the centerpiece of all Leibnizian arguments was the promise offered by the China mission for a Sino-European knowledge exchange. The Rites Controversy, in his view, was a distracting quarrel about trifles. In substance, Leibniz believed that Chinese ideas, especially those attributed to the so-called ancients and understood as a sort of natural theology, are fully compatible with Christian tenets. And in form, he believed that Chinese texts should be interpreted benevolently unless incontrovertible facts would necessitate a more critical reading.

After Leibniz, the European image of China increasingly portrayed it as a superstitious nation and as "an atheistic, corrupt, stagnant land addicted to Opium".⁶⁵ At the same time, the sinological studies desired by Leibniz would continue to evolve and deepen. We do not know whether their eventual research results would have prompted

him to revise his statements or to change his views. But perhaps we should rather think about another question: What would have happened if the peoples of the seventeenth century had listened to Leibniz's proposals?

DALIAN UNIVERSITY OF TECHNOLOGY
Berlin, Germany

TECHNICAL UNIVERSITY BERLIN
Berlin, Germany

ENDNOTES

The authors thank Martin Schönfeld for revising their English.

1. Leibniz's writings are quoted as follows:

A = Leibniz, *Sämtliche Schriften und Briefe*, ed. Preußische (later on Deutsche, now Berlin-Brandenburgische) Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Berlin, Darmstadt (later on Leipzig, now: Berlin: Akademie Verlag), 1923ff.

C = *Opusculs et Fragments Inédits de Leibniz*, ed. par Louis Couturat (Paris, 1903; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1961, 1966).

Discours sur la théologie naturelle = Leibniz, *Discours sur la théologie naturelle des Chinois*, ed. Wenchao Li and Hans Poser (Frankfurt: Klostermann Verlag, 2002); published as *Veröffentlichungen des Leibniz-Archivs* 13.

Dutens = Leibniz, *Opera omnia, nunc primum collecta* . . . studio Ludovici Dutens, 6 vols. (Geneva: Fratres de Tournes, 1768; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1990).

GM = *Leibnizens mathematische Schriften*, ed. Carl I. Gerhardt (Berlin 1849–1863; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 1962).

GP = Leibniz, *Philosophische Schriften*, ed. Carl I. Gerhardt (Berlin 1875–1890; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms, 1978).

Klopp = Leibniz, *Werke*, ed. Onno Klopp (Hannover: Klindworth, 1877).

LBr = *Briefwechsel des Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz in der Königlichen Öffentlichen Bibliothek zu Hannover*, ed. Eduard Bodemann (Hannover 1895; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 1966).—Numbers refer to the fascicles of the Leibniz Estate, Leibniz-Bibliothek Hannover.

Leibniz korrespondiert mit China = *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China. Der Briefwechsel mit den Jesuitenmissionaren (1689–1714)*, ed. Rita Widmaier (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann Verlag, 1990); published as *Veröffentlichungen des Leibniz-Archivs* 11.

LH = *Die Leibniz-Handschriften in der Königlichen Bibliothek zu Hannover*, ed. Eduard Bodemann (Hannover 1895; reprint, Hildesheim: Olms Verlag, 1966).

Novissima Sinica = Leibniz, *Novissima Sinica. Das Neueste von China*, ed. H. G. Nesselrath and H. Reinbothe (Köln: Deutsche China-Gesellschaft, 1979).

Writings on China = Leibniz, *Writings on China*, trans. and ed. D. J. Cook and H. Rosemont Jr. (Chicago and La Salle: Open Court, 1994).

2. For Intorcetta, see Leibniz to Oldenburg, March 8, 1673, in A, series III, vol. 1 (= A III: 1), 38–45, here 43: "Prostat hic scientia Chinensium P. Intercettæ, sed non videtur magna adeo mysteria continere." For Ricci, see Leibniz, *Annotatio de quibusdam ludis*, in *Miscellanea Berolinensia* (1710), 22–26 (Leibniz showed interest only in the Chinese game of chess). For Couplet, see Leibniz to Ernst of Hessen-Rheinfels, December 9, 1687, A I: 5, 25–28, here 26.
3. See André Robinet, *La Rencontre Leibniz-Grimaldi à Rome et l'Avenir des Académies*, in *Das Neueste über China. Leibnizens Novissima Sinica von 1697*, ed. Wenchao Li and Hans Poser (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2000); published as *Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa* 33: 79–88.

