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Leibniz on China and Christianity: The Reformation of Religion and European Ethics through Converting China to Christianity

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Recommended Citation

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Leibniz on China and Christianity:
The Reformation of Religion and European Ethics through Converting China to Christianity

Senior Project submitted to
The Division of Social Studies
Of Bard College

by
Ela Megan Kaplan

Annandale-on-Hudson, New York

May 2016

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my mother, father and omniscient advisor for tolerating me for the duration of my senior project.

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Introduction

Although now largely remembered as a philosopher, Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz (1646-1716) gave himself the life goal of finding an answer to the entire spectrum of European moral, sectarian and political issues of his time. Leibniz truly feared for his beloved Europe's future as well as its present. In his political memorandum of 1670, he summarized the challenges of his times as follows:

“These consist in a badly established trade and manufacture; in an entirely debased currency; in the uncertainty of law and in the delay of all legal actions; in the worthless education and premature travels of our youth; in an increase of atheism ; in our morals, which are as it were infected by a foreign plague; in the bitter strife of religions; all of which taken together may indeed slowly weaken us and, if we do not oppose it in good time, may in the end completely ruin us; yet we hope, will not bring us down all at once..”¹

Religious war in particular was Leibniz' great fear. Leibniz was born towards the end of the Thirty-Years War (1618-1648) and he saw the religious antagonisms arising from the Reformation as the greatest threat to Europe and, particularly, his own divided region of the Holy Roman Empire. He fixated on solving this great issue, and his solution was ultimately as bold as the problem.

Although Leibniz is usually considered a largely secular thinker, in the eighteenth century he proposed a plan for the nothing less than the mass conversion of China to Christianity. Rather than being primarily based on the expansion of Christianity, however, his goal was, this essay will argue, intended as a model for a modern reformation of the religion and morality crisis of Christian Europe. Following the basic tenets of his philosophy, he held that the merger of the vast systems of Chinese ancient natural theology and European culture would

¹ Gottfried W. Leibniz, Paul Ritter, ed., “Securitas Publica,” *Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz: Samtliche Schriften und Briefe, herausgegeben von der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften*, 4th series, vol. 1, 133. As cited in Rudolf W. Meyer, *Leibniz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution* (Cambridge, Eng.: Bowes & Bowes, 1952.) 8.

create a new form of Christianity and society that could in Europe overcome humanity's modern corrupt factional theology, and in China establish a centralized monotheistic religion. After learning about a group of Jesuits', which will later be distinguished as accommodationists, attempts at fighting for Chinese doctrines and their rights to be accepted into Europe as theologically and philosophically sound materials, Leibniz decided that he could use some elements of Chinese natural theology to reform Christianity and restore the glory of God. Through merging the two great powers and creating a superstructure connecting the two he believed that his plan could provide the parts of the world he cared to save peace, clarity, equality and faith.

It is in large part because of this project that Leibniz was so at odds with the insularism of other enlightenment figures. "Leibniz emerges as the only significant philosopher of his period (with the exception of Montaigne)," writes Ian Almond in a characteristic summary, "to actively research the languages, religious texts, and ethnographies of other cultures."² We misunderstand Leibniz, however, if we think he did this solely as a disinterested intellectual project. His goal was rather the political and religious reform of Europe, which was to be initiated by the conversion and consequent reform of China. Only as a consequence of this project did Leibniz embark on his admirable project of cultural translation between the two world regions. Leibniz made an exemplary effort to search high and low for key cultural motifs that incorporate ethically sound and just elements in order for their prosperity in a new system, and not just their survival as scholarship.

However, most importantly, he did indeed do all of this with an open mind: he was ready and eager to learn about the foreign, not solely for the purposes of comparing them to

² Ian Almond. "Leibniz, Historicism, and the "Plague of Islam," in *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39.4 (2006): 465.

European equivalents or less, but to understand how they work in their respective societies. This was not a product of simple good will. At its foundation, Leibniz's wider philosophy entailed both a respect for all forms of human thought and perspective that valued other cultures precisely in their differences. Essentially, to put it in the terms of the field of computer science which Leibniz is described as founding, different societies represented for him different programs or systems for understanding the world, and only by understanding all of their interlocking parts in themselves – every aspect of material culture as well as religion - - could they be properly outlined. In combining the two most complex and comprehensive such systems that God had placed on the earth – that of Europe and China – and creating a common exchange between them, Leibniz thought he could facilitate nothing less than the next stage of human history. Even if his grandiose ambitions were not realized, his philosophical work resonated in the literary and scholarly worlds, as he made sure he was thorough and fair, in his assessment of foreign cultures and what they offered to this Renaissance man with a strong scientific background, and a very analytical method of handling information.

It wasn't until the publication of the preface to the *Novissima Sinica* (*Latest from China*) [1697] in which he revealed his intentions for Chinese doctrine. My first chapter argues that Leibniz was genuinely interested in solving Europe's ethics crisis by using China's natural theology, which was only made possible through his faith in his philosophy and his understanding of Chinese doctrines. He intended to reform Christianity, respecting his Protestant principles, and to incorporate natural theology into it, in an attempt to restore simpler and centralized beliefs. For Leibniz, as Patrick Riley notes, the Chinese Emperor was "as just and

charitable and as a (more or less) "Platonic" geometer who is as wise as he is charitable."³ From China, Europe would receive this "geometrical" ethics; for China, Europe would export what Leibniz took as the rational concept of monotheism as well as traditional European teachings, reasonings and sciences.

The second chapter argues that Leibniz, through the help of his many correspondents, found himself growing closer to the Chinese cause, and eventually tried his hardest to redeem the Confucianism's theological identity. He thought that the Chinese were quite advanced in social and philosophical domains, and that Europe had to share its superior military and scientific knowledge in order to negotiate the details of the great cultural exchange, and rebirth of their reformed Christianity.

Leibniz ultimately failed his mission in part due to the Chinese Rites controversy, a 17th-18th century dispute among Catholic missionaries over the compatibility of Confucian traditions with Christian belief. Despite all of the attempts he made in order to restore theological meaning he and other accommodationists found in Confucian concepts, mainly its natural philosophies and concept of *Li* (order of nature), Holy See eventually decided in 1704 and 1715 that the Chinese rites ought to be banned.

Chapter 3 reveals Leibniz's true intentions regarding the creation of his reformed, moral, and culturally advanced Euro-Chinese state, and how he believed that this construct could bring humanity closer to God, as the possibility of having such a superior civilization could only highlight God's magnificence. This of course was heavily inspired by his visions for complex Monadic structures. He directly applied his philosophical vision to creating the perfect society which he could use in turn as proof of this philosophy.

³ Riley, Patrick, "Leibniz's Political and Moral Philosophy in the *Novissima Sinica*, 1699-1999," *Journal of the History of Ideas* Volume 60, Number 2 (April 1999), 217

Chapter 1 European Ethics and Chinese Natural Theology

China, was regarded as a country that had managed to successfully reign over its peoples without losing much of its virtues from their ancient doctrines. It wasn't an openly religious state like most European territories, China's Confucianism has been categorized by some as precursor to Christianity, a sort of Stoicism of forces and society, and by others as an atheistic philosophical system. China had managed to preserve itself and its ethics in a fashion that could only be deemed mysterious to a religious outsider. Leibniz, in time would find himself in a sea of texts provided to him by his many correspondents on Chinese culture and theology, thus leading him to believe Confucianism had a lot more to offer than any other belief system in his quest to provide solutions to European ethical problems of the time. He thought that by converting China to Christianity, a reformed Christianity might arise from the fusion, with incorporations of natural theological concepts found in ancient Chinese doctrines: providing the religion with not only ethical amendments, but also an inclination towards rational theology, and an escape from sectarian hostility.

But why did he give himself this task of solving this so called problem in the first place? Or better yet, why was Leibniz even in the business of solving problems to begin with? In this chapter, we'll look at the European origins of Leibniz' fascination with China, starting with the basis of his valuing unbounded curiosity, which developed from both his biographical circumstances and, increasingly, his philosophy as whole. We'll then turn to his belief in the role of education and professionalization in society as a whole, where the notion of a change of ideas – an Enlightenment – could form the basis of ethics in society. Here Leibniz saw the Chinese virtues of Confucianism as serving as a model for this pedagogical project, and also saw a means of disseminating the results of this cultural dialog. Finally,

we'll look at one particular discovery that emblemized Leibniz's belief in the value of this cultural transmission: Leibniz's discovery of the I Ching, and with it the basis of a binary system for underlying and system of information – or society. Within the more complex forest of the I Ching, Leibniz would also find a model for how two different societies could rest on different, but related, algorithms.

In a letter to Duke John Frederick of Hanover in 1672, Leibniz wrote: “Mainly because my parents died so early and I was thus left, almost without any direction, to my studies, I have had the good fortune to come upon books of many languages, religions and sciences, yet in no proper order; and these I read, being at first impelled by the instinct of *delectatio*⁴. ”⁵ As he put it, he found delight in learning more and more of other's perceptions of almost any matter. The fascination he had with reaching new recorded thought was reflected in his approach to writing, as I will explain further on, Leibniz approached the subjects of his writings as if it were a puzzle. At times, they were completely unsolvable like age old philosophical questions regarding man's freedom or God's omniscience for example, but it is obvious to any reader that Leibniz didn't write to hover or lightly ponder, but to solve.

In order to establish Leibniz, as a genius of a remarkable background, I will attempt to summarize his life before approaching his famous grand cultural exchange, as it provides context to my argument underlining his philosophical maturity as his foundation in problem solving. Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz was born in Leipzig, Electorate of Saxony, 1646, to a Professor of Moral Philosophy and Registrar of the University of Leipzig. Leibniz's father, Friedrich, died when little Gottfried was just six years old. His education was overseen by his mother, the daughter of a professor of law, and a loyal orthodox Protestant. As a self-proclaimed autodidact,

⁴ Latin for delight, pleasure.

⁵ C. J. Gerhardt, trans., *Die Philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz* (Berlin, 1875-1890), vol. 1, 57. (As cited in Meyer 87)

he was able to enter his father's library at age seven or eight. Thus started his reading of any material he could find and teach himself to read, in more languages than one. His interests got increasingly specific as his level of education augmented: "I began to read historians almost as soon as I was able to read at all, but as soon as I began to learn logic, I was greatly excited by the division and order of thoughts I perceived in it. I immediately noticed, to the extent that a boy of 13 could, that there must be a great deal in it."⁶ Leibniz did not waste much time; enrolling himself in to Leipzig University at the young age of 14 he received a doctorate of Law from University of Altdorf (he was supposed to receive one from Leipzig University a year earlier but the school decided that a twenty year old was far too young to receive such a diploma).⁷

After his university years, Leibniz started publishing political and jurisprudential commentaries and essays under various pseudonyms, a notion which highlights his eagerness to argue and make a difference, not in the hopes of making a name for himself, but to actually produce constructive materials. He was given various diplomatic missions, one being a secret trip to France, in 1672, which entailed him tricking Louis XIV into invading Egypt and its infidels, driving them away from attacking lands Germans had claimed as their own, Leibniz intended for this plan to be viewed as a crusade, and an end of inter-Christian hostility.⁸ The plan was abandoned almost immediately, but Leibniz managed to get his patron to allow him to stay in Paris for a few extra months.⁹ He eventually returned to Germany as counselor to Duke Johann Friedrich of Brunswick, and settled. The court itself was to experience a meteoric rise during, but not necessarily because of, Leibniz' association with it: In 1692, the Duke of

⁶ Gerhardt, Vol. 7, 516. As cited in Roger Ariew, "G. W. Leibniz, Life and Works." In *The Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995,) 18.

⁷ Ariew, "G. W. Leibniz, Life and Work," 20-27.

⁸ Steven Nadler, *The Best of All Possible Worlds: a Story of Philosophers, God, and Evil* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2008), 13.

⁹ Ibid.

Brunswick became a hereditary Elector of the Holy Roman Empire, thus arguably one of the seven most powerful people in central Europe. The British Act of Settlement 1701 designated the Electress Sophia, the wife of Johann Friedrich's brother, and her descent as the royal family England, a role they still of course hold.¹⁰ In his lifetime, Leibniz, held many titles from mining engineer to diplomat, advisor to historian and head librarian, He was quite passionate about what he found justifiably necessary and important.

