FORGIVE US OUR SINS
Confession
in Late Ming and Early Qing China

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INTRODUCTION

Confession in early modern Europe has been the subject of several studies. But what happened to the confessional practice when it moved to other cultures? This is the major research question of the present book as applied to late Ming and early Qing China. The origin of this research can be traced back to the *Handbook of Christianity in China: Volume One (635-1800)* (Leiden 2000) compiled by researchers of the K.U. Leuven, in collaboration with an international team of circa twenty scholars. As a reference work, the *Handbook* comprehensively presents many different aspects of Christianity in China, including sciences, arts and crafts. But there was one major absentee: ritual, which is often considered essential for understanding China. The compilers did not include it because they became aware that a serious investigation of the vast amount of Chinese and Western sources and an in-depth research of ritual in the Catholic and Chinese traditions would require a postponement of the publication of the *Handbook* itself. A first step in filling this gap was the organisation of an international workshop on “Chinese and Christian Rituality in Late Imperial China” (Leuven, June 2004). The present volume includes the revised contributions by Eugenio Menegon and Erik Zürcher, to which we added a reworked version of an article by Liam Brockey as well as the edition of the primary source he used for his article. They portray from different angles one of the sacramental rituals, viz. that of confession.

The first article by Eugenio Menegon presents two main facets of the Christian rituals for the confession and absolution of sins within the context of Chinese social and religious experience: the prescriptive-normative aspect, and practice as recorded in historical documents. It shows that in the course of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the ritual could take on differing meanings in the hands of both priests and Christians. While the daily experience of confession was powerfully connected with the Christians’ concern for salvation in the afterlife, its practice changed from a pastoral of perfection to a pastoral of fear. The kind of audiences that increasingly preoccupied the missionaries, as well as their expanding numbers, determined a growing neglect of individualized spiritual direction through confession, and a rise in a penitential rituality concerned with efficaciousness, which found its climax in the phenomenon of indulgences in the eighteenth century.

The second article by Erik Zürcher focuses on a comparison between Christian and Chinese confessional practices. It is mainly an attempt to analyse seventeenth-century Buddhist and Buddha-Daoist penitential rites, especially the communal confessional liturgies called chanhui. In doing so, the article defines the main points of similarity to, and difference with, the Catholic confession. It shows that the Catholic sacrament of confession, unlike the Buddhist chanhui, was strictly personal, and that it was much closer to the Confucian way of self-improvement by being based on an individual examination of conscience. Zürcher is of the opinion that Christianity, by providing purifying and redeeming rituals, indeed could be a substitute for the Buddhist ceremonials that so far had served to “complement Confucianism.”

The third essay by Liam Brockey examines the use of auricular confession by Jesuit missionaries in China during the seventeenth century through making the link with their European background. By focussing on the way that the members of the Society of Jesus in the China mission dealt with their penitents in the mission field confessionalists, it shows that the Jesuits in late Ming and early Qing China shared the intention of their confrères in Europe to bring about change in the morality of their followers through the sacrament of penance. Jesuits were keen to impute their Chinese Christians with a desire for this sacrament, something at which they claimed to be increasingly successful over the course of the seventeenth century.

This essay is followed by the publication of a confessional manual composed by José Monteiro S.J. (1646-1720). It is edited and supplied with an introduction by Liam Brockey and Ad Dudink. This manual not only reveals one of the central components of a Jesuit plan aimed at accelerating the process of educating missionaries for service in China, but also illustrates many aspects of the concrete confessional practice in China at that time.

These different approaches show how confession as a foreign ritual became embedded in the Chinese Christian communities. It is hoped that these studies can contribute to a better understanding of other rituals as well.

The editors of this book are grateful to FWO-Vlaanderen, Onderzoeksraad K.U. Leuven, and the Chiang Ching-Kuo Foundation for the support that made this research possible.

