

Joining the Spiritual World of Confucianism: The Jesuit Translation of the *Zhongyong*

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Abstract

In their encounter with China, the Jesuits developed a multi-layer approach, and the religious, philosophical and political layers of this encounter are quite well known. However, the spiritual encounter is less known, and yet quite important because it deals with the most inner layer of the personal identity of the Jesuits and of the Chinese people. The Italian Jesuit Prospero Intorcetta was intellectually deeply influenced by the spiritual encounter between the two traditions of Western Christianity and Confucianism as shown in his Latin translation of the *Zhongyong*, published in 1687.

Keywords

Zhongyong, Jesuits, Intorcetta, spirits, spirituality

The *Confucius Sinarum Philosophus* is the first Latin translation of the *Daxue* 大學 (*The Great Learning*), the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (*The Doctrine of the Mean*), and the *Lunyu* 論語 (*The Analects*). Published under the auspices of the Royal Library in Paris in 1687, this translation was the result of years of Jesuit scholarship conducted as part of a missionary expedition to China. It proved to be a foundational document for European Sinology, influencing Western scholarship for hundreds of years after its publication; it generated abundant scholarship in the form of translations, commentaries, and essays in many Western languages.

In the style of many Chinese commentaries on the *Four Books* (*Sishu* 四書), this text includes a direct translation of the original source followed