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**SECCIÓN MONOGRÁFICA: PRÁCTICAS DE MEDIACIÓN EN LOS MISIONEROS DE LA CORONA DE CASTILLA EN CHINA Y FILIPINAS (SIGLOS XVI-XVII) / MONOGRAPHIC SECTION: PRACTICES OF MEDIATION IN THE MISSIONARIES OF THE CROWN OF CASTILE IN CHINA AND THE PHILIPPINES (XVI-XVII CENTURIES)**

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**THE CONTENTION IN A TIME OF CHANGE:  
THE WORK OF PANTOJA AND THE MORAL  
DISCUSSION IN LATE MING SOCIETY**  
*EL CONFLICTO EN TIEMPOS DE CAMBIO:  
LA OBRA DE PANTOJA Y EL DEBATE MORAL EN LA SOCIEDAD  
DE LOS FINALES DE LA DINASTÍA MING*

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**ABSTRACT:** This paper provides a different perspective to view the cultural dialogue between China and Europe. The author put this communication in the context of the Chinese intellectual history and analyzes the urgent need of the Chinese literati in late Ming period, which was the solid moral motivation to bring about moral enhancement effectively. Precisely because of this need, the book *Septem Victoriis* 七克 (Qike) of the Spanish Jesuit Diego de Pantoja caused extensive attention among the Chinese literati. Some people accepted that the mindset of “getting rewards for doing good” could attract people in a utilitarian way and thus provided moral motives for the commoners. Nevertheless, there were still many Chinese elites believed that the idea of getting heavenly rewards violates the basic principles of Confucian ethics.

**KEY WORDS:** Neo-Confucianism; Diego Pantoja; moral motivation; moral books; *Septem Victoriis*, jesuits.

**RESUMEN:** Este artículo ofrece una perspectiva diferente sobre el diálogo cultural entre China y Europa. El autor sitúa este artículo dentro del contexto de la historia intelectual china y analiza la necesidad urgente de los literatos chinos de las postrimerías del periodo Ming, que consistía en la creación de una motivación moral sólida con el fin de mejorar de modo efectivo la moral de la sociedad en general. Precisamente por esta necesidad, el libro *Septem Victoriis* 七克 (Qike) del jesuita español Diego de Pantoja llamó mucho su atención. Algunas personas aceptaron que la idea de «obtener recompensas por hacer el bien» podía ser atractiva a los plebeyos por su fondo utilitarista. Sin embargo, todavía existían muchas élites chinas que creían que la idea de obtener recompensas celestiales violaba los principios básicos de la ética confuciana.

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** neoconfucianismo; Diego de Pantoja; motivación moral; libros morales; *Septem Victoriis*; jesuitas.

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## A DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVE

The first great cultural encounter between China and Europe began in the last decades of the sixteenth century. The missionaries, primarily of the Society of Jesus, are crucial intermediaries in this encounter. In the study of the cultural communication between China and Europe, there was a paradigm shift from a Eurocentric to a Sinocentric approach.

The study on the history of communication between China and Europe once treated the missionaries as the transmitters, seeking to reveal their influence on Chinese literati<sup>1</sup>. The objectives of these studies were always about, what manner did the missionaries adopt to transmit their teachings, or, to what extent did the transmitter have an /impact/influence on the receiver, or, to what extent was the Chinese literati changed by the missionaries and their messages.

Thereafter, some researchers began to study this cultural exchange in a different perspective. The Chinese response became the center of the analysis. Since then, questions like “how did the Chinese react, positively or negatively, to the introduction of Christianity and other aspects of Western Culture” emerged. The representative work of this Chinese-centered study is *Chine et christianisme: Action et reaction* of Jacques Gernet, which pays more attention on the Chinese reactions to the Christianity.

Although the main focus on this cultural encounter shift from the European missionaries to the Chinese literati, their roles never changed. That is to say, no matter on whom the researchers focus, the Chinese remained being seemed as the passive receivers and the missionaries as transmitters.

People now realized that it is indispensable to study this cultural communication from the view of Chinese literati, but if we keep on treating them as the receiver of the new knowledges, we would always neglect the half of the history of the cultural encounter. Thus, in this paper we will provide another perspective to study this cultur-

al dialogue by treating the Chinese literati as topic initiator. Instead of study the reaction of the Chinese literati, we will focus on why they are interesting in the teachings of the missionaries. This means that we will take the cultural encounter as a historical change in China, which was produced in its own environment, the Chinese society.

In this paper, we will use this perspective to study the communication between a Spanish Jesuit named Diego de Pantoja (1571 – 1618) and the Chinese literati. We know that the Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552 – 1610) is one of the pioneering figures in the Chinese and European culture communication. Diego de Pantoja was his companion and worked with him in Beijing for 10 years. Together with Ricci they obtained an audience in the imperial Ming Court, thus obtaining a residence permit in the capital, which can be seemed as a landmark of the Chinese Mission.

He argued with the literati and gained their respect and friendship. After the death of Ricci, Pantoja took advantage of his good relationship with the officials and requested the emperor’s permission to grant a cemetery to bury Ricci. The emperor’s probation made these Jesuits more popular in the capital. After that, the publication of the book *De Septem Victoriis* (七克), abbreviated *Qike*, raised a strong repercussion among the literati.

The work of Pantoja is a book about Catholic ethics and spiritual formation, first published in 1614. In his book Pantoja described how to reach self-cultivation and obtain salvation by overcoming the seven cardinal sins: pride, lust, greed, gluttony, wrath, envy and sloth. There are seven according self-restraint ways to overcome these sins, which constitute the seven chapter of this book. *Qike* contains many references to the Bible, the commentaries and stories of saints and Western philosophers. There are also several prefaces written by the contemporary Chinese literati, which are very important for us to understand their attitude on the teachings of the missionaries.