His interest in Chinese theology, throughout its history, was also a testament to his problem seeking and solving character. He found himself in the middle of a grand debate, when one of his correspondents asked for his opinion on the Chinese Rites debate, and whether he supported Matteo Ricci(1552-1610), one of the first Jesuit missionaries to traveled the land with hopes of conversion and rewarding cultural exchange, or Father Longobardi(1559-1654), a Jesuit who later took Ricci's post and along with some colleagues decided that, in short, ancient Chinese doctrines shouldn't be associated with religion, as they were inherently atheistic.

Ricci argued that Chinese rituals didn't conflict with Christian values, but Longobardi pointed out core differences between the two belief systems, adding the fact that the then modern Chinese widespread atheism was problematic, at the very least. Leibniz rolled up his sleeves and read more on the subject, and finally concluded that the ancient Chinese doctrine qualified as a theology, a point which, for him, further discredited the then atheistic doctrines.¹¹ Leibniz, lobbied for the reconsideration of Chinese people as perfectly eligible for missionary missions for one last time in 1716, and died shortly after on the same year's November 14th.

¹⁰ Look, Brandon C., "Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2014 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2014/entries/leibniz/>.

¹¹ Ariew, "G. W. Leibniz, Life and Works," 37.

Gottfried Leibniz achieved the privilege to be known as a well-read man at a very young age. He found solace in reading whatever he could find that peaked his interests first in his father's library, and then at school. He was accepted to his father's former employer, the University of Leipzig, as a fourteen year old adolescent. Rudolf W. Meyer, a Swiss philosopher, found Leibniz's childhood to be quite interesting, as most should given the unusual intelligence the future scientist showed in his appetite for knowledge and solving puzzles. It must be said that his surprising independence and attitude towards information he would encounter from libraries and authoritative doctrine, as remarked by Meyer is nothing shy of impressive¹². Yet, the more one reads into Leibniz's life, the less surprising his worldliness gets, as we become conditioned to expect deeper thought and incredible internal and external associations between both the material and immaterial.

The key to understanding Leibniz's way of thinking rests on his childhood. Leibniz's earliest recorded thoughts were on a rigid system of categories, focusing on criticising dogmatic tradition. Little Leibniz's passion for looking to answer his own questions arose from the lack of information and academic stimulation provided by his school. The future scientist, philosopher and historian was conditioned to read and read, in order to find answers: "[t]he boys world was a world of books[,] [l]ater on it was to be also a world of letters; yet his enormous European correspondence too was ultimately dependent upon the world of books."¹³ Leibniz's professors and peers witnessed his vast knowledge base and his ability to effortlessly differentiate more sustainable and reliable information from the rest that was being passed down to him at school, resulting in his inclination to seek sources outside of his schools.¹⁴ Leibniz consciously or

¹² Rudolf W. Meyer, *Leibniz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution* (Cambridge, Eng.: Bowes & Bowes, 1952.) 86.

¹³ Meyer, *Leibniz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution*, 86.

¹⁴ Meyer, *Leibniz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution*, 86-87.

subconsciously elevated his critical reading and writing skills, in a most impressive manner, especially considering how he was able to separate dogma from more independent thought. This could very well be considered the beginning of his passion for problem solving. It is more than evident to me, that this great thinker was more than capable to assess pieces of information, theories, reasonings, truths and apply refurbished and reconceptualized ideas in the domains he felt most appropriate, especially when it comes to Europe's then contemporary and future legacy.

Whether or not he consciously changed his opinions, or contradicted his previous stances completely over the course of his lifetime is debatable. Yet, his intentions were not oriented towards gaining fame or much fortune: for he desired to further expand on subjects that had to be discussed thoroughly, and for the good of the public. A public, which grew and shifted quite like him and his views over the years. Self-contradiction, a theme that is witnessed time and again in his essays, should be considered a sign of intelligence: we learn new ideas, reasonings and truths from every experience, which is why it is not possible to continuously interpret an event or state the same way on each re-encounter or re-experience. Leibniz's tendencies to change his opinions and reasonings, ideas that he considered most valid but perhaps not true due to the nature of the claim and its reliance on tangent subjects' validities, made him what he is considered today: a renaissance man, unafraid of making his many opinions public.

In 1697, Leibniz published a book titled *Novissima Sinica* (*News from China*), with the subtle purpose of increasing the support of Christian missions in China. Leibniz's goal in writing this preface was in hope of persuading Peter the Great of Russia to help with the travel that was required of Jesuits that were eager to commute to China, his goal was for the tsar to allow the missionaries to pass through Russia as they found the traditional sea route to be rather long and

hazardous.¹⁵ Leibniz was a Protestant who supported Catholic missionaries in China, and he showed his support through the book once more in his praising of the Chinese ruler of the time, making his views on and intentions for China abundantly clear. At this point in the bottom of the seventeenth century, Leibniz's interest in learning more about Chinese culture through his Jesuit correspondents which will be further discussed in chapter 2, laid the groundwork for his mass conversion idea. By shedding light on Chinese culture and theology thanks to his rather objective assessments and clear endorsement of Chinese morality, it was only a matter of time before he himself made the connections. Now that the answer was made accessible to the public, it was time for the right questions to be introduced. But before that, let's take another look at his background in practical thinking as well as his passion for problem solving.

What makes this great man so interesting and likeable is summarized here: “[t]o him the aim of reflection was not the creation of a closed system, nor the formulation of a doctrine, but the critical elucidation of a complex concrete situation.”¹⁶ . He wouldn't have been worried that today he isn't regarded as a professional philosopher, as if such a title could encapsulate what a philosopher truly does. However, Leibniz was never what he was after. He quite plainly enjoyed to solve problems, mysteries, high density situations, and puzzles of any sort. It had been that way since the very beginning of his school years. And his attitude towards foreign concepts thereby was always welcoming, for it made it easier for him to envision them to be utilized in some way or another, to place them in fitting Eurocentric settings in order to understand them.

Leibniz was not a shy man, he wasn't afraid to call unjustifiable dogma ‘vulgar prejudices’, he criticized, at a great extent, what he called superficial and empty thinking brought

¹⁵ John Albert White, and Donald F. Lach. "The Preface to Leibniz' *Novissima Sinica*." *Philosophy East and West* 7, no. 3/4 (1957): 154.

¹⁶ Meyer, *Leibniz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution*, 101

on by *libertins* and *Cartesians* and their school syllabi.¹⁷ Leibniz had autonomy in what he read and felt he must learn, in an autobiographical note he made it clear that he was to learn all there was to be offered in the realm of the sciences, and reach all of its principles, to him this was key in working everything else out.¹⁸ This highlights his identity as a man of science and a thinker who must rely on scientific principles, in his method of thinking. Education was a very important topic for him, especially considering his youth and the lack of proper scholarly, or simply informative by his standards, materials that he had to eventually search for in others' libraries.

Weigel, a former professor to young Leibniz, had slightly different educational ideals for Germany, when Weigel was planning out what he called "*Collegium Artis Consultorum*", for which he had formulated very specific syllabi Leibniz was asked to comment on his work.¹⁹ To my surprise, Leibniz, at no point, shied away from criticising Weigel's plans, he criticized his syllabi claiming they focused too much on the artificial and not enough on the natural, he also criticized the weakness of the proposed name, stating that often times ideas got rejected for their inadequacy.²⁰ It is important to establish how important Leibniz's criticism on education really is, as he was a genius autodidact who went out of the comfort zone of his schools to be able to access the knowledge he wanted. From a young age, he implicitly shifted his approach to everything, as he was conditioned to do so by his environment and the lack of resources his school just could not provide to him during his first stage of intellectual development. He felt that a change was needed in the education system but that the examples of refined systems were too impractical, ideal or vague for people to actually start adapting:

“ Many a writer before has remarked on the manner in which in Germany Schools, Academies, Education, Peregrination, Guilds and the Sciences are all corrupted and

¹⁷ Meyer, *Leibniz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution*, 87.

¹⁸ Gerhardt, trans., vol. VII, 185. As cited in Meyer, 87.

¹⁹ Meyer, *Leibniz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution*, 91.

²⁰ G. E. Guhrauer, ed., *Leibniz's Deutsche Schriften*. Berlin 1840. Vol. 2, 473. As cited in Meyer, 200.

confounded; there have likewise been many who have made proposals to remedy these evils; but these proposals are partly too theoretical, being taken *ex Republica Platonis et Atlantide Baconis*[from Plato's Republic and Bacon's Atlantis]; partly quite incomprehensible, that is Lullian or Metaphysical; and partly ambiguous and dangerous to the Republic."²¹

His writings on education should be taken quite seriously as it is testament to the open minded and optimistic characteristics, he was a person that made efforts for the good of his public, first his fatherland and then Europe. His views on education are important as he was deeply unsatisfied by the way his schools couldn't really teach him what he was so eager to find and learn for himself in his father's library. This man could not have arguably become one of the fathers of calculus if his family did not have an abundance of books available at home. Therefore there is genuine concern placed here, in his words, for this is a very personal subject for him, and so observing what he fought for deepens our understanding of this great man, altogether.

What Leibniz had envisioned for his public was a specialized professional middle class, influenced by a predominantly scientific class, this is based off of a plan he shared with a Joachim Becher on education as a tool for political power, by having a central and national educational authority and eventually to be able to control the production of classes: "Leibniz's many designs for learned societies and academies were drawn up very much on these lines; and both men were impressed by the success of political education in contemporary France."²² Many thinkers were trying to figure out the most efficient way to produce a more learned and enlightened society, and the fact that the competitive atmosphere that Europe had been cultivating over the course of its existence was nothing but a great advantage and a powerful motivator for these commentators.

²¹ Gottfried Leibniz, *Bedenken von Aufrichtung einer Akademie oder Societät in Deutschland zum Aufnehmen der Künste und Wissenschaften*, (1671,) Vol. 1, §13, 546. As cited in Meyer, 92.

²² Meyer, *Leibniz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution*, 91.

In 1671, Leibniz published a Memorandum titled *On the Founding of a learned Society in Germany*, in which he contemplated on practical knowledge and further expanded his vision for education, in a broader context:

“All the education[] should tend towards a true, that is ‘practical’, knowledge of God. To attain to this knowledge, three kinds of men are necessary: first, a class of ‘orators’ and ‘priests’, who will disseminate it in the world; secondly, a class of ‘philosophers’, whose task is to elucidate and exhibit harmony of all God-made things; and thirdly, the most perfect class of ‘moralists, politicians and statesmen’, who being the tools of God, increase perfection of this world, but have to rely for their support upon the two lower classes.”²³

Leibniz adds religion into the mix, stating that somehow practical knowledge of God should be essential, in order for the system to function properly. In short, what he expected from these men were faith, harmony and guidance, all of which rested on the assumption that these were all men of admirable ethics. Leibniz’s line between material and immaterial isn’t often clear, yet here he relies on practical knowledge being the force that must drive societies to higher degrees of perfection. His faith in man is projected, as he trusts that others’ faith in God and the vision of perfection that one experiences in his or her faith would work as their prime motivation in their efforts to create a better education system, reliant on practical knowledge.

However, in order to even dream about reforming publicly accessible academia, Leibniz needed to solve an even greater threat to his beloved societies: unethical behavior. He turned to China after realizing the completely different social dynamics in their societies, and became fascinated with their codes of social conduct. In his *Novissima Sinica* Leibniz’s praise and demand for Chinese moral practices to be incorporated into European ethics is largely credited to their social interactions with one another:

“But it is desirable that they in turn teach us those things which are especially in our interest: the greatest use of practical philosophy and a more perfect manner of living, to

²³ Meyer, *Leibniz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution*, 95.

say nothing now of their arts. 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 of practice of natural religion”²⁴

The Chinese virtues of peer tolerance and respect between peasants and servants as Leibniz’s goal for European societies and the mending of all Christian’s hostility towards each other. Thus merging his clairvoyance and practical thinking into one problem solving expedition, in which he desired but one thing: mending Europe. He might not have cared too much for China or their social traditions and interactions, or the Muslim Ottoman threat that had been lingering around Europe’s Eastern front for far too long, but rather their impact on Europe’s future. Leibniz was not a naive thinker, he was always set out on a mission, and I will argue that at times, his intentions weren’t as clear as his arguments would suggest.