4. “Vos quidem inventa nostra Mathematica ad Sinas fertis, sed spero referetis aliqua nobis, unde doctrina Europaeorum locupletetur”; Leibniz to Grimaldi, March 31, 1691, A I: 6, 520.
5. “Illi observatis, nostri excogitates praevalent; misceamus beneficia et lumen de lumine accendamus”; Leibniz to Grimaldi, March 21, 1692, A I: 7, 618.
6. “Singulari quodam factorum consilio factum arbitror, ut maximus generis humani cultus ornatusque hodie velut collectus sit in duobus extremis nostri continentis, Europa et Tschina (sic enim efferunt), quae velut orientalis quaedam Europa oppositum terrae marginem ornat. Forte id agitat Suprema Providentia, ut, dum politissimae gentes eademque remotissimae sibi brachia porrigunt, paulatim quicquid intermedium est, ad meliorem vitae rationem traducatur.” *Novissima Sinica*, § 1, p. 8; compare *Writings on China*, 45. Translation revised by Martin Schönfeld.
7. “Je feray donc mettre une affiche à ma porte avec ces mots: bureau d’adresse pour la Chine”; Leibniz to Sophie Charlotte, December 29, 1697, in Klopp, 10: 42.
8. “Ut enim nostri Anatomia et Chymia, seu Physiologica, ac proinde cognitione principiorum theoricorum artis, ita illi parte illa magis Empirica quidem, sed fini tamen Medico (Sanitati) magis propinqua et ut sic dicam immediatiore, Botanica, Pathologica et Therapeutica, seu cognitione simplicium, et experimentis morborum antecellunt, pulsus imprimis scientia admirandi.” Leibniz to Gottlieb Spitzel, February 7, 1672, A I: 1, 192.
9. “Physica enim magis experimentis, Mathematica rationibus nititur; in his nostra Europa excellit, sed experimentis Chinenses vincunt, quoniam in flore a tot annorum millibus imperio traditiones antiquorum conservatae sunt, quae in Europa gentium migrationibus magnam partem periire.” Leibniz to Grimaldi, July 29, 1689, *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China*, 3.
10. “Lequel est le plus croyable des deux, Moïse ou la Chine?” Blaise Pascal, *Pensées*, no. 397 [159], in Pascal, *Oeuvres complètes*, ed. Jaques Chevalier (Paris: Gallimard, 1954), 1192.
11. See David E. Mungello, ed., *The Chinese Rites Controversy. Its History and Meaning* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1994); published as *Monumenta Serica Monographie Series* 33.
12. In 1700 the Kangxi Emperor confirmed the Jesuit position in an edict published in Peking 1701; see *Discours sur la théologie naturelle*, 17, note to line 8.
13. See Wenchao Li, *Die Christliche China-Mission im 17. Jahrhundert: Verständnis, Unverständnis, Mißverständnis* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 2000); published as *Studia Leibnitiana Supplementa* 32: 344–45.
14. See Edward J. Malatesta, S. J., “A Fatal Clash of Wills: The Condemnation of the Chinese Rites by the Papal Legate Carlo Tommaso Maillard de Tournon,” in *Chinese Rites Controversy* [note 11], 211–45.
15. Jonathan D. Spence, “Claims and Counter-claims: The Kangxi Emperor and the Europeans (1661–1722),” in *Chinese Rites Controversy* [note 14], 15–28, here 16.
16. See the monumental work *Morale Pratique des Jesuites* by Antoine Arnauld. The polemic had targeted the China mission since *Défense des Nouveaux Chrétiens* by Michel Le Tellier (Paris: Estienne Michallet, 1687; 2nd ed., 1688). Leibniz reported on the controversy between Jesuits and Jansenists in a letter to Ernst of Hessen-Rheinfels, early 1681, A II: 1, 513–14.
17. *Dissertatio exoterica De statu praesenti et incrementis novissimis deque usu Geometriae* (1675/76), in: GM, 7: 316–26, here 321. He refers to Martino Martini’s *Brevis relatio de numero et qualitate Christianorum apud Sinas, juxta exemplar Romanum* (Coloniae: Joannes Buseus, 1655).
18. “Nihil doctrinae Christi adversam esse facturum”; A VI: 4, 244–45. Compare Leibniz to Ernst of Hessen-Rheinfels, July 14, 1690; A I: 5, 591, 617; Leibniz to La Loubère, October 5, 1691, A I: 7, 398; and Leibniz to Kochański, in December 1691, A I: 7, 487.
19. Leibniz to Antoine Verjus, May 27, 1695, in *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China*, 30–31; A I: 11, N. 334.
20. “Grand procès à Rome entre les Jesuites et d’autres Missionnaires”; Leibniz to Electress Sophie, August 24, 1699, A I: 17, 67.
21. *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China*, 112, 131–33.