This paper aims to study the Chinese literati’s commentaries on Pantoja’s moral book in the context of Chinese intellectual history and try to

1 STANDAERT, 2002: 4.

explain why the Spanish Jesuit's moral teachings aroused much attention in late Ming China.

## THE COLLAPSE OF POLITICAL ORDER AND THE MORAL CRISIS

To understand why the Chinese literati was interesting in the missionaries' teaching, we must learn first what were their most concerned issues. Chinese society changed markedly since the reign of Zhengde 正德 (1505 – 1521). The social changes stunned lots of intellectuals. Timothy Brook gives us a general view about the change of late Ming China:

As they crossed into the latter half of the sixteenth century, many felt they were entering a new world... the old models coming apart in the flux of change that more people, more money, and more competition were bringing about. They found the experience of being Chinese less predictable and less uniform. For upper gentry, large landowners, and rich merchants, the late Ming was a time of cultural brilliance, innovative ideas, and endless pleasure—also a time of confusion and anxiety. At the other end of the social scale, the anxious poor survived at the edges of this prosperity as short-term tenants, wage labors, domestic servants, woodcutters, and seasonal migrants<sup>2</sup>.

The social changes brought about chaos in social order, which worried the gentries; on the other hand, the increasingly fierce political struggle also disappointed the elites. The literati of the Ming used to form different factions and groups based on their friendship, similar political views, or even a fellow countryman's bond. Different factions scrambled for power and profit. This conflict between literati was getting dramatic in the Wanli 萬曆 period (1573 – 1620). Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578 – 1645), the famous Confucian scholar in late Ming China, commented:

The political conflict between officials is getting fierce. They take sides with those in the same cabal and ostracize those who hold different opinions; the moral degeneration of the world is getting worse; the general mood of the literati is becoming vicious<sup>3</sup>.

Gu Yanwu 顧炎武 (1613 – 1682), one of the most influential philosophers in late Ming China, looked back into the history of the reign of Wanli and commented:

Before the reign of Wanli, with the law and the moral teachings' assistance, society was under a comparatively good administration. However, since the reign of Wanli, the law existed, yet the moral teachings were gone<sup>4</sup>.

Another issue concerned the literati was the unethical behavior of their Emperor. Wanli emperor was widely criticized for extorting taxes ruthlessly. To increase income, he sent lots of his confidential eunuchs to the mines and ports around the whole empire to collect taxes. This command caused strong dissatisfaction among the literati, who believed that it was their moral responsibility to prevent the emperor from hurting people. Feng Qi 馮琦 (1559 – 1603), the Minister of the Rites, once said:

Now the eunuchs went to every corner of the country and extorted wealth from the people if the literati could not protect and support the people... not only would they be despised by their peers, but also the heavenly principle and the imperial law will not tolerate this ignorance of their responsibility<sup>5</sup>.

Some literati reproached the emperor for being avaricious and bringing disasters to the commoners in China:

The eunuchs have much power in finance, and they control tremendous wealth. Since your majesty nominate them, the officials did not dare to investigate them. Haven't they squeezed the fortune of people and fill their pockets? Your majesty did not even bother to ask about it. They are determined to take all gold in Yunnan province, all pearls in the sea, all the fine silks in Wu and Yue until there is nothing left. Your majesty just leave your senior counselors aside and prison your officials who dared to remonstrate. It seems that your majesty prefer treasures to your able and virtuous officials<sup>6</sup>.

If this criticism seems relatively mild, some other accusations against the emperor were extremely harsh. In the year 1579, a famous me-

2 BROOK, 1999: 154.

3 LIU, 2012, vol. 4: 16.

4 GU, 2006: 519.

5 FENG, 1607: 2.

6 ZHANG, 1974: 6057.

morial written by Luo Yuren 雒於仁 (? – ?) was presented to the court, indicating that:

The illness of your majesty comes from alcoholism, lust, avarice, and wrath. Excessive drinking could hurt the stomach; lechery has deleterious effects on the vigor; monetary greed is poisonous to the mind, and the wrath could damage the liver (...). How could your majesty forbid your subjects to have luxury banquet when you drink that much? How could your majesty forbid your subjects to indulge in carnal pleasure when you are a lascivious person? How could your majesty forbid your subjects to be greedy when you are avaricious of wealth? How could your majesty make your subjects get along well and work together when you abandon yourself to emotions?<sup>7</sup>

This sharp criticism deeply hurt the pride of Wanli. He wished to give severe punishment to this bold official. His advisors held him back, indicating that the punishment on Luo Yuren would cause more criticism and made more people know his reproaches, which was terrible for the emperor's reputation. Hearing this, Wanli had to oppress his anger.

According to Confucian ethics, the emperors should run the country by virtue and become a central moral icon of his realm. Yet clearly, the emperor yielded himself to the pleasure and felt in to, as Luo Yuren reproached, four cardinal vices: alcoholism, lust, avarice, and wrath.

It was not just the emperor, some people from the gentry class also wanted to justify the luxury lifestyle. Their original intention was to advocate that people should shake off the fetters of the tradition, apprise the human desire, yet this idea also encouraged hedonism at the time. For example, Li Zhi 李贄 (1527 – 1602), one of the most strikingly original thinkers in the late Ming period, once said: "Becoming a Buddha or sage, you just need to clear your mind. When the mind is clear, you can't be corrupted even you received thousands of gold in one day, not be licentious even you have sex with ten women in one night"<sup>8</sup>. This is really a fine excuse for the lechery. This idea of Li Zhi could partly explain why many literati visited brothels and celebrated banquets

with famous hetaeras<sup>9</sup> without scruple, which was clearly against the law but was tolerated by society.