Leibniz cannot be named an opportunistic writer, this would be terribly naive mainly due to the lack of harboring overwhelmingly selfish, self-promoting or self-rewarding demands and personal gain as an outcome to any political or philosophical commentary he has ever made. He never owned a business that he tried to promote. He was passionate about the Holy Roman Empire and restoring his glory, yet he didn’t fixate on his enemies; he accepted most Christian people, especially Catholics.

“In 1670, Leibniz, aged twenty-four, published his first philosophical work. Marius Nizolius of Bersello (in the state of Modena) had published a treatise, *De veris principiis, et vera ratione philosophandi contra pseudophilosophos* (On true principles, and the true method of philosophizing against the false philosophers) in 1553. Nizolius’ ‘false philosophers’ were all Scholastics, past and present.[...]By the seventeenth century the book had fallen into oblivion[, until] Leibniz published it with a preface and some notes and used the occasion to show off his general erudition and knowledge of philosophy.”²⁵

²⁴ Gottfried Leibniz, “Preface to the Novissima Sinica”, 1697-1699. As published in Daniel J. Cook, Henry Rosemont Jr., *Writings on China*. (Chicago and La Salle, IL: Open Court, 1994.) 51.

²⁵ Ariew, “G. W. Leibniz, Life and Works, 22.

Nizolius' book aimed to take a jab at what he considered as corrupted philosophy, he thought that terms that couldn't be re-rendered in simpler terms were no longer relevant, he attacked the Scholastics on the grounds of their ideas being obscene and language being barbaric²⁶. Leibniz used Nizolius' work to prove, once and for all, that he had sufficient knowledge and technical ability to analytically criticize, as well as present his own natural philosophy for the first time, at an official capacity. Yet, he didn't shame Nizolius, instead he made remarks on the work in order to correct his thinking and not just scrap it all. Nizolius used nominalism to persuade his readers into thinking that the Scholastics' views were tainted, Leibniz took this opportunity to "expound upon the nature of universals and the general rule, 'entities must not be multiplied without necessity'"²⁷, and that is simply it. This pre-work of Leibniz beautifully summarizes the kind of thinker he truly was: he was not a person sailing across books' and pamphlets' pages, hoping to find some ideas to clash with, he was a hands-on philosopher in constant search of improving knowledge as a whole, unafraid of formulating an opinion on what he felt he was informed about.

The preface turned out to be quite beneficial for Leibniz, shortly after his republication of Nizolius, he was able to produce his first work in natural philosophy, and followed this with a more practical and dangerous attempt at changing the world, as he knew it. After the Thirty Years War, Leibniz "came up with various schemes to weaken French power by weakening its economy"²⁸, he went so far as to publish a satire on the Sun King, and later tour the country in hopes of illuminating himself and others. This early work of his would later be captioned as destructive as he his future mission would be to unify Europe, especially in religion and ethics. His patriotism did get the best of him, as rivalry between France and the Holy Roman Empire

²⁶ Ariew, "G. W. Leibniz, Life and Works, 22.

²⁷ Ariew, "G. W. Leibniz, Life and Works, 23.

²⁸ Ariew, "G. W. Leibniz, Life and Works, 24.

had been at an all time high and Leibniz desired only to lift up his fellow Germans spirits after a great loss. This political passion and force that influenced him to leave his country and to actually try to solve the Holy Roman Empire's mortal enemy is another testament to how much he cared for his country. He could have easily stayed at home, and published manifestos, pamphlets and essays on how France and Navarre deserved nothing less than the absolute worst, but he didn't.

After returning from traveling Western Europe for some time, Leibniz returned to his fatherland, Hanover, where he settled and served a few Hanover princes, and by doing so became increasingly political. Leibniz encountered a very interesting political situation caused by Martin Luther and his secularization of Principalities.²⁹ With this movement, Luther's Princes obtained absolute sovereignty of state and religion, which granted them the power to focus their preferred form of Christian to whatever they desired. This allowed religious sect rivalries to become an even bigger issue, all the while burning reformed bridges that Luther worked so hard to build in the first place. This actuality that Leibniz experienced, first hand and not through a book, is perhaps what prompted Leibniz to start harvesting thoughts that would later conclude him to believe that all of Europe's Christianity should merge and finally formulate a Christian Euro-Chinese superstructure in order to hit many unsuspecting birds with one stone. However, his first publications on solving all of these matters, on a much larger scale, weren't published until the last fifteen years of his life. These ideas might have been brewing inside Leibniz's mind palace, but they hadn't yet reached paper until he was exposed to even more contemporary Christian problems and puzzles, later provided to him through Jesuit missionaries.

Martin Luther had made possible for German Princes to become increasingly independent, especially in terms of religion. Luther argued that spiritual and secular or temporal

²⁹ Meyer, *Leibniz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution*, 67

authorities must not cross over, God's spiritual authority may be supreme, but it can't extend on to worldly governmental functions. For Luther, every individual was a subject of the realm of God and his or her ruler's state, and that these allegiances are different, and that secularism must be upheld.³⁰ Leibniz's crusade entailed ending domestic Christian rival hostility as well as general ethical crises, he aimed to heal all by reforming it completely. He would eventually argue that this could easily be achieved through reverting to a simpler natural theology's input on to the contemporary Christians sects by using Ancient Chinese theology. A clever attempt at reigniting the flame of decent human beingness the Holy Bible so openly advocates for by bringing in Ancients, this plan had worked once in Europe by revisiting in the Greek Classics through the phenomenon of quick and easy printing technology. Why couldn't a similar plan work again?

Leibniz was a Protestant first, and a Christian second. Reformation was in his blood, and thereby most of his solutions contained mending, editing and reformulation. Christian traditions had the ever present problem of not appealing to its evolving audience's needs, and Leibniz, being the Protestant he was, was keen on mending the traditions, instead of discarding the issue completely. Traditionalists and non-traditionalists have been tirelessly clashing since little old Eve was just a rib of Adam's. Luckily for Europe, at one point Leibniz had tried to solve Christian tradition problems as well: "Leibniz hoped to solve the crisis of the Christian tradition by subordinating pietist to rational religiousness: ... *'on ne sauroit aimer Dieu, sans en connoistre les perfections, et cette connaissance renferme les principes de la veritable piete*[we/one can not love God without recognizing [his] perfections, and this knowledge

³⁰ James Turner Johnson, "Sovereign Authority and the Justified Use of Force in Luther and the Reformation", *Sovereignty: Moral and Historical Perspectives*, (Georgetown University Press, 2014.) 62.

contains the principles of true piety].”³¹ The central issue that arose on many separate occasions had to do with the validity of the Christian tradition, especially with the “scientific revolution of the age, with its new accounts of the Self and the world, [giving] an added weight of responsibility to his particular philosophical solution of the problem.”³² At the end of the day, religion was there for people to seek refuge and guidance in. The fact that people were taking advantage of religion by making arguments that relied on holy passages dragged out of context was not a phenomenon a rationalist would get behind. Leibniz, on occasion, was a man of modest desires, and undoubtedly the most important of which was the solidarity of his Christian brothers, as he genuinely wanted people to be happy and for he believed that it was possible through God and his own help to achieve a just and peaceful society: “[i]t is to be ensured that men are prudent, endowed with virtue, abundant in faculties, evidently so that they know, will and are able to act in the best way” in order to achieve public happiness.³³

The only time, according to Leibniz, in which a Christian would be permitted to release himself from the moral clauses that restrict hostility towards others could only be against what he categorized as the plague of Islam: “[i]t is difficult to make the world believe that black is white, that in order to affirm public peace one has to take up arms which destroy it, and for that good of Christianity has to break all the sacred bonds of Christianity”³⁴ and even then his strong opposition to Islam and Muslims can be regarded as a tool that could bring people together in the hopes of defeating a common enemy together, as a unit.

³¹ Meyer, *Leibniz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution*, 75.

³² Meyer, *Leibniz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution*, 114.

³³ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz, and Gaston Grua. *Textes Inédits D'après Les Manuscrits De La Bibliothèque Provinciale De Hanovre*. (Paris: Presses Universitaires De France, 1948.) 613.

³⁴ Leibniz, ed. *Deutsche Akademie der Wissenschaft, Samtliche Schriften und Briefe* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1923-) 4:3, 776. As cited in Ian Almond. “Leibniz, Historicism, and the “plague of Islam””. *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 39.4 (2006:) 463.)

The Cartesian revolution brought a new dimension to many discussions including man's place in nature and whether or not God was being eclipsed or replaced through the further development of tools, and technology: "If man is the centre of the revealed world, then his duty to fashion the world according to his own designs becomes obvious and indisputable."³⁵ Leibniz was not so keen on eliminating God from any discussion, and this particular self-inflation of the image of man didn't sit right with him:

"But in this manner he advanced in fact the very argument that renders the Christian faith unreal. For to a Christian the limits of man are drawn not by 'the majesty of Nature', but by God; it is in God that the Christian knows his foundations to lie, and in Him is man's autonomy suspended. These limits of man the new mathematical thought was prepared to accept. But it interpreted them as drawn not by a divine, but by an anonymous power."³⁶

Nature was just not allowed to be perceived as divine any more. Leibniz tried to protect and preserve Christian Cosmology in his essay "*Systeme Nouveau de la Nature*" but failed, as bringing the words "*la majeste de la nature*" no longer sufficed. As the natural world around us became more and more approachable through science and technology, Leibniz's religion started taking blows to the gut.

In view of all of this tension, Leibniz attempted to take a few steps back and reintroduce God through the perspective of a Christian rationalist in his chef d'oeuvre the *Monadology*: "God alone is the primary Unity, or original simple substance, from which all monads, created and derived, are ... born so to speak, by continuous fulgurations of the the Divinity..."³⁷. The term he paraphrased as "original simple substance" is a very innovative thought, especially for a scientist who holds reason and rationalism above all. The sheer vagueness leaking out of every

³⁵ Meyer, *Leibnitz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution*, 76.

³⁶ Meyer, *Leibnitz and the Seventeenth-century Revolution*, 142.

³⁷ Gottfried Leibniz, *Monadology*, 1714. As cited in Robert Latta, trans.. *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*. (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1925:) 243.

cranny and crevasse doesn't seem to stop Leibniz from believing in something that he could not sense or measure with any of his physical senses, which is as contradictory as it gets.

Meyer captioned him as a Christian philosopher, a move not every Leibniz reader would do, as many have argued in favor of him being agnostic or atheistic, and not particularly religious even in his cultural identity. People have quoted his Sufficient Reason Principle, an argument which supports the questioning of even the simplest facts, and demands validation of all that is expected to be considered factual. Leibniz, as a rationalist, relied on reason and explanations. His prime argument had always been conditional to being able to comprehend or rationalize all, even if it meant that the matter at hand needed time and future technology required for its inevitable unveiling of its cause for creation or come to being out of its necessity. His Principles of Contradiction(which dictates that "a proposition cannot be true and false at the same time, and that therefore A is A and cannot be not A ."³⁸) and Sufficient Reason does rely on a God, a creator that exists based off of its necessity in order for all to be defined within reason. Whether or not Leibniz used the word God in parallel with the world's major religions is not very clear, and is still debated today. Interestingly both monotheistic religious people and atheists use his principals in arguments for and against, respectively, proof of the existence of a God. This comes to show how Leibniz's arguments were open to many different and at times polar interpretations. It also underlines the inherent vagueness he leaves in his essays and books, which could arguable show signs of censorship of his time, especially when it came to religious discussion topics.

Leibniz's contingency argument is another important one, in which he claims that the reason a God-like essence created the actual world is due to it being the best possible world there

³⁸ C. I. Gerhardt, ed., Leibniz's *Die philosophischen Schriften*. Edited by . Berlin, 1875–90. Reprint, Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 196. Volume 6, 335. (As quoted in Brandon C. Look, "Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/leibniz/#PriCon> (accessed on May 1, 2016)

could be: “[t]he reason for this world is that it is the best[,] [t]he reason for any contingent truth is that, since the existence of the actual world entails it, it is for the best.”³⁹ For a rationalist, there is no doubt that it is an extremely vague claim, but it sufficed for the time being, as I will further argue that he wasn’t truly in the business on solving theological problems per se, but rather intended for people to simply correct themselves. Leibniz wanted people to achieve public happiness for he believed it would reflect divine power and its perfections as his goals for humanity could only be achieved through God’s blessings(e.g., life, will, knowledge), which will be discussed in chapter 3.

