

The direct intellectual exchange between China and Europe begun at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> century when the Jesuit missionaries Matteo Ricci and Michael Ruggieri established a permanent mission in today's Guangdong province of China. The first contacts between Jesuits and Chinese scholars were marked by an intense effort of translation and comparison of the main concepts of Confucian tradition and Aristotelian scholasticism. The subsequent transmission of the ideas and concepts from China to Europe was, to a great extent, based on these initial intellectual encounters. The same holds for the reaction towards China among rationalist thinkers of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century who made an attempt to adapt the Jesuit depictions of Neo-Confucian thought to the Western philosophical debates concerning the metaphysical, political and moral implications of Spinozist monism, that is a philosophy acknowledging existence of only a single substance. What was the origin of this conviction about affinity between monism and the Neo-Confucianism? How did the Early Modern authors relate Western concepts with those developed in China? What was the role of Chinese philosophy in rethinking the European political institutions and Europe's place in the emerging global world? These are some of the main questions that should find an answer in the course of research.

The research will encompass comparative analysis of three groups of texts: a) Chinese texts that have inspired the debates concerning the relation between Western and Chinese philosophy; b) Jesuit interpretations and descriptions of Neo-Confucianism addressed to Chinese and European readers; c) selected works by Pierre Bayle, Nicolas Malebranche, and Jean Levesque de Burigny who adapted the information about China provided by the missionaries to their own historical, philosophical and political contexts by associating it with the philosophy of Benedict Spinoza, the main monist thinker of the 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe. These texts will be compared against each other and analyzed in the wider context of the most important philosophical currents of the Early Modernity. Particular attention will be given to the transformations and the use made of Chinese concepts in the course of philosophical debates and arguments. This approach will allow to see not only the way in which Chinese philosophical concepts were relocated after being transmitted into the European context but also how different was the meaning attributed to Chinese philosophy among European authors of various intellectual orientations during the Early Modern period.

The project will result in a systematic study of an important, while rarely discussed, aspect of the early European reception of Chinese philosophy which has prepared the ground for its later better-known readings by such authors like those by Leibniz or Christian Wolff or Voltaire. It will also provide an insight into the early essays in comparative philosophy and the reassessment of its role played in the formation of the philosophical discourse of modernity.