

***Alfonso Vagnone's Tongyou Jiaoyu***  
***(On the Education of Children, c. 1632)***  
***The Earliest Encounter Between Chinese and European Pedagogy***

Giulia Falato  
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This volume focuses on the book *On the Education of Children*, written by the Italian Jesuit Alfonso Vagnone (1568–1640) and printed around 1632 in Jiangzhou (Shanxi). After analysing the earliest treatise of European pedagogy known to the Chinese public, it also includes its first annotated translation.

The Introduction briefly explains the importance of Vagnone's *Tongyou jiaoyu* and his editorial vicissitudes. Falato, who is currently a lecturer in Chinese Studies at the University of Oxford, had to choose among different printed and manuscript copies of a book written by a Jesuit who, following the examples of Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and Alessandro Valignano (1539–1606), successfully practiced *accommodatio* (accustomising to local languages, practices, food, clothing etc.) and made Western learning known to a Chinese public.

The first chapter ('European Education and the Society of Jesus in the 15th and 16th Centuries') concerns the history of education in Europe. Falato starts from the Greek and Latin origins of pedagogy, following its adaption during the Christian centuries and the Middle Ages, until the Jesuit re-elaboration as planned by Ignatius of Loyola (1491–1556). As the *Constitutiones* and the *Ratio studiorum* clearly show, the founder of the Society of Jesus kept the focus on Latin and rhetoric, and always with an international approach and global ambitions. This humanistic approach was particularly appreciated in the Chinese empire and became a precious tool in the hands of Jesuit missionaries like Vagnone.

Chapter 2 ('Chinese Pedagogy during the Song and Ming Dynasties') gives in parallel a historical overview of the Chinese pedagogic culture, during the Song (960–1269) and Ming (1368–1644) dynasties. The nature of children and their role in the society has always been of the utmost importance for Chinese authors. The first Jesuits arrived in the Ming empire in 1583, immediately recognizing the high literacy of its people. Missionaries also understood that Europeans could not impose their own

learning (like they could try to do in different contexts), but had to mediate and discreetly complement it with what Chinese were very used to: printed books.

In chapter 3 ('The Making of *Tongyou jiaoyu*: A 17 Year-Long Journey'), Falato recounts the genesis of *Tongyou jiaoyu*. Vagnone worked for more than fifteen years on what 'can be considered the oldest proof of a Sino-Western exchange in the field of the education of children' (52). Not only Vagnone had studied the classics of European pedagogy (Cicero, pseudo-Plutarch, Quintilian) but, during his permanence at the Jesuit college of Saint Paul in Macau, he corroborated and updated his knowledge of the subject by making use of the Chinese and Western sources available at St Paul's college. The instruction of children was, in fact, an extremely relevant issue for missionaries. The aim of *Tongyou jiaoyu* was to introduce Chinese readers (who came from different cultural strata, and also included women and children) to European and/or Christian pedagogy. The main targets were obviously educators (parents and teachers), and not exclusively converts or religious people.

Chapter 4 ('Sources of *Tongyou jiaoyu*: An Open Debate') deals with Vagnone's sources, both Chinese and European. Jesuits were very committed to what are usually described as "translations," but are more "adaptations," of European books into Chinese. This literary operation required a three-fold collaboration: a Jesuit author/collector, his native collaborators (usually converts), and the revisions/censorship by both European and Chinese experts. Vagnone's background allowed him to compose 'a unique combination of classical, Renaissance, and Chinese philosophical precepts' (67). Unfortunately, he never left notes or allusions in his epistolary on the sources he employed.

The final chapter before the edition of the treatise ('Into the Text: A Study on Vagnone's Language and Style') is one of the most important and innovative elements of the book. Falato studies the language and style of Vagnone, who was aware of the importance of written words in China and put all his efforts in persuading them rhetorically, drawing from different traditions. These adaptations and compromises affected not only the contents, but the form itself: what kind of words had to be used to transmit the new message without risking misunderstandings or heterodoxy? The most famous example was the translation of the term "God," addressed in this section. The main choices for "transwriters" were four: 'phonemic loans, semantic loans, loan translations, or the creation of pure neologisms' (101–2). Falato follows the development of all of them, also thanks to five explicative comparative tables.

The Appendix finally provides the reader with a full English translation of the *Tongyou jiaoyu*. The footnotes contain the explanations of linguistic issue and indication of the sources used by Vagnone: biblical references, other Jesuits' works, Neo-Confucian classics etc. When Vagnone died, in 1640, he left a relevant human and cultural legacy: a flourishing community of eight thousand Christians and twenty-one publications. The Conclusions briefly underline the importance of his *Tongyou Jiaoyu* as one of the first books of ethics adapted to a Chinese public.

In the last few years, *Tongyou jiaoyu* was the focus of another scholar's research. At the end of 2017, Thierry Meynard, a Jesuit sinologist operating in Sun Yat-sen University, published an annotated edition of Vagnone's work and a collection of essays in Chinese by scholars from different fields.<sup>1</sup> Falato's publication, which is based on her revised doctoral dissertation (written between 2014 and 2017) clearly shows the author's desire to offer a complete study on *Tongyou jiaoyu* from the perspective of a Western sinologist and presents a stronger focus on language and translation strategies.

The biggest challenge while dealing with early modern Jesuits operating in the Eastern territories, is being able to reach their linguistic fluency and cultural expertise. Even if Vagnone was not a polymath (like, for instance, his famous contemporary Athanasius Kircher, 1601–80), he was a typical man of the Italian Renaissance, and left for the Ming Empire after having received an extensive education at the best Jesuit colleges. Once arrived in the Chinese empire (1604), Vagnone had not only to learn a new and different idiom and writing system, but to familiarize with totally new cultural practices. The Jesuit deeply studied the Confucian classics, and could take advantage of his native collaborators and patrons. For a scholar today, it is almost impossible to acquire a comparable erudition, if not after decades of application. This notwithstanding, the richness and originality of Falato's work is incontestable. Managing sources in seven languages, Falato put at disposal Vagnone's treatise worldwide, and analysed it from multiple perspectives. This edition will be a reference for other scholars working on Jesuit pedagogy and on the relations between East and West during the early modern period.

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<sup>1</sup> ALFONSO VAGNONE (高一志), *Tongyou jiaoyu jinzhu* (童幼教育今注), annotated by Thierry Meynard (梅謙立), collated by Tan Jie (譚杰) (Beijing: Commercial Press 商務印書館, 2017); Sher-shiueh Li and Thierry Meynard, *Jesuit Chreia in Late Ming China: Two Studies with an Annotated Translation of Alfonso Vagnone's Illustrations of the Grand Dao* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2014).