



FROM *CONFUCIUS SINARUM PHILOSOPHUS* TO "CONFUCIANISM": INDIRECT TRANSLATION AND THE MAKING OF A EUROPEAN INTELLECTUAL CATEGORY

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This paper explores how indirect translation shaped Europe's earliest and most important perceptions of Chinese thought, focusing on two related case studies: the Jesuit Latin translation of Confucius, the *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* (1687), and the later European construction of "Confucianism" as a unified philosophical-religious system. Through these examples, it argues that indirect translation was not merely a practical response to linguistic barriers but a fundamental force in moulding cross-cultural knowledge.

Produced by Jesuit missionaries in China, *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* was a heavily mediated version of the *Lunyu*, *Daxue*, and *Zhongyong*. Its translators operated within theological, political, and missionary constraints, portraying Confucius as a rational moral thinker compatible with Christian natural law. Although this Latin compilation did not produce full vernacular translations of the Confucian classics, it became the main reference for partial translations, paraphrases, and re-elaborations in French, German, and English. It influenced the writings of figures such as Nicolas Fréret and shaped Christian Wolff's influential interpretation of Chinese ethics, as well as the treatment of Confucianism in the *Encyclopédie*.

The phenomenon of indirect translation continued into the modern era: Richard Wilhelm's *Die vier Bücher des Confucius* (1907) and Guillaume Pauthier's French editions of the *Entretiens* (1921) did not draw from Chinese originals but from James Legge's English translations. This emphasises how European understandings of Confucianism were repeatedly filtered through intermediary linguistic and interpretive layers. As recent scholarship has demonstrated (Pięta 2019), indirect translation can serve as a powerful tool for dialogue between central and peripheral languages and for the dissemination of culture and knowledge. The long journey from *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* to modern European editions of Confucius thus shows how significantly such mediated processes have shaped—and continue to shape—the categories through which Chinese thought is understood in Europe.