The simplest and uncontested thought Leibniz did possess was that he really did want peace amongst his fellow European men: “[w]hatever is publicly useful, is to be done[,] [t]he common good is valued by the goods of all being collected into one total.”⁴⁰ Leibniz believed in creating higher structures, dependent on other independent structures, as mentioned in his *Monadology*, thereby his views on achieving public happiness must be incorporated into the foundations of his natural philosophy: “[g]ood is a necessity without which we are miserable, the rest are only called useful... [m]oreover, [people] will not think vicious thoughts, nor will them, nor be able to put them into practice.”⁴¹ He wanted his subjects to be good citizens, respectful of one another, loving and kind, exemplary to what Jesus would have wanted them to behave. This is what Leibniz was truly after, he could quite arguably have cared less about foreign culture if he didn’t believe in his mission: salvaging European morals, at any cost. Even if it meant that he would have to turn towards other cultures to look for answers. I am not suggesting that he was

³⁹ Edward N. Zalta, ed., “Principle of Sufficient Reason”, *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/leibniz/#PriCon> (accessed on May 1, 2016)

⁴⁰ Gaston Grua, ed., *Textes inédits d'après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque provinciale de Hanovre. Tome 2 Tome 2* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1998), 613.

⁴¹ Gura, *Textes inédits d'après les manuscrits de la Bibliothèque provinciale de Hanovre*, 613.

disinterested in globalism or that he wasn't objectively interested in any culture he could learn from, but the bottom line for him was maintaining Europe's legacy as well as its supremacy. Perkins argued that: "[t]he fact that cultural exchange is important primarily as a way to gain experiential truths and observations fuels Leibniz's enthusiasm for China."⁴² is very true, but incomplete. It was important in the context of rebuilding Europe. Perhaps if Christian Europeans weren't so busy being hostile to one another, Leibniz would not have praised the Chinese ruler as openly as he did in his *Novissima Sinica*. Yet that wasn't the case at all, visibly speaking, he was incredibly open-minded, for his time. And he did indeed praise another continent's ruler, which was a very tricky move, especially for someone under the patronage of a German prince.

The most recognizable display of Leibniz' cultural tolerance and desire for creating a mutually beneficial environment in which both communities could merge and give birth to a reformed super-culture can be found here: "we need the Chinese to send us Missionaries in turn, for us to learn the natural religion that we have almost lost."⁴³ His open call for a cultural ambassadorship promotes a very modern concept, one that wasn't likely to circulate until very recently, as immigration and cultural tolerance laws, in Europe, didn't relax until well after Leibniz's era.

When Leibniz eventually got his hands on more Chinese materials, thanks to the Jesuit missionaries, he found interest in one specific book titled *I Ching*, which can be translated as the Book of Changes. After a French Jesuit missionary, Joachim Bouvet, who was convinced that he saw a binary arithmetic in some of the diagrams he shared with Leibniz, the German thinker decided to write an essay about it and send it to the Academy of Sciences, in Paris, two years

⁴² Franklin Perkins, "Virtue, Reason, and Cultural Exchange: Leibniz's Praise of Chinese Morality". *Journal of the History of Ideas* 63 (3). (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002:) 451.

⁴³ Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004:) 156

after his exposure to this previously hidden arithmetic.⁴⁴ The oldest edition of *I Ching* dates back five millennia, and is still referred to as it is considered more simple and natural in its knowledge. Leibniz used the book in the creation of his new binary arithmetic that we still depend on quite heavily every day, as it makes up our computer processing instructions, used by most of the electronic devices around us. Interestingly, Perkins mentioned Leibniz's noted disbelief of coming across any potential scientific revelation in Chinese ancient doctrine: "[w]hile Leibniz is anxious to learn many things from China, he generally does not expect to learn truths in such fields as mathematics or metaphysics."⁴⁵ The truth is that he eventually did learn more by reverting to much older texts, which perhaps sealed the envelope belonging to his Chinese-European conversion mission statement. After all, this ancient doctrine had given him his famous works on binary, one of which being *Explication de l'arithmétique binaire, qui se sert des seuls caracteres 0 & 1* (*Explanation of the binary arithmetic which utilizes only the numbers 0 & 1*), why couldn't it give him the solution to Europe's problems as well? If the *I Ching* managed to keep this mathematical secret for so long, what did other ancient Chinese texts have in store for the Europeans who had the capacity of uncovering more hidden meanings? Indeed, we could add that just as the *I Ching* suggested that increasingly complicated adumbrations of binaries could explain extremely complex fields, so the binary system – as modern computers demonstrated – could form a foundational language connecting each culture. In any case, this one insight was so powerful for Leibniz' thought that it must have suggested the value of the mutual translation of the two systems.

Leibniz thought that bringing China systemic religion would improve the then modern Chinese philosophies as a whole, by providing them with the mostly verbal tools that would

⁴⁴ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁵ Perkins, "Virtue, Reason and Cultural Exchange", 450.

get them out of their Stoic deadlock. According to Cook, the use of the word “ancient”, when describing the many philosophies of the Chinese people is more than crucial to the whole operation, as he didn’t credit the then modern thinkers to merit the titles of reasonable interpreters of the ancient texts (as he remarked in his *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*). This is an important remark, showing how strictly Leibniz was editing what he presented in his interpretations and characterizations of Chinese theology. All of this brings us to an important question on why Leibniz privileged ‘ancient’ information, whether it was Western, Chinese or Middle Eastern. Did it have to do with a notion of what was written down by the ancients must have been simple, direct, and thus relatively more original in thought? Why did he edit out modern thoughts, what made modern thought so tainted, and if the modern thinkers were so off point, how could the Chinese people be converted given the reasoning that they would have been influenced by their modern thinkers and interpreters of their ancient texts?

Chapter 2 Chinese Rites: heresy or exemplar?

Leibniz' understanding of China can be traced back to the the Jesuit order's first Chinese mission, which commenced with St. Francis Xavier(1506-1566)'s attempt to travel to China in 1552. Although, his journey ended prematurely with his death, the desire to establish a Christian outpost was still there, and the fire was finally rekindled in 1582 with Matteo Ricci, when he successfully settled and established an outpost in mainland China, in which Jesuits could study the Chinese ways and start converting locals. The Jesuits had significant political influence, particularly when they served as advisors to the rulers who were tolerant and eager to learn about Western science and philosophy. Using the intelligence first provided by the Jesuits, Leibniz suggested in his writings on China, spanning from 1699 to 1716, that there was serious merit to the notion of a transmission and dialogue between the Chinese and Christian spheres. To understand the merits and flaws of Leibniz' argument, as well as its ambitious scope, we need to first situate it in the controversies that developed around Jesuit missions to China. In particular, in the "Chinese Rites Controversy" Leibniz would strongly side with those who saw Chinese beliefs as harmonizing with those Christianity, and against those who considered them antithetical. It was from this base that Leibniz could build the project of the mutual translation of the two cultures.

Leibniz wrote philosophical texts primarily expanding on notes and critiques belonging to a Father Longobardi. He was convinced that the priest was being objective, and not flattering of classical Chinese authors and their works. Longobardi was a Jesuit missionary who had been stationed in China by his order with the aims of translating and understanding Chinese doctrines, along with converting the public. Leibniz's didn't shy away

from critiquing Longobardi's interpretation of certain Chinese doctrines. For example, the embodiment of angels, Leibniz writes, was not a sign of the denial of an existence of the spiritual, as Longobardi had argued: many of Europe's well-respected philosophical forefathers had made the same presumptuous mistake on the case of the angels. As with many areas of his interpretation, Leibniz' own philosophy attempted to make immanent and material aspect of Christianity that were transcendent. He found in Chinese philosophy a ready set of parallels. He wasn't concerned with disallowing foreign concepts and understandings of prestige, and to grant them high acclamation if and when they were deserving of such a thing: "there is in China a public morality admirable in certain regards, conjoined to a philosophical doctrine, or rather a natural theology, venerable by its antiquity, established and authorized for about 3,000 years, long before the philosophy of the Greeks whose works nevertheless are the earliest which the rest of the world possess, except of course for our Sacred Writings."⁴⁶. Yet he couldn't refrain from using some sort of monotheistic reference, even if it meant the mentioning of the Old Testament, this might be an indication of editorial censoring, or it very well might have been an original remark, there is no way of knowing.

Accommodating Chinese ideas, not viewing them as completely irrelevant to Christianity was a view popularized by Ricci, and followed by Leibniz. Leibniz wasn't alive when Ricci convinced Europe, for a brief period, that Chinese ancient texts could be interpreted in certain lights that would make it accessible for Christians to relate to this entirely foreign and secluded society's older beliefs. Matteo Ricci was an incredibly important person for Leibniz, this Italian born Jesuit spent most of his adult life in China, learning from the locals, the Chinese court, and both their modern and ancient doctrines. If we were to

⁴⁶ Gottfried Leibniz "Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese," 1716 in Daniel J. Cook, Henry Rosemont Jr. *Writings on China*. (Chicago, Ill.: Open Court, 1994.) 78.

remember this man by one idea, it would be his accommodationist view when it came to understanding and accepting ancient Chinese natural philosophy. Ricci's successor Father Longobardi, opposed this idea of trying to hold some Chinese concepts of heaven and a supreme ancestor, outdating Jesus and his friends, in which Ricci pointed out alleged similarities between Chinese philosophy with Christian theology. He intended for these similar terms to work as a bridge between the two immensely different cultures, and the stories of their origins. Ricci, and in time Leibniz, fought for China's right to be able to be considered salvageable, or religiously redeemable, as they believed that cultural differences shouldn't act as permanent roadblocks, crippling an entire nation and stopping them from becoming Christians.

Ricci, became remarkably comfortable with Chinese culture and language in a relatively short slice of time. He comprehended the importance of learning about his immediate community, in which he was given the mission to uncover Chinese practices as well as to convert as many people as he could. His firm grasp on the language made ideas all the more accessible to him, it is noted that his Chinese writing skills were virtually indistinguishable with his contemporary Chinese scholars. His open mindedness and, most importantly, his willingness to accommodate potentially parallel foreign constructs into Christian traditions of thinking was what truly attracted Leibniz to his work. Ricci, did not look down upon the cultures of the settlements he visited, and when in China went as far as to "shave[] [his] head and beard, shroud[] in the robes of a Buddhist monk", he stated that the reason why he changed his entire European look, was because he believed that religious men in China needed to dress holy, and had to forfeit luxury in many ways. Interestingly, he later understood how he had been cultivating his image in a wrong way, that the Buddhist monks were lower class,

and that to gain influence he needed silks. Moreover, Buddhism was in part a heterodox sect, whereas the Confucianism of the court would allow him greater access. Dressing like the Chinese literati instead of like a reminder of how “the name of foreigners and priests is considered so vile in China that we need this and other similar devices to show them that we are not priests as vile as their own.”⁴⁷

Ricci, as well as every other missionary at the time witnessed the different actions and reactions regarding law and its enforcement, and felt as if corrections were to be made specifically for their target audience: the Chinese public. An example that encapsules this claim perfectly is Ricci and his colleague Ruggieiri’s translation of “Thou shall not committ adultery” to “Thou shalt not do depraved, unnatural or filthy things.”⁴⁸ As vague as the statement was, they altered this widespread translation for it to be comparatively louder and clearer than the original one given the different audience. They expected the public to understand and change their ways regarding their crimes and punishments, with the aid of this more comprehensive translation. This is a very important example, showing how like minded Leibniz and Ricci were when it came to cultural appropriation and trying to maintain, what they thought, was universal equality but was in fact an attempt at elevating quality of life to Eurocentric standards.

Contrary to Ricci and Leibniz’s enthusiasm, Longobardi along with most Dominican and Franciscan Friars of the time did not adapt Chinese philosophy to Christian theology, as they believed that making such connections were simply wrong. This debate between these two sides, battling over whether or not mostly Confucian doctrine was compatible with Christianity is known as the Rites Controversy. Ricci’s fluid definitions, and willingness to appropriate Chinese natural philosophy with European monotheistic theology was eventually overlooked,

⁴⁷ Matteo Ricci, *Opere Storiche*. Pietro Tacchi Venturi, S.J., ed Vol. 2, 1913. 104. As cited in Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*. (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 1984.) 115.

⁴⁸ Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, 228.

and overturned. Yet, Leibniz wasn't convinced that throwing it all away was appropriate, and he argued in favor of Chinese culture, in order to establish their closeness to European standards of spirituality. His goal in doing so, was to groom their image as wise and ethical people that were chiefly misguided due to a lack of centralized religion and European knowledge: perfect candidates for a conversion.