NICOLAS STANDAERT and AD DUDINK
DELIVER US FROM EVIL
CONFESSION AND SALVATION
IN SEVENTEENTH- AND EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY
CHINESE CATHOLICISM

EUGENIO MENEGON

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Introduction

In this essay, I explore two main facets of the Christian rituals for the confession and absolution of sins within the context of Chinese social and religious experience: the prescriptive-normative aspect, and practice as recorded in historical documents. The first part focuses on the way missionaries and converts described in writing the complex of moral teachings introducing Christian ideas of salvation and sin, as well as the more properly sacramental notions linked to the preparation for and the performance of the ritual itself. The second part employs a number of Chinese and Western sources, including missionary reports on the daily religious life of Christian communities, to explore the practice of confession as a community-building device, as a response to individual psychological and spiritual needs, and as a disciplinary tool. The co-existence of all these aspects shows that the ritual could take on differing meanings in the hands of both priests and Christians, and be employed to different ends within a common belief in sin and salvation in the afterlife that European and Chinese traditions, each with its own specificities, shared.

PART 1
The Sacrament of Penance in Prescriptive Texts

Since the very beginning of the early modern Catholic mission in China, the sacrament of penance was one of the rituals that most Chinese Christians experienced soon after conversion. Through preaching and prescriptive texts, catechumens and converts received full exposure to the idea and practice of ritual confession of sins. However, in literati circles and among non-Christians the Jesuits preferred to first introduce a set of moral teachings that propaedeutically prepared the ground for Christian life and for the sacramental rituality reserved to baptized Christians. The Jesuit propaedeutical presentation fit well within the late Ming interest for confessional literature and so-called “ledgers of merit and demerit,” but also resonated with existing Chinese preoccupations for sin and salvation.

Moral Themes as Propaedeutical Steps to the Introduction of the Catholic Theology of Penance

Death reaches everywhere

Alas! In the bustle of the world, years go by and quickly reach an end, pressuring on the living. The silver face of the moon changes every month. But the rosy softness of spring flowers withers from morning to evening!

No matter what your beauty, you cannot avoid wrinkles, nor stop hair from becoming white. When old age and decrepitude arrive, they rapidly summon the lethal night upon you, and you lose your eyes in death.

Death reaches everywhere, does not fear royal palaces, does not shirk the houses of the poor. Poor and rich, ignorant and cultured, all are conducted along the tenebrous way. Burial under three inches of dirt, that awaits me as well as the royal prince!

What is the use in making so many efforts to avoid the heat of summer? Why take so many pains to avoid the inconveniences of the autumn wind? Soon you will have to separate yourself forever from your wife, your relatives, your friends.

If you have a beautiful house, decorated with precious things, maybe someone else will come and live in it. Is there anything you do not love about it? However, none of the numerous trees in your garden, except for the pine and the catalpa, will survive after the funeral of the master. All the riches you have accumulated with so much effort day after day will be enjoyed by your descendants, and squandered at once.¹

In the spring of 1601, the famous Jesuit Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), then residing in the imperial capital Beijing, composed this rhythmic text on the brevity of life together with another seven ones on related topics to accompany Western-style music in the imperial palace. In Ricci’s words, these “eight short compositions in Chinese characters regarding eight moral topics, full of beautiful sentences of our authors,” were written to “exhort to virtue and to a good life.”² The songs were well received by literati in the capital, who started copying and spreading them in their circles. The most

² FR II, no. 601, pp. 134-35.
Acute among these literati observed that through this *artifcio* the Jesuits had attempted to teach the emperor how to rule wisely and to live virtuously.3

These moral themes connected to the passing of time, the brevity of life, death, and the fate of humans in the afterlife had obviously been carefully chosen by Ricci for discussion with his literati audience. Ricci’s emphasis on these themes can be most clearly seen in his book *Jiren shipian* 天人十篇 (Ten Chapters of an Extraordinary Man), a collection of moral teachings published in form of dialogues in the capital at the beginning of 1608, after two years of compilation work. This book, which borrowed some of the contents of Ricci’s earlier treatise *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven, first edition Beijing, 1603), represented a rather faithful testimony of conversations with contemporary men of letters between 1595 and 1601, mainly in Beijing. This tract reflected to a certain extent the literati’s interest for, and surprise at, some themes of Christian moral life presented by the foreign priest through aphorisms.4