Anyhow, the misconduct of the emperor, and even more, the severe moral decline in the level of the whole empire, concerned the literati. According to the Confucians doctrine, the ultimate aim for learning is to build a morally perfect world:

In ancient times, those who wished to make bright virtue brilliant in the world first ordered their states; those who wished to order their states first aligned their households; those who wished to align their households first refined their persons (...). Only after one's person is refined may one's household be aligned. Only after one's household is aligned may one's state be ordered. Only after one's state is ordered may the world be set at peace<sup>10</sup>.

Consequently, when the literati felt frustrated by the moral decline, they believed that they were obliged to defend the Confucian moral principles and reconstruct the moral order.

## MORAL BOOKS AND "ENCOURAGING VIRTUE MOVEMENT"

The ethical tradition of ancient Chinese Confucianism holds that all acts of virtue should be performed purely for the sake of virtue itself, without any contamination of utilitarian or self-serving considerations. Individuals act virtuously merely because such actions align with ethical and moral principles, embodying the concept of "Ren (仁)" or "benevolence". Confucius' comment on Po Yi 伯夷 and Shu Ch'i 叔齊<sup>11</sup>

9 In contrast to prostitute, who provided sex for a large number of clients in brothels or on the street, hetaeras were thought to have had only a few men as clients at any one time, to have had long-term relationships with them, and to have provided companionship and intellectual stimulation as well as sex. Having a romance relationship with the hetaeras was the fashion among the intellectuals in late Ming China.

10 Zhu, 1983, 3.

11 Po Yi and Shu Ch'i were two brothers who lived in China at the time of the transition between the Shang dynasty and the Zhou dynasty. They are remembered for their moral virtue. They also opposed the violent transition of power, for this reason they starved to death because they refuse to eat the food of the new dynasty.

7 GU, 1966: 4086-4087.

8 ZHOU, 1976, vol. 2: 165.

could perfectly interpret this mindset, as one of his disciples asked him if these two moral persons harbored resentment for ending up miserable, he answered: “They sought to act virtuously, and they did so; what was there for them to repine about”<sup>12</sup>?

Sima Qian 司馬遷 (c. 145 – 86 BC), the most famous historian in China, shared the same idea with Confucius and he insisted that one should follow their own will without considering which was worthy or unworthy, which was gain or loss<sup>13</sup>. In *Records of the Grand Historian* 史記 (*Shiji*) he once commented on people’s doubts about the meaning of good:

Some say, ‘Heaven’s way favors none, but always sides with good men.’ Can men such as Po Yi and Shu Ch’i be called good then, or bad? They accumulated such virtue, kept their actions this pure and died of starvation. Of his seventy disciples, Confucius recommended only Yen Yuan 顏淵<sup>14</sup> as ‘fond of learning’. But Hui was often poor, and did not get his fill of rice dregs and husks, finally dying young. How then does heaven repay good men? The Bandit Chih 盜跖<sup>15</sup> killed innocent men daily, made delicacies from men’s flesh, was cruel and ruthless, willful and arrogant, gathered a band of thousands of men and wreaked havoc across the world, yet finally died of old age. For what virtue did this follow? (...). I am deeply perplexed by all this. Perhaps this is what is meant by ‘the Way of Heaven’. Is it? Or isn’t it<sup>16</sup>?

Confucian ethics emphasizes “benevolence” or “ren,” an intrinsic principle about moral behavior and treatment of others that requires people to display love and care for others, not for personal gain. In this sense, the Confucian idea of “benevolence” has some similarities with Kant’s “categorical imperative”, as both emphasize the purity and moral nature of the motivation for action, both emphasize that moral actions should arise from a respect for moral laws, rather than being driven by the pursuit of personal gain or anticipated outcomes.

Needless to say, Confucian ethics set a high standard for Chinese literati, demanding them to cultivate virtues and restrain their desires spontaneously and thereupon, making sure that everyone could be a sage. Some may argue that Confucian ethics emphasized the obligatory aspect of moral, without paying enough attention to moral motive<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, Confucian ethics don’t pay enough attention to expounding the relation between happiness and morality, or it just simply argues that the two ideas equate. Some researchers believed that this is a defect in Confucian ethics<sup>18</sup>.

The Confucian ethical tradition of overlooking people’s needs and the pursuit of happiness still held a dominant position in the intellectual world of the Ming Dynasty. Wang Shouren 王守仁 (1472 – 1529)<sup>19</sup>, the most important thinker of the Ming Dynasty, proposed the doctrine of “innate knowing (良知 Liangzhi)”. The concept of “liangzhi” is central to Wang’s philosophy. He proposed that every human being is born with an inherent moral sense, which he called “liangzhi”. This moral sense is not something that we acquire or learn from the external world; rather, it is innate, and it enables us to distinguish between right and wrong. According to Wang, this innate moral sense is the ultimate guide for human actions:

The sense of right and wrong is knowledge possessed by men without deliberation and ability possessed by them without their having acquired it by learning. It is what we call innate knowledge. This knowledge is inherent in the human mind whether that of the sage or of the stupid person, for it is the same for the whole world and for all ages. If gentlemen of the world merely devote their effort to extending their innate knowledge they will naturally share with all a universal sense of right and wrong, share their likes and dislikes, regard other people as their own persons, regard the people of other countries as their own family, and look upon Heaven, Earth, and all things as one body. When

12 Zhu, 1983: 36.

13 SIMA and NIENHAUSER, 1995: 4-5.

14 Yan Hui (c. 521-481 BC) was the favorite disciple of Confucius, a man of virtue, one of the most revered figures of Confucianism.