Leibniz wasn't intimidated by this vastly different culture: to him the Chinese civilization was one that would eventually validate humanity's magnetic attraction to reason and wisdom. After all, logic had to be in the foundations of all principles, regardless of the geography of their origins. The true optimist, he was compelled to look at China as a potential land of radically different but compatible ideas, with philosophies that could aid Christianity and what it had become. The Chinese conversion to Christianity would trigger a mutually beneficial reform period, mending the hostility that had been lingering around Europe for far too long. As a principle commentator on this period this aspect of Leibniz' work, Franklin Perkins notes: "While Europe's moral poverty led it to perpetual conflicts and wars between religious factions, (in Leibniz's lifetime) China was peaceful. This led Leibniz to prefer the natural theology of the Chinese to the corrupted revealed theology of Europe"⁴⁹.

This potential challenge of cultural translation, as he imagined, would yield a greater perspective on to God, and to Leibniz that was the most fundamental outcome of the project. On one hand he was stating that it was a conversion, a task which God expected from all good Christians, on the other it was a journey that would reverse the sails, and return Christians to the core of the religion, before it was corrupted by humans. The same humans which were

⁴⁹ Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.) 154.

capable of impurities due to lack of knowledge and wrongful executions deriving from wrong thoughts and free will, who could partake in the very same mistakes regardless of their placement in the physical world, and so he believed in his cause: “And thus, as far as I understand, I think the substance of the ancient theology of the Chinese is intact and, purged of additional errors, can be harnessed to the great truths of the Christian religion.”⁵⁰ This idea will be revisited in the following chapter.

In order to be able to pave the road to discuss the Chinese conversion, Leibniz found that he had to first convince Europe of how the Chinese weren't too far off the path of religion, and he could only achieve this through Ricci's accommodationist foundations. His primary task was to fit Chinese thoughts into his conceptions of Western theology and philosophy. As he tried to carry out this task, he was quite aware of his process of breaking down these foreign views and translating them with care. He takes this association between the two completely different philosophical realms to the next level when he brings in his *Monadaology*, which I will comment on after establishing his respect for Chinese doctrine on a more broad spectrum. Leibniz, in his Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion:

“What the ancient priests and philosophers of China thought is not easy to determine. Even with so much illumination from history, criticism and philosophy, we know how often we argue among ourselves about the meaning of Plato, Aristotle and even Augustine. Among the Chinese, I believe neither history nor criticism nor philosophy are sufficiently developed. No one at all has yet emerged who has produced a literary history of the Chinese and who has attributed the true works, meanings and sense to each author.”⁵¹

In other words, he had objections to how Chinese thought was being misinterpreted in its own culture, as there was a certain lack of context. He thought his philosophy could make amends for this, and provide a broader context for ancient Chinese thought.

⁵⁰ Leibniz, “Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion,” 1708. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 73.

⁵¹ Leibniz “Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion,” 1708. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 71.

Leibniz tried to bring in examples of Chinese rituals that would work as common ground, in order to make this foreign culture more approachable and inherently relatable. He gave an example on the afterlife which one could view as an attempt at connecting between Christian and Pagan European customs: “one could demonstrate that the literati thought that the souls of Confucius and the others were conscious of what is happening after death and that they reward those who imitate and worship them and punish those who scorn them.”⁵². This could be used to support his argument claiming the Chinese public to be one of spiritual belief infusions, allowing them a sort of access to the Christian realm.

What was most important to Leibniz in his *Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion*, is his eagerness to save and preserve Chinese souls, as he continuously tries to bring perspective to their lack of religion, or specifically, lack of centralized and harmonious religion. In his view, the basis of such a religion already existed in ancient China, but had been lost by a lack of systematic criticism and organization:

“I would think that no doubt many philosophers from the Orient, no less than the Platonists and Stoics, regarded God as the World-soul or as the universal nature immanent in things; that other spirits also assumed bodies; and that some even considered the soul as a particle of the divine aura, which would return to the Ocean of souls with the body's death. I would not deny that this had been the thought of many Chinese philosophers, but since the philosophy of the Chinese has never been organized in a systematic form, and, I very much suspect, they lack philosophical terminology, nothing prevents interpreting what the ancients teach about divine and spiritual things in a more favorable sense.”⁵³

Leibniz, in the first part of his *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese*, pointed out that he believes that the Chinese have recognized “spiritual substances”, yet the parameters of its metaphysical identity is left unclear: “ I believe that they did, although perhaps they did not

⁵² Leibniz, “ On the Civil Cult of Confucius,” 1700-1701. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 62.

⁵³ Leibniz, “Remarks on Chinese Rites and Religion,” 1708. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 72.

recognize these substances as separated, and existing quite apart from matter. There would be no harm in that with regard to created Spirits, because I myself am inclined to believe that Angels have bodies; which has also been the opinion of several ancient Church Fathers. I am also of the opinion that the rational soul is never entirely stripped of all matter.”⁵⁴. He then explained how the Chinese thought God was embodied, and that the only way for them to understand European Christianity was through their comprehension of how God was an *intelligentia supramundana* ([notion]beyond understanding), and superior to matter. In order for Leibniz to be able to further argue the benefits of adding Chinese ethics and philosophies, as a whole, into European culture, he needed to convince his readers that the Chinese had to be credited with advanced natural theological theories: “Therefore, in order to determine whether the Chinese recognize spiritual substances, one should above all consider their *Li*, or order, which is the prime mover and ground of all other things, and which I believe corresponds to our Divinity.”⁵⁵, and he thus cut the ribbon and began his excavation of *li*.

Father Longobardi spent a lot of time gathering materials on *li*, the first principle, “They call it (*par excellence*) the Being, the Substance, the Entity. According to them, this substance is infinite, eternal, uncreated, incorruptible, and without beginning or end” these qualities of *li* create a divide between itself and Monads, as Monads cannot ignore time, and require explicit creation. Leibniz writes (it seems that this Father L but then next sentence makes it seem like Leibniz): “It is not only the principle of the physical basis of Heaven and Earth and other material things, but also the principle of the moral basis of virtues, customs, and other spiritual

⁵⁴ Leibniz, “Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese,”1716. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 77.

⁵⁵ Leibniz, “Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese,”1716. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 77.

things. It is invisible, it is perfect in its being to the highest degree, and it is itself all perfections.”⁵⁶

Leibniz expanded on the concept of *li* two years after he finished his *Monadology*, which must be associated to his deeper understanding and the meanings he projected on to *li* regardless of what *li* really was. The *Monadology* seems to appear highly influential on Leibniz’s perception of unique, fluid, immaterial building blocks he captioned as Monads. *Li*, in other words, was the Chinese inferior product to his rationalist European constructs, and can only be properly compared to the Stoic’s natural theology, as it is described to be morally grounded and still trapped in the material world, quite like a Greek God; *li* should be regarded as a simple deity or theology that must be improved or converted.

Father Longobardi tried to further disassociate, or quite arguably discredit, this foreign concept in order to affirm European theology’s superiority and to make sure that people didn’t mistake *li* for God: “do not let yourself be dazzled by these specious names under which a poisonous doctrine is hidden. For if you penetrate to the very heart of the matter, to its very root, you will see that this *Li* is nothing other than our prime Matter⁵⁷.” Here he brings in prime matter, a matter which is given the properties of gas, Longobardi tried to direct people’s attention towards the spiritual and material understandings of creation and existence, in an arguably aggressive fashion. After all, his

⁵⁶ Leibniz, “Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese,” 1716. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 80.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 83.

Note 27: “*prime matter* is purely passive, capable only of receiving motions or shapes from an active power and is hence incapable of the active powers ascribed to the *Li*. Without being informed with a soul or entelechy or some sort of power of activity, matter is never a genuine or complete substance according to Leibniz and can be known only in abstraction from it.” *Ibid.*, 84,

desire to maintain, if not augment the value of the gospel of the lord was his primary mission, as he was stationed in China as a Jesuit missionary.

The following sections of Leibniz's *Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese* points out Longobardi's prejudice; they state that the Sicilian priest had been influenced by certain Mandarin Atheists, and their views that use the ancient texts in a manipulative way. He suggests then that Longobardi was reading arguments that were written to promote flaws in the ancient natural religion: "One should no more trust the obviously strained interpretation of such people than one would trust those of an Atheist in Europe who would try to demonstrate by passages pulled out of context, from Solomon and other holy authors, that there is no reward or punishment beyond this life"⁵⁸ and so his bibliography was heavily edited. He strengthens his argument with a very bold example: "And if by misfortune Atheism should prevail in Europe and become the doctrine of the most learned•• as there was a time when Averroism almost prevailed among the philosophers of Italy ••then if missionaries were sent to Europe by the 60 sages of China and they studied our ancient books, they would have reason to oppose the wave of opinion of these most learned men and to ridicule their ridicule."⁵⁹. Leibniz here makes it evident that in order for the cultural reciprocity to trigger a conversion and advancement as society as he knew it, his readers needed to clearly see how cultures are incredibly open to misinterpretation through being introduced to partial, prejudicial and/or tainted analysis. Ultimately, Leibniz discredited Longobardi's attempt at tying li to the Scholastic's prime matter, substantial underlying reality of all things, ill fitting. Consequently *Li*, should be translated as order and reason.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 84

⁵⁹ Ibid.

Why was Leibniz trying so hard to redesign Christian morals? Why did he care? Was he doing it all for himself? Cook suggests that Leibniz is aiming to revert back to some previous version of Christianity:

“He surely cannot mean that Europeans have lost the ability to prove that God exists or that the soul is immortal; he believed he had himself given a stronger footing than ever. In saying that natural religion is almost lost, Leibniz must mean something else, that natural theology has lost the attention of the Europeans, who concentrate instead on the distractions of sectarian debate. These conflicts and distractions keep our innate ideas out of our apperception. So Leibniz does not expect the Chinese to teach Europeans how to reason better or to give them new proofs for the existence of God; rather, the Chinese would help purify religious discourse in Europe by emphasizing its essential core.”

Reverting back to previous natural theologies, and not attempting to rationalize and reformulate what was at hand, and consequently formulating a ‘pure religious discourse’ would’ve been the obvious plan for a thinker such as Leibniz, unlike what Cook suggests. He did indeed expect the Chinese to rationalize religion: “One sends some Missionaries all the way to China to preach the Christian religion, and does good, but we need some Missionaries of Reason in Europe, to preach the Natural Religion, on which Revelation itself is founded, and without which Revelation would always be taken poorly. The Religion of Reason is eternal, and God has engraved it in our hearts, our corruptions have obscured it, and the end of Jesus-Christ has been to render its luster, to restore men to the true knowledge of God and of the soul, and to make them practice the virtue makes the true good.”⁶⁰

Leibniz authored *The Monadology*, late in his life in 1714, as a summary of his philosophy. Through this text we can also see why the Chinese understanding of *Li* and of natural theology would be entirely coherent to Leibniz, and why in turn his philosophy would provide a new materialist base for it. In the *Monadology*, he described incorporeal entities that

⁶⁰ Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz. *Die Werke Von Leibniz*. Hannover: Klindworth, 1866. ix, 3, 301

he called Monads. He introduced them as substantial and temporal forms of being, of varying levels of apperception. Unlike the atoms of Democritus⁶¹, Monads are not material things, but rather principles of change that combine to create different ensembles: a table is a collection of animate Monads for Leibniz, as is a dog or an institution such as the Catholic Church. The combination of Monads – which Leibniz came to understand using the principle of calculus he invented – described functional relations of change that defined and created different forms of time and space. They are “elements of things”⁶², he wrote, that “can come into being only by creation and come to an end only by annihilation”⁶³, and are immune to external changes: “natural changes of the Monads come from *an internal principle*,”⁶⁴. Yet Leibniz held that the interrelation of all Monads was first established by God’s pre-established harmony. Most notably, they are all strictly unique: “each Monad must be different from every other. For in nature there are never two beings which are perfectly alike”⁶⁵.