In particular, the *Ten Chapters* represented a purposeful effort to highlight themes connected to salvation: the misery of human life as compared with the bliss of the celestial kingdom; the necessary retribution for one’s sins in paradise and hell; the fact that responsibility for our actions, including our sins, is with us, and not with fate, as embodied by fortune-tellers; the notion that wealth and its by-product, avarice, are major obstacles to salvation; the need to prize time and prepare for death; and finally, the methods to reach salvation through a virtuous life, i.e., meditation about death, examination of conscience, and penance (in particular, fasting).

Both in *The True Meaning* and in the *Ten Chapters*, Ricci expressed criticism of the Buddhist understanding of afterlife, but also attacked the current emphasis among Confucian literati on the acquisition of merits in this life through the moral accounting in texts known at the time as “ledgers of merit and demerit,” and their disinterest for the afterlife. If one does not believe in the immortality of the soul, in retribution *post mortem* for the sins committed, and in a paradise and a hell, then he or she will not be concerned about eternal salvation, and will centre his or her attention on life in this world.5 Ricci clearly saw the themes connected to the Christian idea of *memento mori* as important in establishing a platform for the propagation of Christianity among literati: it was necessary to convince them of the fallacy of their understanding of life and death in order to introduce a Christian vision of these ideas, and instill in them a desire for salvation in the afterlife. Thus, the strategy of Ricci was to advance explanations based on natural theology, and to confute Buddhist, Daoist and Neo-Confucian ideas contrary to Christianity.

The detailed treatment of examination of conscience, meditation techniques (e.g., *memento mori*; silence), repentance, and penitential practices such as fasting in the *Ten Chapters* can be seen as preliminary steps to the only remaining element missing in Ricci’s presentation, the Church sacrament of penance administered by the priest. Ricci could rely on literati familiarity and predilection for introspection and meditation (*zuogong* 坐功) and the Buddhist-Daoist tradition of *zhai* 養 (fasting and purification) to introduce the ethical elements of penance, but stopped short of presenting its ritual dimension, entailing priestly intermediation, and a ritual community. In view of his target audience, i.e., the cultured literati in the Confucian tradition who had yet to accept membership in the Christian Church, he chose to underline the importance of repentance for sins as a form of personal moral self-cultivation, independent of priestly intermediation.

Nevertheless, as adumbrated in his discussions of paradise and hell in *The True Meaning*, Ricci implicitly introduced a hierarchy of audiences and of pastoral approaches to spiritual progress:

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3 *FR* II, no. 601, p. 135.

4 On the overlaps between the two books, see Lin 1978. Ricci indicated that his compilation was not so much inspired by the “paradoxes” of ancient philosophers, but rather by the Christian tradition, that had assimilated also classical wisdom. As Ricci reported to General Acquaaviva in a letter dated August 22, 1608, the book was a compilation of the sayings of “Western sages” of all epochs, “those that I could remember with the help of the few books that we have here”; *TV*, vol. 2, p. 362. In Ricci’s own estimation, the *Ten Chapters* were a great editorial success: “Among all the books we have composed so far... none has been more accepted than the recently printed *Paradoxes* in ten chapters with appendixes. [...] We already know that it has been reprinted in two or three other provinces, and from many places they ask us for copies, and thus we have already handed out a few hundreds of them.” See *TV*, vol. 2, pp. 361-62.