15 Dao Zhi, a legendary villain in the Chinese history.

16 SIMA and NIENHAUSER, 1995, vol. 7: 4.

17 CHEN, 2016: 45.

18 WANG, 2008: 177-178.

19 Well known by his honorific name Wang Yangming 王陽明, Wang Shouren was a Chinese idealist philosopher. His principle ideas “Innate knowing (Liangzhi 良知)” and “Integration of Knowledge and Action (Zhixing Heyi 知行合一)” made him a the leading figure in the Neo-Confucian School of Mind.

this is done, even if we wanted the world to be without order, it would not be possible<sup>20</sup>.

Wang Shouren took a departure from the traditional Confucian emphasis on moral cultivation through learning and practice. Instead, he argued that moral action comes from the activation or realization of one's innate moral sense. He emphasized the importance of introspection and self-reflection to understand and actualize this innate moral knowledge. His view on moral motivation are closely tied to his doctrine of "innate knowing". Yet as other orthodox Confucians, Wang Shouren believed that moral motivation does not come from the pursuit of interests or the expectation of rewards, but from our inherent, innate moral sense. It is only when we act truly according to our "liangzhi" that we can achieve genuine moral action. That is to say, moral actions should originate from our inner "liangzhi", not from external rewards or punishments. As he once declared:

Doing good is the obligation for the gentry. Nowadays people believe that they do good for the sake of happiness in the afterlife, taking the reward for their good deeds like doing business really makes me feel ashamed. Couldn't people choose moral conduct if there is no retribution<sup>21</sup>?

Obviously, "doing good for rewards" or "doing good with other agenda" is disdained by this most influential philosopher of Ming dynasty. He saw the good deeds as the spontaneous behavior if one follows his innate knowledge. In this sense, people don't need other motivations to be virtuous. Nevertheless, we could also find some arguments of his that seem contradict this mindset.

In his Nangan Village Convention 南贛鄉約 (Nangan Xiangyue), a practice to enhance the virtues of the commoners which enjoyed wide-spread renown, he wrote:

From now on, those who share this convention with me would observe the precept, be of one heart and one mind, together dedicate to the goodness; those who are of two minds, comply the goodness in appearance but oppose in heart, will be punished and destroyed by the divinities<sup>22</sup>.

The expression "will be punished and destroyed by the divinities" is worthy of attention because it is backed by an important idea: people's behavior should be judged by the "divinities". That is to say, whoever joins the "convention" must make a solemn promise to "divinities", that they should be punished or rewarded by these deities according to their deeds. In his another work the four moral instructions 諭俗四條, Wang Shouren also mentioned that the spirits help the kindhearted people and punish the evil-doers:

The good-doers are not only loved by their family, friends and fellow countrymen, even the spirits will give them secret support. Meanwhile, the evil-doers are not only abominated by their family, friends, and fellow countrymen, even the spirits will punish them surreptitiously. That is why "the family that accumulates goodness is sure to have superabundant happiness, and the family that accumulates evil is sure to have superabundant misery"<sup>23</sup>.

It seems that here Wang Shouren agreed the reward could be people's motive to enhance their virtue and do good things when he implied that the good-doers could benefit from their philanthropic work.

Since in many occasions he expressed opposition to the idea of "doing good for rewards", why did he talk about "spirits" and their ability to punish and reward people in his village convention and moral instructions? The answer is the urgent need to enhance the virtue of society.

We mentioned before that the collapse of political order and the moral crisis in late Ming China worried the gentries. They realized that moral teachings should not be limited to empty talk or personal cultivation and moral doctrines should provide enforcement and stimulate people's actions. In this sense, Chinese intellectuals took a relentlessly practical view of the moral teachings, they wanted to use them to run the society successfully and, at least for some of them, even that means that they had to preach the ideas of "getting rewards for doing good" if only this mindset could attract people in a utilitarian way and thus provide moral motives for the commoners.

20 WANG and CHAN, 1965: 166-167.

21 LIN, 1997, vol. 1: 210.

22 WANG, *et al.* 1992, vol. 17: 602.

23 WANG, *et al.* 1992, vol. 24: 907.

Yet clearly, they deemed this mindset as an expedient method. For example, Wang Ji 王畿 (1498 – 1583), a representative figure of the Neo-Confucian thinkers in the Ming Dynasty, once talked about this “expedient method” in his letter to another philosopher Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 (1515 – 1588):

Allegedly that you often talked about the theory of karma in your lecturing, I know it is an expedient method to appeal to the person rooted in the bottom, who are entangled in his selfish desires. However, I am worried that it is like talking about the fantastic tales before the fools, you should be extremely careful because if they don't accept your moral teachings, they would just accept the absurd tales. What should you do then? What should you do then<sup>24</sup>?

The same as Wang Ji, many other literati shared the similar idea, taking the mindset of “getting retribution for what you did” as a temporary and expedient method to lead people to do genuine acts of virtue<sup>25</sup>.

Since the middle period of Ming Dynasty, the urgent need of promoting social virtue gave birth to the popularity of moral books and even prompted the “encouraging virtue movement (Quanshan Yundong 劝善运动)”<sup>26</sup>. When Wang Shouren wrote the village convention and moral instructions for the commoners, it means that the most influential thinker in Ming Dynasty participated in this movement. Many other intellectuals dedicated to writing moral books, making its popularity a remarkable phenomenon in late Ming China.