He underlined its resemblance to the concept of the soul, “If we are to give the name of Soul to everything which has perceptions and desires (...) then all simple substances or created Monads might be called souls”⁶⁶ but he clearly states that “the soul is something more than a bare Monad.”⁶⁷ He differentiates the two by stating that souls are tied to memory, and thereby cannot exist without consciousness (both animal and human). For him, Monads are a

⁶¹ Democritus’ atomic theory suggests that there are only atoms and voids, all is composed of materials that are physically indestructible and indivisible, they are also always in motion. Democritus also believed that nothing happened by chance, and that all must abide natural law. Bertrand Russell, *A History of Western Philosophy*, 1945. 66.

⁶² Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm, and Robert Latta. *Leibniz The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1898. 218.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 219.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 223.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 222.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 230.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

lot more complicated and immaterial notions that have three stages, each stage gradually getting closer to perfection. It is also important to remark that these Monads “express the whole universe”⁶⁸, much as a anamorphic mirror (like a mirrored ball) reflects a room. They are moreover infinitely dense: “Each portion of matter may be conceived as like a garden full of plants and like a pond full of fishes. But each branch of every plant, each member of every animal, each drop of its liquid parts is also some such garden or pond”⁶⁹ They are “always in a perpetual flux like rivers”⁷⁰ and are thus able to be involved in multiple Monadic constructs, whilst remaining in a unique state within its own boundaries. These metaphysical, incorporeal structures aided him in getting a grasp of the natural world, and beyond, and allowed for a new science based on change, forces, and relations rather than static elements in mechanical relation.

Monadic constructions significantly drove him to make sense of the complexity which was the Chinese natural philosophy, and arguably their natural theology. The whole universe was a monadic construction, and at its core was God as the monad-in-chief. But this God was also a living reflection of this ensemble: it was, from one perspective, li. Once Leibniz saw the words li and qi(or ki), his interest in the matters of Chinese theology peaked as they appeared to him to be harmonious with Monadic thought and an essence that complicated conceptualizing all Chinese thought as atheistic. So his quest to promote the Chinese people as a group which could possibly be proven spiritually worthy enough to be converted to Christianity commenced – a translation and conversion which would, of course, substantially endorse the value of his novel philosophy.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 255.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 256.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

It can be argued that the best pairings are made possible by a selecting candidates based on the polarity of each other's respective strengths. Leibniz would've been a firm believer of this argument, given that his conviction that the Euro-Chinese alliance would prove to be an excellent idea rested on the differences of the two very large powers: “[n]ow the Chinese Empire, which challenges Europe in cultivated area and certainly surpasses her in population, vies with us in many other ways in almost equal combat, so that now they win, now we”. Through divine harmony, the two systems had developed separate and roughly equivalent views of the universe; it was to Leibniz’ age now possible to bring them into dialog to create a new definition of a monotheistic natural theology. This was very convenient for Leibniz, as this is the foundation of the whole project. If China had been more advanced than Europe, even the fact that they were so spread out from each other wouldn’t have saved them from a possible triggering of some sort of physical or intellectual war. And if the Europeans were too advanced for this alliance to take place, they would have just attempted to colonize areas they deemed prosperous.

It is important to note that while Leibniz is praising their reasoning of “despis[ing] everything which creates or nourishes ferocity in men,” which he provides as background to the lack of European militaristic technology and sophistication, he remarked that “[t]hey would be wise indeed if they were alone in the world[,] [b]ut as things are, it comes back to this, that even the good much cultivate the arts of war, so that the evil may not gain power over everything.”⁷¹ Leibniz does not suggest demilitarizing Europe, or trying to somehow halt European aggression and hostility, but he does greatly admire Chinese civil behaviour. I am not quite sure he completely understood his beloved Ricci’s observations on the harshness of Chinese

⁷¹ Leibniz, “Preface to the *Novissima Sinica*,” 1697-1699. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 46.

punishments and the very strict law enforcement across its many territories, that he wrote down in his journals, yet he praises them quite freely, time and again: “ Indeed, it is difficult to describe how beautifully all the laws of the Chinese, in contrast to those of other peoples, are directed to the achievement of public tranquility and the establishment of social order, so that men shall be disrupted in their relations as little as possible[;] [c]ertainly by their own doing men suffer the greatest evils and in turn inflict them upon each other.”⁷² It is unclear whether or not Leibniz expected European governments to claim all authority regarding the enforcement of civil law in public. Thinking of the Chinese maintaining of public lawfulness, it must be said that the self-proclaimed problem solver Leibniz left a few crucial subjects up in the air.

If the Chinese weren't religious and expected government officials to maintain highly ethical behaviour in public, and this system was to be practiced in Europe, how would this affect the Church's standing and authority? Surely, the ethical pillars or crutches that were the reason why Western Civilization was still standing would take a massive blow if Chinese ways of preserving moral standards were to migrate to Europe. The most important question here is: would this, as a result, delegitimize Christianity's, almost monopolized, authority on ethical standards? Where would it stand and how would these ideas be received? Leibniz unintentionally stated that Christianity can't guide the public to be upstanding citizens and he aimed to bring back what ancient Chinese doctrine or what the friars would call atheism to Europe to save all of their souls? What about all of the different sects? Leibniz was raised as a Protestant, and was therefore conditioned to accept potential constructive amendments to be made on his religion. However, as the Catholics had never been as accepting, would Catholic Europe welcome a completely foreign culture into its midst, and let it dictate what changes must be made on their

⁷² Ibid., 47.

faith? As Leibniz would agree, an outsider's perspective and criticism can benefit the host society in many ways, from potential constructive alterations to gaining information on how the host society is perceived by the outside world. On the other hand, as most would agree, it is hard to take criticism in the first place: even if all of Europe was made up of reformist Protestants, it would've been highly unlikely for people to just let go of the system they were born into, especially if this renovation wasn't being carried out by the public in a bottom-up revolutionary fashion. Yet if the value of Chinese natural theology could be demonstrated it might form a common foundation for the various Christian confessions – much as Leibniz had hoped his own philosophy could, but now through the revealed wisdom of one of God's creations: China.

Leibniz was working as an intellectual, trying to solve Europe's morality crisis. As crime and quotidian hostility was seemingly too high for Leibniz's liking, he started searching high and low for a way to save his beloved continent from unethical behavior, and most importantly: from the very distracting sect rivalries. From the texts he was exposed to thanks to his correspondents, he managed to envision what he truly wanted for his friends, neighbors, fellow countrymen, and his beloved Europeans: “[s]o great is obedience toward superiors and reverence toward elders, so religious, almost, is the relation of children toward parents, that for children to contrive anything violent against their parents, even by word, is almost unheard of.”⁷³ The way Leibniz thought he could best bring in this Chinese public peace, was through Christianity. Though his writings suggest that he was religious, and he thought that this whole project would deepen his understanding of God and natural theology, it is clear that his primary motive was to simply end religious hostility. The most valuable end product belonging to this plan would've been the reformed Euro-Chinese form of Christianity. It had the potential of halting all that was

⁷³ Leibniz, “Preface to the *Novissima Sinica*,” 1697-1699. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 47.

distracting Europe from achieving greatness and becoming a true civilization: a most advanced and complex society.

Leibniz knew how important it was for the Chinese court to access European advanced sciences and other teachings. However, Leibniz was not running a charity. He had a very clear goal for which he would never compromise, and so he thought that he could reach his objective at the cost of trading European intellectual commodities:

“[M]athematicians from the *Academie des Sciences* have been sent to the Orient to teach the monarch, not only the mathematical arts, but also the essence of our philosophy [...] But it is desirable that they in turn teach us those things which are especially in our interest: the greatest use of practical philosophy and a more perfect manner of living, to say nothing now of their other arts. 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 religion, just as we have sent them teachers of revealed theology.”⁷⁴

This passage reveals two important parts of his plan, the first being the reciprocity of knowledge exchange expected from the Chinese, in view of their dominance over Europeans in the realm of practical philosophies and social morality, and the second being the call for missionaries from China to travel to Europe with the hopes of them teaching Europeans how to apply natural theology to their lives. The latter is a great act of submission, as Europeans were the original missionaries, they were mostly Christian learned men travelling abroad to enlighten the world. Now with this cultural exchange program, they were supposed to find themselves in requirement of and hospitably accept foreign missionaries to teach them what had been a known challenge for the continent, for centuries. This change of tide in the exchange of necessary information that one nation possessed and the other did not, could have acted as a threat to the faith Europeans had in their self-declared supremacy over the rest of the world.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 50.

Even if religious hostility and ethical problems were suffocating the people from within the borders of the Western world, for Leibniz, Europe's gift of Christianity was able to redeem the continent's name and restore its prestige : "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."⁷⁵ This was Leibniz's way to show his readers however dire the morality issues might have been, Europe could always surpass China, as long as it held on to its faith, Christianity. Yet, if China were to accept Christianity and embrace it the way Europe eventually did, could Europe still contest for the golden apple?

⁷⁵ Ibid., 51.

Chapter 3 Leibniz's City of God

For Leibniz, as we have seen, Chinese doctrine was far too important and underutilized to be considered a heresy that was to be discarded or burnt away. China existed for a greater reason: God had made China and its teachings accessible to Leibniz in order for him to get the chance to fulfill his foundational goal of reaching the closest degree of perfection man was permitted access to. China permitted Leibniz to observe a state where natural theology is the most dominant philosophical system. China and its naturally revealed religion, therefore, had an important place, as it played the role of a necessary counterpart to Europe.

The basis of Leibniz's higher order synthesis merged Europe's monotheism and advanced analytical skill with China's naturally revealed theology, a phenomenon which was inspired by the functions of Leibniz's *Monadology*, for if simple substances could formulate compounds in order to fulfill the calling or requirement of a higher purpose or meaning, these material states could formulate a compound themselves. Molding such a complex structure wouldn't take away from the essential independence the founding Monads or states possessed in their respective cores, but it would correct the underutilization or inefficiency of the subjects. This way, Leibniz properly allocated the perfect strengths and skills of the individual Monad or society, and proposed a complex but refined and tailored end product. God is defined by Leibniz as the perspective on all monadic combinations and defines a great civilization as similarly providing an overview of a vast, but lesser, realm of these combinations, perhaps as embodied by an emperor but also as an ideal construct as "the empire." Two combine the perspectives of the two greatest known civilizations in the world would for Leibniz necessarily be both a political and theological event of the immense magnitude.

Leibniz trusted the ancient philosophies and the alleged natural theologies of the Chinese and considered them closer to the foundation of Chinese thought and far superior to their modern thinkers: “[n]ow this shows also that the ancient Chinese have surpassed the modern ones in the extreme, not only in piety (which is the basis of the most perfect morality) but in science as well.”⁷⁶ The accommodationists’ interpretations of the ancient texts, free from associations with Buddhist, Taoist and atheistic concepts allowed Leibniz and other accommodationists to view them as belonging to the realm of natural theology. This is highlighted in the passages where Leibniz criticized Father Longobardi for being too dependent on the interpretations and commentary of Mandarin atheistic thinkers, for Leibniz this made Longobardi’s source for information quite tainted, and thereby his ideas on Chinese philosophy equally unreliable.⁷⁷

One of the prime examples that worked in favor of Leibniz’s assumed superiority of European analytics and its products is of the Binary Arithmetic:

“Reverend Father Bouvet and I have discovered the meaning, apparently truest to the text, of the characters of Fohi, founder of Empire, which consist simply of combinations of unbroken and broken lines, and which pass for the most ancient writing of China in its simplest form. ... Actually, the 64 figures represent a Binary Arithmetic which apparently this great legislator [Fu Xi] possessed, and which I have rediscovered some thousands of years later.”⁷⁸

Leibniz, today, is known to be the father of the Binary code, mentioned in Chapter 1 in the context of Leibniz’s use of the book of *I Ching*. Here in this passage he defends Chinese thought, to the extent of the simple but effective arithmetic that was, according to him misinterpreted for quite some time. Leibniz argued that before his European perspective landed on the books, many thinkers tried to apply different uses for the teachings, “Fohi, the Emperor Ven Vam and his son

⁷⁶ Leibniz, “Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese,” 1716. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 134.

⁷⁷ This refers to sections of the second chapter, where Leibniz noted that Europe and Christianity had its fair share of atheist critics and alluding to the notion that discarding everything on their words wouldn’t be wise.

⁷⁸ Leibniz, “Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese,” 1716. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 133.

Cheu Cum, and Confucius more than five centuries later, have all sought therein philosophical mysteries.”⁷⁹ Yet, none of them saw the most suitable application of the arithmetic, but Leibniz and Father Bouvet, a French Jesuit missionary who spent time in China, did. This is an import remark, considering that it added to the case of the delegitimization of modern Chinese thought and the idea that these ancient Chinese books might have been hiding lucrative ideas that could only be mined using European tools.

