Neo-Latin and the Contemporary Latin Classroom: Tales from 16th century China

During his twenty-seven years as a missionary to China in the late 16th and early 17th century, the Jesuit priest and mathematician, Matteo Ricci (1552-1610), composed what has become a foundational text in Western scholarship for the study of Chinese culture: "On the Christian Mission among the Chinese by the Society of Jesus," or in the Latin translation of Ricci's fellow Jesuit missionary, Nicolas Trigault (1577-1628), *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas suscepta ab Societate Jesu*. Upon Ricci's death in 1610, Trigault was charged with translating the original Italian manuscript, *Commentari della Cina*, whose title he expanded: *Ex P. Matthaei Riccii eiusdem Societatis commentariis Libri V ... in Quibus Sinensis Regni mores, leges, atque instituta, & novae illius Ecclesiae difficillima primordia accurate & summa fide describuntur* (*Five books on the Christian Mission among the Chinese by the Society of Jesus based on the Commentaries of Matteo Ricci ... in which the customs, laws, and institutions of the Chinese kingdom and the very difficult beginnings of the new Church there are accurately and faithfully described*). Trigault's Latin version was published in Augsburg, Germany in 1615, after which it was frequently reprinted and rapidly translated into European vernacular languages.

This paper assesses the viability of introducing passages from the Ricci-Trigault *Expeditio apud Sinas* into the Latin classroom. It belongs to a larger project to develop an advanced Latin reader of Neo-Latin texts that treat non-classical material such as Chinese culture, African flora and fauna (G. Leone, *Descriptio Africae* [1526]), and middle-school classroom conventions (I. Pontanus, *Progymnasmata Latinitatis* ([1591-93]). At the CAAS meeting in New York, I hope to present three passages from the *Expeditio*: on feng shui (I.9), on Confucius and his teaching (I.10), and on the origins of Chinese Buddhism (I.10). I am keen for feedback from the diverse audience that CAAS meetings attract, in particular from K-12 classics teachers whose students are a potential audience for these texts. My sense is that this material will be well received and that the session will prove edifying and diverting for the audience and of great personal value as I develop my Neo-Latin reader.