However, when an idea develops into a trend, and further into an intellectual movement, there are always individuals who interpret some thoughts in a more extreme way. Some moral books do not simply teach people to do good and avoid evil, they also send out a message: divinities or the gods will reward men who do good and punish those who do evil, this kind of punishment or reward could come to the person this life, or to his offspring<sup>27</sup>.

The representative figure of the authors of moral books is Yuan Huang 袁黄 (1533 – 1606), an intellectual from Zhejiang Province, who attributes the happiness of his life to his practice of merit accumulation. In his biography *Liming Pian*, he admitted that he was persuaded by a Chan master Yungu 云谷 (1500 – 1575) and now he believed that the morality was the origin of good fortune and one surely can get secular success through cultivating virtues<sup>28</sup>.

Now the question is how to convert moral merits to secular success, or, to put it in another way, how to get external benefits through virtuous acts. Yuan Huang's method is making a pledge to the Buddha that he would perform good deeds in exchange of secular gain. Then he recorded his good deed and wrong doings in a notebook called ledger of merit and demerit<sup>29</sup>. During this whole procession, Yuan needed to make constant self-examination and meditate his moral state. He firmly believed that this moral cultivation brought him rewards, attributing his success in the imperial examinations and even having a male heir to the use of ledger of merit and demerit<sup>30</sup>. He made a personal example as an effective means of convincing others that good deeds equal with happiness and success. Clearly, there is a motive to seek blessings behind every good deed. Yuan Huang's moral teachings brought three changes into the Confucian ethics:

1. Modify the traditional moral teachings into executable instructions.
2. Introduce utilitarian view into Confucian discourse system. Taking virtue as means instead of end.
3. Associate morality with personal gaining in earthy life.

Many ideas in Yuan Huang's works bear strong tones of “karmic retribution” from Buddhism, which is undoubtedly a challenge to orthodox Confucian thought. Yet the popularity of Yuan Huang's books suggested that his utilitarian view had a great impact on the moral teachings

24 WANG and WU, 2007, vol. 11: 295.

25 GAO, 2012: 113.

26 WU, 2011: 53.

27 WANG, 2008: 177-179.

28 YUAN, 1889: 3b-4b.

29 YUAN, 1889: 6b-4a.

30 YUAN, 1889: 6b.

in late Ming China. The practice of ledgers of merits and demerits provides moral motive for people because they do feel happy and content when they attain the reward, neither in this life, or in another life.

## THE DISCUSSION ON MORAL MOTIVATION IN LATE MING CHINA

Yuan Huang's book sparked greater disagreement among Chinese elites on the issue of moral motivation. Some intellectuals highly appraised these moral books, saying the mindset of utilitarian view could "encourage virtue and repress evil, improve and perfect the Confucian teachings"<sup>31</sup>. They believed that this utilitarian thought of getting rewards could bring about moral enhancement effectively and could be a beneficial supplement to Confucian ethics. They apparently accepted, at least temporarily, performing virtuous actions without the appropriate virtuous motivations. Zhou Rudeng 周汝登 (1547 – 1629), a dominating figure among the followers of Wang Yangming, commented the moral books of Yuan Huang "will be of great benefit to people, and should be published right away"<sup>32</sup>.

On the other hand, some literati insisted that the purpose of moral cultivation and performing acts of kindness to others should purely be being moral, without any intent of gaining divine favor or worldly benefits. Clearly, this strict approach to moral motives accords with the orthodox Confucian mindset. In the eyes of the orthodox Confucianism, Yuan Huang's thought is undoubtedly a dangerous heresy for widely publicizing the thought of "doing good and getting reward", which distinctly violated the Confucian ethics. Liu Zongzhou criticized that Yuan Huang "lead the whole world to seek fortune and benefit"<sup>33</sup>. Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲 shared the similar idea:

Since Yuan Huang began his practice of the ledgers of merits and demerits, some people with noble aspiration began to imitate him, yet they couldn't

constrain their desire of calculating their merits. Once they do something good, they want to trade with the divine spirits for rewards. Thus, these good deeds are inspired by the wealth and rank and have nothing to do with our heart-mind<sup>34</sup>.

In response to the "heresy" of ledgers of merit and demerit, which strongly imbued with utilitarianism, many orthodox Confucians began to adopt a different method to enhance their virtue. Unlike Yuan Huang's ledgers of merit and demerit, orthodox Confucians demanded that people not record their good deeds, but instead their wrongdoings. This was done in order to remind themselves to correct errors and improve morality. That is to say, they would not expect to offset evil deeds with good deeds, or trade surplus good deeds for benefits in this life. Instead, they focus on "self-indictment" 自訟 (Zi Song).

On all accounts, a heated debate on moral motivation was triggered. It was in this atmosphere, the Jesuits Matteo Ricci and Diego de Pantoja began their dialogue with the literati. Ricci and Pantoja also realized that the concern of the Chinese elites. Pantoja once indicated that the main topic between the Jesuits and the Chinese literati was about moral issues. Indeed, the Chinese literati showed great interest in Christian ethics and the teachings about God<sup>35</sup>. He was also fully aware the moral debates of the Chinese Mandarins:

There be many very great Mandarins, whose chief delight is to Desire of discourse of things concerning Vertue, and oftentimes Learning and they meete together as it were in Fraternities to treat thereof; and the graver sort doe make Orations, and Conferences together, perswading one another, and delivering the meanes to governe well, and to follow virtue<sup>36</sup>.