5 See the extensive discussion on afterlife in *The True Meaning*, chapter 6 (Ricci 1985, pp. 284-345). Yet, not all literati were agnostic. Yang Tingyun had been a Buddhist devotee before converting to Christianity, and Xu Guangqi, in Ricci’s account, “seeing that the sect of the Literati speaks little of the afterlife and of the salvation of souls, had taken many teachers from the sect of the Idols (= Buddhists) and other sects, which all promise the Paradise after death, but he had been dissatisfied with all of them”; see *FR* II, no. 680, p. 252. Zürcher, however, points to the superficiality of Xu’s knowledge of Buddhism and his practical, almost anti-theological bend, noting (2001, p. 155), that the depiction of Xu as a religious seeker, also found in Xu’s Chinese biography of 1678, smacks of cliché.
mon to the inferior man ... . Humble people (xiaomin 小民) must begin from the standpoint of gain; only then can they be led to accept a higher standard of morality.\(^6\)

All should believe in paradise and hell, as symbols of our fate in the afterlife, but for different reasons. The lowest motive was to do good in order to go to Heaven and to avoid Hell: "The masses (min 民) have long been fond of gain (li 利), and if one does not guide them with the promise of gain, or frighten them by warning them of the losses they can incur, one will not be able to lead them."\(^7\) An intermediate motive to do good was to repay the Lord of Heaven for his grace. The highest motivation, finally, was to do good simply to follow the will of God. This three-fold path to moral perfection was known in Christian spirituality as the "Three States or Ways," an idea first developed in full by the Franciscan theologian Bonaventure in his De triplici via (1259–1260?), and which influenced Jesuit spirituality through the work of the Spanish mystic García de Cisneros (d. 1510); Christians were thus divided in beginners, progressants, and perfected.\(^8\)

Ricci's emphasis in the Ten Chapters and in The True Meaning on self-cultivation depended on the fact that, at least initially, the Jesuits were indeed after the most intellectually refined public of Chinese high literati, whose Neo-Confucian formation privileged the idea of a disinterested good moral life: thus the appeal to elements of the highest way, that of the perfected.\(^9\) However, in practice, most people had to engage in a daily struggle with sin, and needed "instruction" as well as incentives to do good, squarely falling within the beginners and progressants.

All along, the Jesuits (Ricci included) aimed at developing Christian communities focused on catechetical formation and ritual life. An early example of deep Jesuit engagement with religious-ritual activities was the work of Nicolò Longobardo (1565–1655), successor of Ricci as superior of the mission, and one of the pioneers of catechization among rural publics in Guangdong and elsewhere.\(^10\) The commitment of early Jesuits to their more properly religious mission can also be gauged from the government reaction against the catechetical and ritual activities of Alfonso Vagnone (1568–1640) among commoners during the Nanjing anti-Christian campaign of 1616–1617.\(^11\) Ricci and his contemporaries, however, were too few to be able to engage with the same vigour both the learned and often agnostic literati, and those who had converted (including a handful of higher degree holders, but mainly made up of lower degree-holders and male and female commoners). In the first twenty years of the mission (1582–1602), only 500 people were baptized, and by 1616 there were probably around 6,000 converts in China – a tiny number.\(^12\) Yet, this should not blind us to the developments in the religious-ritual realm already happening in the first few decades of the mission. These activities show continuity with the future growth of ritual life in larger and well-established local Christian communities, especially from the 1630s on, and help us to properly place the pre-catechetical ideas on sin and penance I discussed so far within the framework of the growing Christian rituality in late Ming times.\(^13\)

The Ritual Forms of Cleansing from Sins: From Baptism to Confession

The final objective for the missionary was to convert the Chinese to Christianity, and baptism opened to the neophytes a gate onto the ritual world of their new religion. Awareness of sin, and rituals to eliminate or control sin, were at the core of the religious offering of Christianity: after imparting baptism, priests could finally inject the kind of self-cultivation techniques

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\(^{6}\) Ricci 1985, pp. 311-313 (modified translation).

\(^{7}\) Ricci 1985, pp. 312-313.

\(^{8}\) See Dictionnaire de spiritualité, vol. 16, cols. 1200-1215, entry "Voies" by Aimé Solignac.