The religious situation in China, during Ricci’s time, was an interesting one, the increased commercialization and urbanization allowed for many religions to be practiced: synagogues, Taoist temples, Buddhist temples, Tibetan Buddhist temples, mosques welcomed its followers, this was made possible by the dominant state ideology, Confucianism, and its claim of superiority.⁸⁰

The reason why Matteo Ricci thought that the Chinese public’s ancient theologies could potentially welcome the guidance of an overarching religion, like Christianity, rested on how China carried itself all the way to his own century:

“Of all the Pagan sects known to Europe, I know of no people who fell into fewer errors in the early ages of their antiquity than did the Chinese. From the very beginning of their history, it is recorded in their writings that they recognized and worshipped one Supreme Being whom they called the King of Heaven, or designated by some other name indicating his rule over heaven and earth.”⁸¹

He was thoroughly impressed by the way Confucian principles had managed to guide most of the population without having a religious presence comparable to one derived from a monotheistic moral guidance system. Having no real claim on the events in the afterlife, convinced Ricci and other accommodationists that appropriating any anti-Christian themes to their ancient texts was

⁷⁹ Ibid., 133.

⁸⁰ Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.) 14.

⁸¹ Matteo Ricci and Nicholas Trigault, *China in the Sixteenth Century: the Journals of Matteo Ricci, 1583-1610*, (Random House, New York, 1953.) 93. As cited in Franklin Perkins, *Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light*., 28.

not respectful of their doctrines. Ricci not only established the Jesuit mission in China, but he also established the image of a religious European of an Abrahamic religion. Ricci's respect for Chinese natural theology benefitted his image, and therefore his conversion mission. He tried to leave as much Chinese culture intact, in a similar way to how Pagan beliefs were once preserved in its followers great conversion to Christianity, some centuries ago.⁸²

Ricci noted that the Chinese were easy potential converts: “[they] could certainly become Christians, since the essence of their doctrine contains nothing the contrary to the essence of the Catholic faith nor would the Catholic faith hinder them in any way, but would indeed air in that attainment of the quiet and peace of the republic which their books claim as their goal.”⁸³ Well then, why didn't they convert to Christianity? Why did the mission fail? Ricci tried to maintain a high regard for himself and his cause where he was perceived as a foreigner selling religion where it wasn't needed. From changing his attire to his class, to making the effort of becoming more than fluent in the Chinese language, he battled long and hard in order to preserve Chinese cultural identity and its almost sacred doctrines whilst promoting the true word of the lord. This wasn't what all missionaries did, especially since the mission eventually was terminated due to the Rites controversy, and the hostility that arose out of the situation.

Confucian doctrine was widespread and its concepts were made accessible to the public, however Leibniz suggested that there was more to be understood from the teachings. Leibniz claimed that Chinese thought far exceeded the depth of much European thought, and if this were true for modern thought it was even truer of ancient thought. Therefore the European analytical

⁸² Perkins, *Leibniz and China: A Commerce of Light*. 27.

⁸³ Pasquale M. D'Elia, Matteo Ricci. *Fonti Ricciane; Documenti Originali Concernenti Matteo Ricci E La Storia Delle Prime Relazioni Tra L'Europa E La Cina (1579-1615)*. (Roma: Libreria Dello Stato, 1942.) Vol.1, 20,39-40, 118-119. As cited in Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*.(New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 1984.) 210.

method of critical reading was needed in order for these texts' true meanings to be revealed properly:

“It is indeed apparent that if we Europeans were well enough informed concerning Chinese Literature, then, with the aid of logic, critical thinking, mathematics and our manner of expressing thought more exacting than theirs--we could uncover in the Chinese writings of the remotest antiquity many things unknown to modern Chinese and even to other commentators thought to be classical.”⁸⁴

This was argued in order to establish Longobardi's failure to differentiate good sources for interpretations and information, as it so clearly suggests that European contemporary analytics were so superior to the Chinese's that their modern writings couldn't be trusted the same way as European documents.

The relationship between Leibniz himself and God is itself an important one. Based off of his writings on religion and the *Monadology*, one would argue that he did believe in one all-powerful God, and even went as far as to plot ways to strengthen his understanding of God through harmony and the graduation on to a higher level of society. Leibniz set out to accomplish this dream of further proving God's existence through reverting to simpler and more natural theological concepts. Leibniz greatly admired the word simple, and the concept of going back to simplified versions of events or theories in order to rebuild the subject anew, in an attempt to avoid the problems that once caused impasses. This chapter will address Leibniz's God, the relationship between God, *li* and Monads as well as Leibniz's vision for the future and his underlying motivations that lead to his advocacy of the great Euro-Chinese exchange one last time before his death. Whereas we have address the basis in European problems for Leibniz' quest, and the sources in Chinese thought from which he drew, this chapter will address his own experience and goals in the creation of his new hybrid kingdom of ideas.

⁸⁴ Leibniz, “Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese,” 1716. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 132-133.

Leibniz wrote Pierre Bayle, author of the great 18th century *Historical and Critical Dictionary*, about his Monads and how he believed they made it possible to prove God, mainly through a plan which he later in the *Monadology* described as the City of God. Leibniz, like the Chinese did for *Li*, gave God attributes, or rather captioned his domains, with the hopes of being able to recreate God-like structures with a lot less perfections, which would still be considered large improvements on the then current ones. Leibniz thought he could only obtain this through the connections made through simple substances and the harmony that would come from the bonds. On one hand, he hoped to develop a new logic reaching the foundations of things, so that he developed various “universal characteristics” or languages through which to describe the world in the simplest terms. The most basic of these we have described earlier: a binary notation system. The most complicated was his invention of calculus. Yet on the other hand he proposed in his *Theodicy* that all monads form the “most perfect” possible combination, so that it was possible to always find an explanation for any state of affairs. It was this latter concept that Leibniz took as both a hypothesis about the world and one which, once entered, formed a new sort of proof for God:

“Besides, no hypothesis but this (which I venture to call proved) fittingly exalts the greatness of God; and this Monsieur Bayle recognized when, in his Dictionary (article Rorarius), he raised objections to it, in which indeed he was inclined to think that I was attributing too much to God- more than it is possible to attribute. But he was unable to give any reason which could show the impossibility of this universal harmony, according to which every substance exactly expresses all others through the relations it has with them.”⁸⁵

Attributing too much to God, was for Leibniz the entire point of his theodicy: it was a belief that than revealed a proper approach to knowledge and belief.

⁸⁵ Gottfried Leibniz, *Monadology*, 1714. As cited in Robert Latta, trans.. *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*. (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1925:) 249-250.

“No hypothesis but this” refers to Leibniz’s arguments both in the *Monadology* and *Theodicy*(1710) on God’s reasonings for choosing this universe and world. He claims that by emphasizing God’s foresight of the potential that this world’s humans have, he is therefore claiming that we are the closest possible beings that could approach or at least witness levels of perfection.

Leibniz's willingness not to give up on the Chinese case, even after the Vatican's finalized decision regarding Chinese doctrine in the beginning of the eighteenth century shut off his conduit of information from the region, is probably largely due to the fact that Leibniz believed that God chose this very universe for it showed the greatest potential. This universe, to him, was worth working on because of the impossibility of God putting faith or effort into the wrong universe: "[n]ow, as in the Ideas of God there is an infinite number of possible universes, and as only one of them can be actual there must be a sufficient reason for the choice of God, which leads Him to decide upon one rather than another."⁸⁶ The reason he gives for this sounds quite logical for how absurd and abstract it really is: "[a]nd this reason can be found only in the fitness, or in the degrees of perfection, that these worlds possess, since each possible thing has the right to aspire to existence in proportion to the amount of perfection it contains in germ."⁸⁷ The idea of the fitness of the entire universe to be measured by the level of perfection found in a germ is certainly far out there, even by Leibniz's standards, but it does grant him the permission to trust his God and fellow man in a very interesting manner. Leibniz's God and his best universe scenario only works through an understanding of both parties appreciation for it being the best of circumstances, which is a very comforting thought for all involved parties. And on another note, this idea can be seen in everything Leibniz touches, as the efforts he makes, especially the ones underlining God's virtue and creating better societies as he thought that improvements must be made in order for our world to reach the highest state and a new level of closeness to God. After all, "the actual existence of the best that wisdom makes known to God is due to this, that His goodness makes Him choose it, and His power makes Him produce it"⁸⁸ therefore it would be

⁸⁶ Leibniz, *Monadology*. As cited in Latta, 247.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Leibniz, *Monadology*. As cited in Latta, 248.

more than wasteful to not try to complete God's work and regroup on a religious path to the formation of great societies.

The degrees of perfection Leibniz mentions rest on God's power, knowledge and will. This concept is difficult to grasp at first due to its oxymoronic wording, but it is primarily associated with his classification of Monads and therefore does not make bold claims regarding perfection and its inner variety in a literal manner. To understand Leibniz' argument we have to digress slightly to define what he understands monads to be, and how he would understand their complex interrelations to define most things, ideas, activities, and institutions. On the simplest level, this focus on monads allows us to understand why Leibniz' approach to Chinese belief would be so sympathetic. The fact that Monads were simple substances, thought up to be naturally indivisible make it possible for them to be independent:

“[t]hese characteristics [(God's power, will and knowledge)] correspond to what in the created Monads forms the ground of basis, to the faculty of Perception and to the faculty of Appetition. But in God these attributes are absolutely infinite or perfect; and in the created Monads ... there are only imitations of these attributes, according to the degree of perfection of the Monad.”⁸⁹

Appetition and perception in the realm of Monads represent the shift from one perception to another caused by their internal principle and the passing condition which shows multiplicity in the simple substance, respectively.⁹⁰ It is important to distinguish the Monads' self-sufficiency which allow themselves to govern their internal activities. This will be the crucial point in understanding how the Monad's compound complex structures in turn will exemplify how humans would ideally reorganize themselves, in order to reach a higher level of enlightenment.

It must be noted however, that as Monads are capable of limited self-governing, within the constraints of their internal principals, they are unable to influence the inner principles of one

⁸⁹ Leibniz, *Monadology*. As cited in Latta, 245.

⁹⁰ Leibniz, *Monadology*. As cited in Latta, 224 and 228.

another and thereby are dependent of compound structures, which are collections of simple substances. The relationship between Monads could have derived from human connections: “in simple substances the influence of one Monad upon another is only ideal, and it can have its effect only through the mediation of God, in so far as in the ideas of God any Monad rightly claims that God in regulating the others from the beginning of things, should have regard to it.”⁹¹ Leibniz often sought backing from elements he would gather from his relationship with God, in attempts to ground his thoughts, and have an established and constant reference point

This simple reference and the improvements he makes on the initial idea highlights Leibniz’s eagerness to revert back to more natural, and less contemporary or, as he described them, “modern” thoughts which he considered tainted due to religious rivalry, overall distance from natural theology and other contemporary issues. In order to perform this task, Leibniz needed another dose of natural theology. What he eventually found in China permitted him to reassure God’s position in the world, especially as prime law-giver and utilizer.

Leibniz’s conviction was that this was the right universe to be chosen by God as it showed the most potential, and this fit with God’s master craftsmanship and choice of the best fitting laws. In a way, his Monadology worked as means to convince himself first and the world second, that unity through harmony was the key to figuring out what was truly best for humanity. Even as universal harmony was a hypothesis, it was one that revealed both God’s complexity and a means of investigating any problem for its next deeper level of meaning. Entering into this circle demonstrated the power of Leibniz’s real order, and he thought that the Chinese had become better at perceiving that order. It was his firm belief that if European and Christian traditions of thinking were to be applied to their doctrines, their work would become more meaningful and worthy of mass distribution, especially if used as a device to refresh the essence

⁹¹ Leibniz, *Monadology*. As cited in Latta, 246.

of God's words, and reform Christianity. This was his goal, and his foundation is this being the most perfect world, and thus worthy of collaborative efforts and constructive dialogue between two great realms, Christian European and Chinese.

The Monads simplicity, essence to be without parts, should be considered a model for human mind and spirit. Leibniz chose time and again, to reintroduce the subject of his essays in simpler form, with the aims of clarifying the core of the problem he desired to address and solve.