Realizing that the Chinese literati's most concerning issue was morality, Pantoja willingly involved himself into the debate. He chose to write a book, titled *Qike* 七克 on Catholic ethics. "Qike" means seven victories, "Ke克" actually has another meaning as "restraining." Moreover, "Keji", which means "self-constraint", is a central

31 HUANG, 1676, vol. 2: 6b.

32 ZHOU, 1970: 19a-20a.

33 LIU, 2012, vol. 3: 282.

34 HUANG and CHEN, 2009: 121.

35 PANTOJA, 1905, vol. 12: 356.

36 PANTOJA, 1905, vol. 12: 360.



idea of Confucianism. Here the Spanish Jesuit implied that there are seven methods of self-constraint in his book. As Ann Waltner pointed out, Pantoja's book could be comfortably accommodated in the late Ming context<sup>37</sup>.

Confronting the moral books as ledgers of merit and demerit that carried obvious Buddhist tone, Pantoja unhesitatingly sided with the orthodox Confucians, as his Italian companion Matteo Ricci. The title of his book *seven victories* suggests that his work places more emphasis on the reflection of misdeeds (or sins).

However, unlike the orthodox Confucian scholars, he believed that people's moral motivation is indeed not just morality itself, but to achieve happiness. Only, this happiness does not exist in the secular world, but in the kingdom of heaven after death. He took all the personal gains like fame and fortune as the temptation to lure people away from virtues:

To judge whether people's actions are truly moral, we have to understand their motives. If they do good deeds in obedience to God's command and do good deeds for morality, then that is genuinely good and they possess true virtue. If their good deeds are only for fame and fortune, then they don't possess true virtue, it is just pride and greed. Taking the worldly glory and wealth as the reward for doing good will make the people hope to obtain these, then his virtue is only an appearance, but actually just greed and pride<sup>38</sup>.

The arguments of Pantoja in *Qike* is closely related to the contention on moral motive in late Ming China. For this reason, his book was very popular among the literati. Of all Jesuit publications before 1616, including the work of Matteo Ricci, Pantoja's book had the largest number of prefaces.

Since the heavenly retribution plays an important role in the arguments of moral motive, Pantoja had to explain why "people who do good do not meet with recompense" in his book. Otherwise, their standpoint of doing good for a reward could be untenable. Further, the authority of Heaven, which could encourage and reward

moral actions, would also be questioned. Some literati indeed asked Pantoja about the justice of Heaven:

Book of Documents said: 'the way of Heaven is to bless the good and make the bad miserable.' It also said: '(The ways) of God are not invariable: on the good-doer, he sends down all blessings, and on the evil-doer, he sends down all miseries.' Therefore, the good ones are blessed, and the evils are punished. It should be like this, yet why is it not the fact? Someone suffers from undeserved punishments while someone enjoys undeserved rewards. Right and wrong are reversed nearly in more than half of the cases, which raises the virtuous men's doubts and encourages the villains to take their chances. The Way of Heaven is not fair for so long. Why is this happening<sup>39</sup>?

Facing the doubts of Chinese literati, Pantoja took an aggressive approach. He criticized that men shouldn't question the judgment of God for they didn't possess the ability to make moral judge:

Who could decide what is authentic good or evil? (...). We human only see the surface of things while God can see through the heart of people. How could you know that what you think is right is not precisely evil in the eyes of God? Moreover, you think that it is not fair to make good people suffer, while I believe that God is the highest and the justest and can recognize good from evil, he must have good reasons to makes someone suffer. You believe in the indefinite good of people and suspect the justice of God while I believe in the justice of God and hold doubts on the indefinite good of people? Which of us is correct<sup>40</sup>?

In Pantoja's opinion, people should believe in and hold no doubts about the judgment of God. The relation between people and God was like the patient and his doctor. The patient should completely trust his doctor, no matter the medicine that the doctor gave was sweet or bitter.

Although the Spanish Jesuit always emphasized the importance of belief, he still needed to provide more reasons to persuade his readers not to doubt the moral authority of God. According to the missionaries, the omnibenevolent creator made good people suffer because "the Lord dis-

37 WALTNER and SCHWART, 1994: 447.

38 PANTOJA, 2018: 108.

39 PANTOJA, 2018: 87.

40 PANTOJA, 2018: 87.

ciplines the one he loves”<sup>41</sup>. Further, he explained to his readers about the arrangement of God:

Even if this person possesses complete goodness, which makes you think it is unfortunate for him to suffer and God should not do that, how do you know that it is not bliss when God makes him suffer? (...). When people see the good men suffer, they have doubts about the justice of God. As a matter of fact, God does not lack the penetration of judgment; it is the men who do not see clearly<sup>42</sup>.

He then explained that God made people suffer to keep them away from the worldly pleasure and increase their virtues. Only in this way could people get heavenly rewards in the world to come<sup>43</sup>. Following that, he told a story that was quite similar to the “unfair” destiny of Po Yi, Shu Ch’i, and the Bandit Chih:

A person of virtue went out in the field and saw a lion killed a man of virtue. When he went to the outskirts of the city he saw a magnificent funeral of a bad man, he was full of doubts (...). Then suddenly, a celestial being came to him and said: “This man surely was bad, God rewards him with some honor since he did small good. However, his soul should suffer in hell. On the other hand, that man surely was good. God punished him with sudden death because he committed small errors while his soul would enjoy eternal happiness in heaven”<sup>44</sup>.