\(^{9}\) In the same tradition of the Ricci texts I examined we find at least another contemporary work. In the early 1610s, one of Ricci's companions in Beijing, Diego de Pantoca circuited and eventually published a famous and extensive treatise on the seven capital sins and the seven virtues to overcome them, entitled Qike 七忌 (The Seven Victories over the Seven Capital Sins). The treatise received wide attention among scholars at the time, and had numerous reprints. In spite of its direct engagement with the topic of sin, however, the text once again avoided any reference to sacramental confession. Pantoca was clearly following the example of Ricci. Qike rather tried to offer to a public of sympathetic literati a Christian "method" of moral betterment superior to that of the "ledgers of merit and demerit" so popular in this period. To do so it often criticized existing practices. For example, in the same vein of Ricci, Pantoca did not miss occasions to attack the Buddhist ideas of karmic retribution. Talking about the sin of gluttony, he criticized the vegetarian diet of Buddhists precisely because it is attached to the idea of retribution (j. 5, f. 19a-b). Pantoca also disparaged the automatic feature of retribution of good and evil, and proposed instead the more stringent Catholic system of rewarding good and punishing evil. Yet, the focus remained on moral self-cultivation. On this text, see Walzer 1994; Zhang 1997; for a reliable discussion of the composition date and the existing editions, see Dudink 2001, p. 212, note 65.


\(^{11}\) See Dudink, "Opponents," in HCC, p. 511.

\(^{12}\) Jennes 1976, p. 30; HCC, p. 382.

\(^{13}\) For a chronological perspective on the growth of Jesuit Christian communities in the seventeenth century, see HCC, pp. 546-557; and Brockey 2002.
neutral presentation in the *Ten Chapters* with properly Christian and ritual contents. Baptism itself represented not only the first ritual act of conversion to a new life, but also an expression of repentance for all sins committed until then, and a way to cancel those sins. It was, in effect, a rite of general absolution. This is confirmed by the depictions of the sacrament found in early catechisms. The first published catechism, Michele Ruggieri’s (1543–1607) *Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄 (The True Record on the Lord of Heaven, 1584), for example, devoted its last short chapter to baptism under the title “Jieshi jingshui chu qianzui” 解釋淨水除前罪 (Explaining how the pure water washes away previous sins). The description was all polarized on baptism as a way to cancel sins, keep at bay evil demons and ascend to paradise after death, as opposed to a scenario for the unbaptized dominated by Satan and leading to damnation in hell.14 Ruggieri’s catechism was soon abandoned following a negative appraisal by Ricci. In the Shengjing yuelu 聖經約錄 (A Concise Record of the Holy Scriptures), the first doctrina compiled some years later by Ricci and his companions, baptism appears again as a way to cleanse oneself of previous sins, although, compared with Ruggieri, less emphasis was put on the “benefits” of salvation, and more on community belonging (after baptism, “one becomes a member of the Holy Teachings and is called a qi-li-si-dang 契利斯當,” i.e., a Christian).15

Converts apparently also placed great emphasis on baptism as a way to wash past sins, rather than merely seeing it as a liminal rite to join the Christian community. This is reflected by the example of Li Yingshi 李應試 (Paul, 1559–1620?). Like customary among cultured men in the community of Beijing in Ricci’s time, Li wrote a “written protestation of faith or a speech which was read in front of the altar [on the day of baptism] and then left to the Fathers.”16 In Ricci’s translation of the Chinese original, dated September 21, 1602 ( Wanli 30.8.6), Li says:

>... considering that since I was born, up to my present age of forty-three, because I had never heard about this great law [of Christianity], in all my actions I was never able to avoid committing sins and falling into errors, therefore, I pray the Celestial Father to grant me His merciful grace, and to cancel and forgive all the robberies, falsities and cheating, dishonest and immodest actions, avaricious attitudes, all the words and thoughts to harm others, and all kinds of sins, serious or light, which I committed on purpose or unintentionally. In this way, from now on, after having received the water of Holy Baptism, I shall diminish my sins and renew myself, adoring You [Lord] and following Your Holy Law, believing in Your doctrine and dutifully respecting the Ten Commandments, without relaxing a moment in being cautious and obedient [to those precepts]. I shall abandon all the bad habits and abuses of this world, reforming my bad behaviours and all that is not in conformity with Your holy teachings, and I will not ever again desire them.17