22. Archival records checked by Wenchao Li.
23. Leibniz to J. Bouvet, August 18, 1705, in *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China*, 216–18. Leibniz expressed his hopes again to Bouvet, December 13, 1707: “J’espere, que le Commissaire, que le Pape a envoyé à la Chine, et qu’il a déclaré Cardinal depuis, contribuera beaucoup à retablir la paix parmy les Missionnaires . . .”; *ibid.*, pp. 265–68.
24. “Que le Cardinal de Tournon l’a echappé belle”; Leibniz to Witsen, October 12, 1708, in LBr no. 1007, 52.
25. Leibniz to Ferdinand Orban, September 24, 1712, in LBr no. 699, 61.
26. Leibniz to Des Bosses, in GP 2: 372; *Discours sur la théologie naturelle*, 266. Des Bosses reported on the royal legation to Leibniz on April 22, 1709, GP 2: 369.
27. Leibniz to La Croze, October 14, 1707, in Dutens 5: 485–84. Leibniz may have received from Des Bosses the following documents (in LBr no. 95): *Copia decreti Imperatoris Chinae initio Aprilis 1707* (p. 100); *Animadversio ad Decretum a S[inensi] S[anctis-si]mo missum in Sinas Anno 1704* (p. 101); *Copia libelli supplicis, quem pro causa Sinensi Sanctissimo Domino nostro Clementi Papae XI, porrexit Legatus Serenissimi Regis Lusitaniae: sub data Romae 14. Septembris 1709, ex Italico in latinum conversa* (p. 111).
28. “Mihi tamen sententiam eorum nondum persuasere”; Leibniz to Des Bosses, May 2, 1710, GP 2: 403; see Leibniz to Des Bosses, November 18, 1710, GP 2: 413.
29. Des Bosses to Leibniz, July 30, 1709, GP 2: 377: “Nempe ut Romae compertum fieret, quid docti et moderati Protestantes de causa illa Sinensi sentiant.”
30. Leibniz to Des Bosses, July 31, 1709, GP 2: 379.
31. Leibniz to Des Bosses, August 12, 1709, GP 2: 380–84; *Discours sur la théologie naturelle*, 265–70.
32. “At vereor ne post bellum suppetiae, nam recens intelleximus nullam humanitus spem esse boni eventus”; Des Bosses to Leibniz, September 6, 1709, GP 2: 385–86.
33. Leibniz to Des Bosses, February 2, 1711, GP 2: 420; Leibniz to Des Bosses, March 2, 1711, GP 2: 420.
34. Leibniz to Des Bosses, July 8, 1711, GP 2: 424.
35. Leibniz to Anton Ulrich, February 18, 1713, in Eduard Bodemann, “Leibnizens Briefwechsel mit Herzog Anton-Ulrich von Braunschweig-Wolfenbüttel,” *Zeitschrift des historischen Vereins für Niedersachsen* (Hildesheim: Lax, 1888), 73–244, here 225.
36. Leibniz to Ferdinand Orban, May 20, 1716, Dutens 5: 444.
37. “Ego, ut verum fatear, Romanae curiae consilia interdum magis miror, quam inteligo”; Leibniz to Des Bosses, June 30, 1715, GP 2: 499.
38. “Quaerendus erit aliquis cujus zelus minus habeat ardoris, plus lucis, quam Tournonius”; Leibniz to Des Bosses, December 24, 1715, GP 2: 507.
39. See La Croze to Leibniz, November 1, 1707, manuscript LBr 517, 7/7b.
40. *Novissima Sinica*, § 11; *De cultu Confucii civili*, in *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China*, 113; Leibniz to Ferdinand Orban, September 24, 1712, manuscript LBr 699, 61.
41. “Si je me trompe, j’aime toujours mieux de me tromper à l’avantage, qu’au desavantage des personnes”; *Recueil de diverses Pieces*, II: 209; see G. Bernhard Bülfinger [Bilfinger], *Specimen doctrinae veterum Sinarum moralis et politicae; tanquam exemplum philosophiae gentium ad rempublicam applicatae: excerptum libellis sinicae genti classicis, Confucii sive dicta, sive facta complexis. Accedit de Litteratura Sinensi dissertatio Extemporalis* (Francofurti ad Moenum: J. B. Andreas & H. Hort, 1724), 37.
42. “Religiosus Cultus is ni fallor est, quo ei quem honoramus tribuitur superior humana potestas beneficia nobis conferendi aut poenas irrogandi.” *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China*, 112; see Leibniz’s *Tables de définitions* (1702–4), in C, 508.
43. “In Cultu quem Sinenses exhibent Confutio et aliis defunctis bene meritis, majoribusque inprimis suis, apparet adhiberi quae religiosa alias apud plurimos habentur.” *De cultu Confucii civili*, in *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China*, 113.
44. “Hyperbolae autem interpretationes rigidas non patiuntur”; *ibid.*
45. “Cultus non tam in ritibus, quàm in animo consistit.” *Annotationes de cultu religione-que Sinensium*, in *Discours sur la théologie naturelle*, 266, line 27.
46. *Ibid.*, p. 266, lines 28–29.