In a letter to Nicolas Malebranche, a French Oratory priest and a rational philosopher, Leibniz explained how he viewed God's way of thinking and emphasized the importance of simplicity: "God makes the most things he can and what obliges him to seek simple laws is the need to find a place for as many things as can be put together; if he made use of other laws, it would be like trying to make a building with round stones, which make us lose more space than they occupy."⁹² Leibniz viewed the great architect as an entity that would respect the simplest ways to create and design its products made possible by its elementary foundations. He had high regard for what he thought was simple in its nature.

According to Leibniz there are important distinctions to be made between souls in Monads, and they must be explained before entering the realm of souls, *Li* and whether or not souls were indeed a part of ancient Chinese theology, from the perspective and context of European theology. Leibniz finalized his thoughts about his Monadic structures well after encountering *Li* and other Chinese philosophical concepts, thus making his formulations of the differences between (his interpretation of) *Li*, Monads and souls quite deliberate. Leibniz, in his *Monadology*, drew a clean border between Monads and souls:

⁹² C. J. Gerhardt, trans., *Die philosophischen Schriften von Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz* (Berlin, 1875-1890), vol. 1, 331. As cited in David Blumenfield, "Perfection and Happiness in the Best Possible World", *Cambridge Companion to Leibniz*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995,) 389.

“If we are to give the name of Soul to everything which has perceptions and appetites in the general sense which I have explained, then all simple substances or created Monads might be called souls; but as feeling is something more than a bare perception, I think it right that the general name of Monads...should suffice for simple substances which have perception only, and that the name of Souls should be given only to those in which perception is more distinct, and is accompanied by memory.”⁹³

For Leibniz, we can conclude that he considers memory to be a deciding factor when contemplating the level of consciousness for his subject. He attributes appetites and perceptions to souls as well, which derives from the assumption that soul possessors have a degree of self-sufficiency.

Leibniz planned out the differences between souls and Monads quite well, as before the *Monadology*'s release, he had time to revise his framework and approach anew his innovative and complex subject. The details and parameters on memory and how it formulates the difference between souls and Monads lies here:

“For we experience in ourselves a condition in which we remember nothing and have no distinguishable perception; as when we fall into a swoon or when we are overcome with a profound dreamless sleep. In this state the soul does not perceptibly differ from a bare Monad; but as this state is not lasting, and the soul comes out of it, the soul is something more than a bare Monad.”⁹⁴

It is unclear whether or not Leibniz would state the following openly, as an argument on its own, but it is clearly implied in the text above; souls are not simple substances. The fact that it could be composed of a Monad or more, due to his rule stating that a soul is more than a bare Monad, eliminates another possible way in which the two could have been equals: in their immaterial skeletal structure.

⁹³ Leibniz, *Monadology*. As cited in Latta, 230.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 230.

Monads are non-spatial quite like souls, therefore one must interpret the closeness between Monads as a closeness between the bodies of the corresponding Monads.⁹⁵ This is an important distinction to make, in order to preserve the inner principle's independence from external natural factors.

Leibniz's concept of a soul requires it to have parts which aren't exclusive to the possessor of the soul, thereby there isn't a portion that remains unique to the possessor: "all bodies are in a perpetual flux like rivers, and parts are entering into them and passing out of them continually."⁹⁶ This recycling of parts of the soul isn't immune to death, "there never is absolute birth [generation] nor complete death, in the strict sense, consisting in the separation of the soul from the body [,] [w]hat we call births [generations] are developments and growths, while what we call deaths are envelopments and diminutions."⁹⁷

The flow of the soul's parts that re-enter the system after an individual's death, to be redefined by its new possessor acts as a bridge between Leibniz's philosophy and Chinese alleged ancient spirituality. In the *Discourse*, Leibniz puts his pen, and noodle, to work one last time for one last fight in his advocacy for Chinese natural theology to be accepted, and for their spirituality to be observed, at the very least:

"His fifth objection [(Father Longobardi's fifth objection as to why he argued *li* was simply formless prime matter of the Scholastics)] is also based on a false or mistaken supposition: namely, that according to the Chinese all things of the world are necessarily material and that there is nothing truly spiritual.... But I believe (as I have already said) that the Chinese recognize no distinct immaterial substance other than the Li which has produced Matter. In this I believe they are correct and that the order of things brings it about that all individual Spirits are always united to bodies and that the soul, even after death, is never stripped of all organized matter or of all informed air."⁹⁸

⁹⁵ Ibid., 250..

⁹⁶ Ibid., 258.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 259.

⁹⁸ Gottfried Leibniz "Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese," 1716 in Daniel J. Cook, Henry Rosemont Jr. *Writings on China*. (Chicago, Ill.: Open Court, 1994.) 94.

This very clear statement shows Leibniz's matured perception of Chinese philosophy, especially since he mentioned going through passages he found from Chinese classical authors. It is also made possible through the findings and notions he utilized for the *Monadology*. Prior to clarifying his simple substances in the 90 paragraphs of this book, he had mentioned spirituality in a less broad context in his previous correspondences, arguing in favor of the Chinese theology. The *Monadology* permitted him to see *li* in a different light, which is the main reason why it is such a dominant theme in the Discourse. One could possibly argue that had he started working on clarifying his Monads to his readers beforehand, and also had gathered more on Chinese theology earlier, he might have been able to reach a larger audience and perhaps saved Chinese souls and thereby their Rites.

Leibniz's prime motivation in the quest of mending European ethics and reforming Christianity, in order to settle the current and prevent future sect disputes, was revolved around his "City of God". This plan for an advanced civilization first emerged at the end of the *Monadology*, but it can be observed in his plans for his Euro-Chinese dream. As it stands as the model for the ideal realm in which peace and piety come together to host a serene and virtuous environment that as a result reflects the might of God. Leibniz was certain that such a high achievement would prove the existence of God, as it could only be made possible through God as a creator and an architect, and that religion was the key that opened the door to mundane theological paradise.

Leibniz thought that a person's will is given by the creator of all, his God, and that God itself possessed a secret will which lead many wise and virtuous people to sync with it and devote their energies to the cause. He believed that only by God's pure love could people recognize the order of the universe and through God, find happiness:

“Finally, under this perfect government no good action would be unrewarded and no bad one unpunished, and all should issue in the well-being of the good, that is to say, of those who are not malcontents in this great state, but who trust in Providence, after having done their duty, and who love and imitate, as is meet, the Author of all good, finding pleasure in the contemplation of His perfections, as is the way of genuine ‘pure love,’ which takes pleasure in the happiness of the beloved.”⁹⁹

The City of God would function as a tool to get closer to the only thing which does not possess a body, by his definition: God. The passion he had for fighting for Chinese natural theology was fueled by the idea that it was possible to architect and engineer this city. For he genuinely believed that ancient and simple examples could add so much more to the divine debates. Leibniz also implied, in this passage, that the city could function properly only if governed by Providence, which would eventually have led people to find happiness and pure love, through religion.

He figured that if people could read these millennia old texts, they could deduce that God, in Leibniz’ definition, was observed and noted in a land where Jesus could not have traversed and see, for themselves, how even these people so far from Christianity knew the power, knowledge, and grace of his God. In his *Discourse* he attempted to correct translations mentioning *li* in the context of more than just supreme order and its five virtues: piety, justice, religion, prudence, and faith.¹⁰⁰ He even went as far as to theorize that it is possible for them to have misworded some of their theories, and that it is possible to interpret that they got close to Leibniz’s causation principles on their own:

“They say of Heaven what we say of the beasts, namely that they act according to intelligence and as if they possessed it, although they do not possess it at all because they are directed by the supreme order of reason; which the Chinese call Li. When they say that the primal air or matter leaves the Li naturally and involuntarily, it could be they believe that God has created matter necessarily. But one could grant yet a better meaning

⁹⁹ Leibniz, *Monadology*. As cited in Latta, 269-271.

¹⁰⁰ Leibniz, “Discourse on the Natural Theology of the Chinese,” 1716. As Cited in Cook, *Writings on China*, 79.

to their words, explaining them more fittingly: namely, that supreme Reason has been brought to that which is the most rational. It is possible they call the Li necessary, because it is determined and infallible; misusing the term "necessary" as many Europeans do.¹⁰¹

He further commended them, stating that they should be considered far from blameworthy for the conclusions they were able to come through, especially without the guidance offered to the people of Abrahamic religions and not to them.

Spirits give God power, and if people were to gather in a morally sound and scientifically advanced society, this could only further highlight God's goodness, wisdom and power. This solution he approved of, the merging of Europe and China in reformation of Christianity could have only further empowered God, and proved how good both he and his creations are as expressed by their new advanced society. Leibniz here completely credited his deity in the face of humanity's triumph in creating the perfect state, governed by the faith in the perfect incorporeal being. This city of God, would have been a man-made city, cultivated from what we can adlib as the great cultural exchange, and the reverting back to natural theology, moving away from Europe's diverse sects and the troubles they brought on. Leibniz here presented his fascination with God, and expresses this mystical way of how God's city was the answer to both what should be in store for the next superior civilization, and how man could get closer to God from the experience, as a whole. This part of the *Monadology* rested on the shoulders of a Leibniz who thought he could prove his God's might through working to create the perfect society for what he thought was the universe God favors. Essentially, Leibniz's great plan to convert China to Christianity and reform the religion based off of ancient Chinese natural philosophy and theology, and thus create the perfectly ethical and enlightened society primarily aimed to create a plan to prove God's might.

¹⁰¹ Ibid., 93.

After Leibniz's Discourse and other later attempts to argue in favor of the great cultural exchange, Pope Clement XI's 1704 anti-accommodationist decree was made public in China in 1707 and in 1709 in Europe, thus widening the gap between the continents on a spiritual level. This decision to refuse Chinese natural theology did not change in Catholicism until the end of the first half of the twentieth century. In 1724, most missionaries were forced to leave, and only the ones the court deemed useful remained to teach astronomy, thus concluding the abandonment of the plans that once held high expectations as an end product of a mutually spiritually rewarding partnership.

Conclusion

Leibniz had faith in his own capacity to provide the best of all possible worlds, the one which he got to call home, with an efficient plan that in turn highlighted the perfections of God, as well as aligned with the optimistic projections of human potential God had entrusted humanity with. Leibniz's plan was focused on demonstrating his deity's excellence, by creating an environment that was morally superior and therefore deserving of even more from God:

“This City of God, this truly universal monarchy, is a moral world in the natural world, and is the most exalted and most divine among the works of God; and it is in it that the glory of God really consists, for He would have no glory were not His greatness and His goodness known and admired by spirits [esprits]. It is also in relation to this divine City that God specially has goodness, while His wisdom and His power are manifested everywhere.”¹⁰²

If goodness could function as revealed knowledge, it would appear as if Leibniz's rational theology could suffice to unlock it. Yet, in order to access rational theology, much of the dogma that had been weighing on all attempts at reforming Christianity had to be shed off.

It could only have been after understanding the importance of European knowledge in China, and how easily commodifiable mathematics, Western philosophy and other studies truly were that Leibniz turned to China in order for it to participate in his cultural exchange model. In 1607, Father Matteo Ricci translated Euclid's *Elements of Geometry* and thus made it available to Chinese military officers, farmers, workers, statesmen and pretty much anyone who would become interested in learning about this subject that was so vital and readily attainable in Europe.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Gottfried Leibniz, *Monadology*, 1714. As cited in Robert Latta, trans.. *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*. (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1925:) 267.

¹⁰³ Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci*, (New York, NY: Viking Penguin, 1984.) 31.

Europe had a lot more knowledge to offer than a book on geometry, mostly prepared before Jesus was just a thought in heaven, as my mother would put it. After all, it was the birth- continent of the university. Leibniz was very much aware of this, as he repeatedly emphasized how the Chinese lacked not only Christian revealed knowledge, but standard European doctrine. It was in the interests of both continents for this merger to have worked out, however it was primarily Leibniz's dream and not the vision of the respective authorities of the two societies. Had the collective monarchs been on board, our world today could have been incredibly different: "[w]hence it is easy to conclude that the totality of all spirits must compose the City of God, that is to say, the most perfect State that is possible, under the most perfect of Monarchs."¹⁰⁴ His utopian state may never have seen the light of day, but at least he tried, which in turn makes a world of difference.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Latta, trans.. *The Monadology and Other Philosophical Writings*. (London: Oxford University Press, H. Milford, 1925:) 267.

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