This declaration, written on his own initiative, not only reflects the instruction Li Yingshí had received from missionaries prior to taking the step of baptism, but also testifies to the man’s interiorization of the sense of sin, and the attending need to be purified from it (“scancellare e perdonare,” to cancel and forgive [sins]). Probably following catechetical instruction, Li grouped sins according to the classic medieval theological categories in actions, words and thoughts, and further divided them in grave (i.e., mortal) and light (i.e., venial) ones.18 Sins were to be “diminished” through a virtuous life regulated by the Church’s Commandments, and the grace of God, but the assumption was that a state of sinfulness was unavoidable, and required other means to purify oneself. Giulio Aleni’s (1582–1649) discussions with Fujianese literati in the famous collection *Koudou richao 口鐙日抄 (Daily Record of Oral Instruction, post-1640)* on the sinfulness of the human condition, and the importance of baptism and confession confirm that these themes were often raised with educated converts.19 Yet, although we know that sacramental confession was part of Christian life since the very beginning of the mission, Li Yingshí’s declaration offers an indication that converts were initiated to the sacrament only gradually.

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14 *CCT ARSI*, vol. 1, pp. 78-79.
15 *CCT ARSI*, vol. 1, pp. 111-112. On the difference between *catechismus* as apologetic texts and *doctrina christiana* as introduction to the main tenets of the faith for catechumens, see *HCC*, pp. 609-615.
16 See *FR II*, no. 695, p. 263.
17 *FR II*, no. 695, pp. 263-64.
18 Sins of omissions were also mentioned by missionaries in their writings. In the *Ten Chapters*, for example, Ricci, as he had done in *The True Meaning*, described his daily routine in the Ignatian tradition: in the morning, one thanks God and asks him to grant the gift to avoid sin, and in the evening one examines for traces of sin in one’s thoughts, words, and actions. Later in the text, however, he expands this medieval triad with the fourth category of “omissions.” See *TXCH*, vol. 1, pp. 207-214; see also *FR II*, p. 303, note 1.
19 Among ca. two dozens passages on the complex of repentance, sin, baptism and confession, for example *Koudou richao*, j. 2, in *CCT ARSI*, vol. 7, p. 148 on the need to repent at the moment of death; *Koudou richao*, j. 2, in *CCT ARSI*, vol. 7, pp. 157-158, on the degrees of gravity in sins and their confession; *Koudou richao*, j. 5, in *CCT ARSI*, vol. 7, pp. 331-332, on the cancellation of sins at baptism; *Koudou richao*, j. 7, *CCT ARSI*, vol. 7, p. 485 on confession and repentance; *Koudou richao*, j. 7, in *CCT ARSI*, vol. 7, pp. 500-501, on the importance of celebrating the feasts and to get confessed.
while the accent was initially put on Confucian-style self-control along a path of moral betterment, as shown by Ricci’s writings. The case of Xu Guangqi 徐光啟 (1562–1633), the most prominent late-Ming Christian, seems to confirm the graduality of ritual initiation. When in 1603 Xu returned to Jiangnan after failing the metropolitan exams, he lived for a couple of weeks with the Jesuits in Nanjing, attending mass daily, being catechized, and finally receiving baptism. Ricci reports that after his baptism

one day he asked what remedy would one have if he sinned after becoming Christian. They answered that it was confession. Thereafter they explained to him the sacrament of penance. Then, having learnt the way to do confession, he received this sacrament, and again he received it another time, when he last went to the [Jesuit residence] before departing for Beijing to take the doctoral [i.e., jinshi] examinations.20

Like Xu Guangqi in Nanjing, Li Yingshi in Beijing learnt in due time about the sacrament of penance, and asked that he, his wife, his sons and all the people of his household be confessed.21