Pantoja tried to reassure people that there is justice for people’s actions. And for this reason, his readers should have no doubts on the heavenly retribution as moral motive. There is no doubt that Pantoja’s arguments touched the most concerned issue of the Chinese literati and provided some novel viewpoints on moral motivation. Many literati became readers of Pantoja. The most famous example of this is Yang Tingyun 楊廷筠 (1557 – 1627). He was originally a devout Buddhist. After accepting the teachings of Catholicism and becoming a Catholic, he became a staunch critic of Buddhism. He was not only among the first readers of *Qike*, but also polished to the manuscript of Pantoja. In his preface of *Qike*, Yang Tingyun summed up the catholic doctrine into two ideas, revering Heaven 敬天 and

loving people 愛人. Loving people is actually the virtuous actions that the literati encouraged, as Yang Tingyun explained:

Loving people is not just a formality, you have to make an effort to truly love others. That is why we say that offering food and clothing to those who need it, as well as lodging the traveler, healing the sick, visiting the prisoner, rescuing the captive and burying the dead, all this is loving people<sup>45</sup>.

Yang Tingyun then specially emphasized that the true way of “revering Heaven” is “loving people”, implying that the moral motive comes from the religious belief<sup>46</sup>. Compared with Yang Tingjun, Xu Guangqi 徐光啟<sup>47</sup> provided a more intact argument on the necessity of the mindset of heavenly retribution, in a memorial presented to the Wanli emperor he expounded:

I always said that the reward and punishment measures of the emperors, the judgements of the sages have provided elaborate directions. Its purpose is to teach people toward goodness and forbid them from evil. But these measures and judgements have jurisdiction over people’s behavior, not over their minds (...). Therefore they had to apply the doctrine of Buddhism, which proclaims that the retribution for Good and Evil lies in the afterlife. Thus people’s behavior and minds could be constrained. (...). But the Buddhism came to China for more than a thousand years, the manners and morals of people didn’t improve. It proved that its doctrine is specious and false (...). If we want people follow the good, we must adopt the teachings of these naturalized subjects (here Xu Guangqi used naturalized subjects to refer to the missionaries), which really can benefit the teachings of the emperor, the doctrines of Confucianism and rectify Buddhism<sup>48</sup>.

In the view of Xu Guangqi, the historical experience demonstrated that there is no retribution in earthy life. Yet if there is no transcendent justice, people would lose the moral motivation. Because obviously, the secular law was not an effective way to encourage morality. Furthermore, Xu Guangqi believed that the doctrine of Buddhism failed to improve the virtues since it reached China

41 Letter to the Hebrews of Saint Paul, chapter 12, verse 6.

42 PANTOJA, 2018: 87.

43 PANTOJA, 2018: 88.

44 PANTOJA, 2018: 90-91.

45 PANTOJA, 2018: 5.

46 PANTOJA, 2018: 5.

47 Guangqi Xu (1562-1633), a Chinese scholar-bureaucrat, the most famous Catholic convert and one of the three Great Pillars of Chinese Catholicism

48 XU, 1933: 2.

for more than thousand years. In the meantime, he attributed the long period of peace and stability in western world (as the Jesuits told him so) to the Catholic moral teachings. For these above reasons, he concluded that the fear of God and the belief in heavenly retribution in the afterlife could provide the moral motivation that he sought. Through this memorial, Xu Guangqi confirmed the transcendent purpose of morality and endowed “expecting the heavenly rewards” with moral value.

Chen Liangcai, another reader and author of the preface of *Qike*, expressed his praise on the moral teachings of Pantoja. He also accepted to take morality and means for another end and indicated that it is proper to cultivate virtue for heavenly rewards:

Someone says: “Knowing your own destiny is undoubtedly the most valuable thing about cultivating yourself. However, why do people covet heavenly rewards? I replied: “How can it not be so? Do people sow without aspiring the harvest? Do people create things without aspiring to make a proper utensil? Can we consider weeds to be harvested in season? Can we take a rough pot for something refined? What I detest are those who so desire the mundane rewards! The virtues of Heaven are immeasurable, and the heavenly rewards are endless. In order to get these rewards, people cultivate their morals diligently, fearing that their efforts are not enough (...). Zhou Gong and Confucius did not speak of worldly rewards in order to make people humble; the Western classics declare that people should look forward to the heavenly rewards for us to understand that they really exist<sup>49</sup>.”

These arguments, like those of the orthodox Confucians, refute the moral motivation to gain worldly benefits. However, for most orthodox scholars, they still could not accept, as Xu Guangqi, Yang Tingyun and Chen Liangcai did, that the purpose of morality is for eternal bliss in heaven. Some literati still argued with Pantoja, saying that there were no moral values in doing good for eternal happiness:

If some do good deeds to get the rewards of heaven, it is not moral but an act of seeking gain. Isn't it better to do good without aspiring after return<sup>50</sup>?

49 PANTOJA, 2018: 11.  
50 PANTOJA, 2018: 140.

It seems that Pantoja and the orthodox scholars could find common ground when they confronted worldly interests, yet the Spanish Jesuit could not accept the concept in Confucian ethical thought that morality itself is the moral motivation. In his view, the ultimate purpose of morality is to please God and gain eternal bliss. Thus he determined to persuade the literati and retorted:

Doing good without aspiring after return sounds pure and lofty, but in nature, it drives people away from true virtue and lure them to evil. Thus, this idea is nothing but a trick of the devil. Why is that? The idea of doing good for moral cultivation indeed is glorious, yet who could live up to this if he or she is not a sage. Even the sages who do good deeds for God and cultivation moral, still want rewards in the world to come, let alone the common people. Who could spur on sloth, refuse the mundane pleasure, and choose the hardship of moral cultivation without anticipation of profit? Who could eliminate evil intentions and restrain his lust without the fear of loss<sup>51</sup>?

