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Research Report

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The USF Ricci Institute's three-month Doctoral Research Fellowship provided me with invaluable resources and an excellent environment to advance my dissertation project "Translating Renaissance Science to Late Ming China. Alfonso Vagnone's *Kongji gezhi* 空際格致 (Investigation into Phenomena in the Atmosphere, c. 1633)." It also granted me a unique opportunity to meet scholars from around the world, working in interconnected fields of Jesuit studies. This academic community greatly inspired my work and will continue to do so in the future. I am most grateful for having received this outstanding support of the Ricci Institute. With this report, I would like to offer some insights into the research I conducted and feedback on the fellowship program I have been part of.

Research

At the beginning of my research stay I was mainly focused on gathering further and more detailed biographical information on the Jesuit Alfonso Vagnone (c. 1568-1640), the author of the work I am translating. In this respect, the Ricci Institute's online catalogue greatly facilitated the search and gathering of relevant sources and references. The different stages of Vagnone's missionary life in China directly relate to his written legacy that is marked by the various influences of his Chinese contemporaries and the historical developments at the end of Ming China. As the compilation of my primary source text, the *Kongji gezhi* 空際格致 (c. 1633), falls into the second half of Vagnone's missionary activities in Jiangzhou, Shanxi province, I chose as a second stage of my research to gain further knowledge about the historical circumstances in this rather remote Chinese region. Of major importance to understand the historical context in which Vagnone established his Christian community in the Jiangzhou region and crafted his translations, are his Chinese collaborators, most prominently the Han 韓 brothers and the Duan 段 family. My research at the Ricci Institute revealed insight in these collaborators' role. They not only edited, revised and polished many of Vagnone's Chinese writings. Furthermore, they illustrate one of the most important links, linguistically, culturally, but also politically and financially, to the Chinese society and government. Therefore, their influence on the compilation and the design of Vagnone's work cannot be over-emphasized. Results of my research on these collaborators show that they themselves were part of a network of (often high-ranking) Chinese scholars who, on the one hand, effectively pursued their scientific and political interests and careers, and on the other hand, were drawn to the religious message delivered by the missionaries.

Based on this extended background research on the complex ensemble of differing interests and influences the work of Vagnone was subject to, I approached one of the major challenges of my research on the *Kongji gezhi*. That is to trace the contextual meaning and cultural patterns intertwined in this translation of European thought tradition to late Ming China. Although it can be plainly described as a compiled translation of Aristotelian classics on natural philosophy, the text of the *Kongji gezhi* not only offers insights into the sciences as

understood and transmitted by the Jesuit missionaries at the end of the 16th and the beginning of the 17th centuries. Moreover, the analysis of the text and its European and Chinese sources offers us valuable information on how they were exposed to the local thought tradition in the process of translation, and shaped or altered in this process. It is at this threshold that the intentions of the author(s) become most obvious and it is also at this threshold that overlapping and differing concepts can be detected and exposed. Thus, in order to approach this mélange of apologetic intentions, scientific teaching and cosmological complexities, I decided to go back to the very first step in analyzing and evaluating Chinese primary sources and the linguistic elements of the Chinese translations of the Jesuits. The analysis of specific terms and the attempt to work with one consistent translation theory therefore took up a lot of time of my research stay. Yet, the result from this approach led to new insights into the intertextual connections of Jesuit Chinese translations of which I was not aware of up to this time. For instance, the *Kongji gezhi* should not be read and understood as a word-by-word translation of its main European sources, that is Aristotle's *De Caelo* and *De Meteorologica* as taught in the Jesuits' *Ratio Studiorum*, but, furthermore, the text contains elements that are very obviously drawn from other Jesuit publications of that time, like, for instance, Matteo Ricci's *Kunyu wanguo quantu* 坤輿萬國全圖 (first published in 1602) or his *Qiankun tiyi* 乾坤體義 (published in 1609). One of my key findings on intertextuality in Vagnone's *Kongji gezhi* and other Jesuit translations of that time was triggered by the Ricci Institute's collection of historical maps, which, as subsequent research showed, were used by Vagnone as a reference for central paragraphs in the *Kongji gezhi*. One essential part of my continuing doctoral research will therefore be to discern the interconnectedness between these translations as the linguistic intricacies not only express the complexity of this cultural and intellectual encounter, but further constitute an instrument to reflect on the degree of compatibility of the Jesuit teaching and learning with traditional Chinese thought and culture.

My research at the USF Ricci Institute was greatly facilitated by the librarian Mark Mir who tirelessly provided us with new sources and ideas. A big part of the research progress I made during my stay I therefore owe to his expertise in this field and his generosity to share his knowledge and insights. In addition, the feedback and input from senior Ricci Institute scholars and staff during the talks and discussions were most valuable.