47. Ibid. Leibniz could not distinguish between “anciens” and “modernes” correctly, see *Discours sur la théologie naturelle*, 70, note to line 8.
48. “Quis nescit hodie Christianorum eruditos multo meliores antiquissimorum Hebraicae gentis librorum esse interpretes quam sunt ipsi judaei? Quam saepe exteri Historiam et monumenta gentis melius ipsis civibus perspexere? idem in dogmatibus multo est facilius cum post secula plus quam viginti non minus remoti, nec magis fortasse subsidiis interpretationis instructi sint Sinenses quam nostri, participes Sinensis litteraturae, et Europaea praesentim Methodo adjuti.” *De cultu Confucii civili*, in *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China*, 114; *Writings on China*, 64.
49. *Annotationes de cultu religioneque Sinensium*, in *Discours sur la Théologie Naturelle*, 267, lines 8–10.
50. *De cultu Confucii civili*, in *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China*, 113; see GP III: 551.
51. *De cultu Confucii civili*, in *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China*, 114.
52. “Itaque nil prohebit ex generali regula, bene sentire nos de veterum doctrina, donec in alia omnia ire cogamur,” *Annotationes du cultu religioneque Sinensium*, in *Discours sur la théologie naturelle des Chinois*, 267, lines 10–11; and “J’incline à croire que leur[s] Auteurs, et sur tout les anciens Auteurs reçoivent un sens raisonable.” Ibid., p. 17, lines 3–4.
53. “Constat olim inter Christianos . . . ulta in Aristotelis honorem dici solita,” ibid., p. 266, line 25; “quemadmodum apud Mosem deus patrem matremque honorantibus longae vitatem spondet,” 267, lines 2–3; “Et sane nec in Mosis scriptis nec in caeteris Veteris Testamenti libris satis aut substantiae incorporales aut alterius vitae praemia declarantur.” Ibid., lines 15–16.
54. “Itaque nil prohibet ex generali regula, bene sentire nos de veterum doctrina, donec in alia omnia ire cogamur.” Ibid., p. 267, lines 10–11.
55. “Nhil prohibet in meliorem partem accipi quae antiqui apud ipsos de rebus divinis et spiritualibus docent.” Ibid., p. 267, lines 30 and 268, line 1.
56. Leibniz to Antoine Verjus, May 27, 1695, in *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China*, 30–31; A I: 11, 491.
57. *Miscellanea Berolinensia*, 22–26; see LH, 266: MS XXXII 1810, 3: De ludo quodam Sinico, differentiaque ludi Scachici et Latrunculorum; MS XXXII 1810, 4: Nic. Trigautius de Christiana expeditione apud Sinas, ex V. Matthaei Ricci Commentariis lib. I, cap. 8.
58. See A I: 7, No. 348.
59. *Leibniz korrespondiert mit China*, 15–20.
60. “Dici enim non potest, quam pulchre omnia ad tranquillitatem publicam ordinemque hominem inter se, ut quam minime sibi ipsi incommodent, supra aliarum gentium leges apud Sinenses sint ordinata.” *Novissima Sinica*, § 3, p. 10; *Writings on China*, 47.
61. “Itaque si artibus operatricibus pares sumus, . . . certe practica philosophia . . . victi sumus, id est Ethicae et Politicae praeceptis ad ipsam vitam usumque mortalium accomodatis.” Ibid.
62. “Certe talis nostrarum rerum mihi videtur esse conditio gliscentibus in immensum corruptelis, ut propemodum necessarium videatur missionarios Sinensium ad nos mitti, qui Theologiae naturalis usum praxinique nos doceant, quemadmodum nos illis mittimus, qui Theologiam eos doceant revelatam. Itaque credo, si quis sapiens non formae Dearum, sed excellentiae populorum iudex lectus esset, pomum aureum Sinensibus daturum esse, nisi una maxime sed supra-humana re eos vinceremus, divino scilicet munere Christianae religionis.” Ibid., § 10, p. 18; *Writings on China*, 51.
63. *Discours sur la théologie naturelle*, 50.
64. See Eric J. Aiton, *Leibniz. A Biography* (Bristol: Adam Hilger, 1985).
65. See Claudia von Collani, *Antonio Caballero A Santa Maria OFM*, in *China heute. Informationen über Religion und Christentum im chinesischen Raum* (ed. China-Zentrum e.V., Sankt Augustin), 30 (2002): Nr. 6, p. 186.

CHINESE GLOSSARY

li	理	shu yu jing er feng bu zhi
shangdi	上帝	树欲静而风不止
tian	天	