Here we can realize that on the issue of moral motivation, Pantoja and the orthodox Confucian scholars were actually unable to convince each other. Although some scholars did not want to delve too much into the question of whether there is an afterlife in heaven, they still subtly expressed their adherence to traditional Confucian moral ethics, refusing to acknowledge the heavenly reward as a final purpose of the moral conducts:

Even indeed exist the rewards of heaven, I could just focus on doing good works. Thus, I surely could get this reward of heaven, why bother to believe in eternal happiness or to find out whether it really exists<sup>52</sup>.

It seems that the Chinese literati were ready to agree to disagree on this issue. However, for the Jesuits, even the slightest doubt on the moral motivation cannot be left unanswered, Pantoja gave a firm summary to defend the Catholic ethics:

There is a reward from heaven prepared for the ones who really do good and serve God diligently. There is no doubt they would get the rewards. Nevertheless, the ones who do not honestly believe in the rewards surely cannot do authentic good deeds for

51 PANTOJA, 2018: 140.  
52 PANTOJA, 2018: 140.

God. How could they go to heaven and get the reward<sup>53</sup>?

That is to say, good virtue is based on belief. If there is no belief in heaven and eternal happiness, the moral conducts lose their meaning, and the moral principles would become false. Pantoja specifically pointed out that if people do not firmly believe in the reward after death, people will inevitably abandon goodness.

On the issue of moral motivation, Pantoja and most orthodox Confucian scholars have significant differences that cannot be ignored. Yet it's true that the Chinese elites were impressed by the virtue of these missionaries, admitting that *Qike* could help improve social morality.

For example, Zheng Yiwei 鄭以偉 (1570 – 1633) pointed out in his preface that *Qike* “is quite helpful for improving the manners and morals of people”; Xiong Mingyu 熊明遇 (1579 – 1649) praised “these gentry from west render outstanding service to Confucianism”; Wang Ruchun 汪汝淳 (? – ?) said that *Qike* and the books of Matteo Ricci are the cure for moral disease; Peng Duanwu 彭端吾 (? – ?) appealed to all the readers of *Qike*:

The readers should neither think that Europe is afar and barbaric, nor that the missionaries' teachings are different from the Confucian classics. We should just care about if their teachings can help our country and solve the social problems<sup>54</sup>?

Nevertheless, due to significant disagreements in some areas (moral motivation being a very important point), most Chinese elites still took the teachings in the book of Pantoja as a expediency. The comments of Zheng Yiwei in the preface of *Qike* are quite representative. In his opinion, this book encouraged people to extinct their passions and desires, which was not the best method of moral cultivation. He compared restraining passions to launching a war with the enemies. Even the enemy was beaten, they still could make a strong effort to recover lost ground. For this reason, he expressed his doubts in the preface, saying that the teachings

of Pantoja may not agree with the Confucian ideas, yet *Qike* was still a good moral book to benefit the society<sup>55</sup>. Although his words are quite diplomatic, it was clear that he had certain reservations about the Spanish Jesuit's moral doctrines.

To sum up, the social and political crisis in the late Ming Dynasty prompted the urgent need of the Chinese mandarins to restore social order by improving people's morality, giving birth to “the encouraging virtue movement”. Nevertheless, the literati differed in views on the effective means of improving one's virtue. Some held that self-interested intent of gaining rewards could spur people to cultivate virtue. However, this utilitarian moral teaching was criticized by orthodox Confucians. Diego de Pantoja willingly got involved in this debate on moral issue with *Qike*, he took a Christian standpoint and indicated that people should regard heavenly retribution rather than worldly retribution as moral motive. Some Confucian intellectuals, such as Xu Guangqi and Yang Tingjun, accepted this idea because they believed that a transcendent existence could arouse people's awe and expectation, thus making people believe that the justice comes unfailingly. In this way, this transcendent existence provides sufficient moral motivation. Moreover, due to the missionaries' disdain for earthy retribution, their teachings seemed less utilitarian in the eyes of some literati.

However, for many Chinese elites, it was still difficult for them to agree with the religious elements in *Qike*. For orthodox Confucian scholars, the moral motivation of expecting posthumous rewards carries a utilitarian hue, which they find unacceptable. Nevertheless, this utilitarian ideology of missionaries, anticipating rewards after death, serves as an effective strategy to resist the Buddhist concept of karmic retribution. It can also be viewed as a potent method for constraining people's behavior. For this reason many of them took this book as a temporary expedient, or a replacement of legers of merits and demerits to encourage virtue cultivation. Probably Pantoja never thought about solving the social problems in China. His main purpose was

53 PANTOJA, 2018: 140-141.

54 PANTOJA, 2018: 7.

55 PANTOJA, 2018: 7.

always preaching Catholic doctrine to the Chinese. Nevertheless, it is because of the common concerns of both parties about moral issues that the Chinese elites and the Jesuits could start a conversation. We can say that the literati didn't fully understand the Catholic teachings in *Qike*, yet this misunderstanding produced the opportunity for the communication between China and Europe.

In conclusion, it is imperative to emphasize that intercultural dialogue is never a unilateral process wherein one party disseminates its culture and the other merely accepts or misconstrues it. The bedrock of any meaningful dialogue between cultures is invariably a subject of mutual interest. In the specific case of Pantoja and his Chinese readership, this shared focal point revolves around the concept of morality.

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