The Jesuits took this gradual approach for a number of reasons. First, missionaries, as noted by d’Elia, showed much prudence, and did not admit neophytes to confession and communion in the period immediately following baptism, fearing a possible relapse.22 Moreover, catechetical instruction up to the 1620s, especially in rural contexts and among commoners (such as during the expeditions of Diego de Pantoja [1571–1618] and Gaspard Ferreira [1571–1649] in the countryside around Beijing in 1604), was quickly accomplished in matter of a few days, done orally or through very simple catechisms, and “remained restricted to the absolutely necessary truths.”23 Thus, sacramental confession, which at any rate needed the presence of a rarely-seen priest, was possibly mentioned, but initially remained a remote ritual. Finally, the newly converted initially offered a certain resistance to this ritual. The Jesuit mission’s Annual Letter of 1602, for example, refers to the difficulties of sacramental confession: “one of the matters that the new Christians find most difficult is to have to manifest one’s sins” to the confessor.24 Exemplary actions were thus needed to convince all of the legitimacy of confession. In 1603 (?), Christians in Nanjing felt encouraged to

go to confession only after a noted literatus, probably Xu Guangqi himself, was seen publicly kneeling in front of the priest to confess.25 Yet, in rural contexts and among lower classes, resistance may have been less fierce. Longobardo, active in the countryside of Shaozhou in Guangdong in the years 1597–1611,

introduced the Sacrament of confession more and more day by day, finding less difficulties than it had been initially thought. He thus was called by sick people to listen to their confessions. He administered this sacrament in front of all, with great wonderment of the pagans, who said that it was something beyond natural forces to be able to uncover one’s secret sins to another person.26

Naturally, pastoral approaches to different publics were bound to be different. While the ritual sequence was strictly codified and fundamentally unchangeable, preparation to the ritual could be accomplished through a diverse and variable range of meditational and devotional steps. In the next section, an examination of the texts on the sacrament of penance indeed shows that missionaries produced them with different publics in mind.

The Presentation of Sacramental Confession in Chinese Texts27

Possibly, the first clear, and yet very brief, description of sacramental confession in Chinese is contained in the catechism Shengjing yuelu, compiled by Ricci and others. Under the fourth sacrament (poenitentia, bai-ni-deng-jiya 白尼登濟亞) we read:28

Poenitentia in translation means to repent with sorrow (huitong 悔痛). According to the rules of the Teachings of the Great Lord, men and women have often to do self-examination (xingcha 省察). All those who have trespassed against the Commandments shall repent with sincere heart, and set their will to become good. Then they should kneel on the side of the seat of the Spiritual Father (shenfu 神父), the sa-ze-er-duo-de 撒責耳譲德 (i.e., sacerdote), and reveal in all truth the faults and sins they have committed, asking for absolution (jie 該) and, listening to the instructions [of the priest]. After the sacerdote has recited the [prescribed] prayers, then one is absolved (shejie 敎解) on behalf of the Great Lord.28

20 FR II, no. 683, p. 255.
21 Letter of Ricci to Ludovico Maselli S.J., February (?) 1605, in TV, vol. 2, p. 256. Ricci adds that he “felt particularly surprised that even [Li’s] wife knew by heart the Confiteor in Latin, which is a language very difficult to pronounce for these people.”
22 FR II, no. 678, p. 249, note 3.
23 Jennes 1976, pp. 17 and 43.
24 Quoted in FR II, no. 683, p. 255, note 3.
26 FR II, no. 731, p. 326.
27 Manuscript confessional texts in romanisation written by foreign missionaries for their own use will be mentioned later.
28 CCT ARSI, vol. 1, p. 113.
This synthetic presentation of the sacrament of penance contained the key four elements usually associated with the ritual: examination, repentance, confession, and satisfaction. Crucially, it also introduced the figure of the priest, who was addressed as shenfu specifically during confession (normally, he would be called xiansheng 先生 or laoye 老爷).29 Even in this short précis of the sacrament, the priest was clearly presented as the only one who held the key to absolution. Yet, a fuller explanation of the sacrament presumably was at this stage still done orally.

The need was soon felt to offer more exhaustive written introductions to confession, an imperative stemming from recurrent questioning on the sacrament by prospective literate converts, as well as a function of the growth of the Christian communities in China. The rather long Dizui zhengguì 滌罪正規 (Correct Rules to Wash Away Sins, 4 juan; Fujian, 1627) by Giulio Aleni can be considered the foundational text on ritual confession and penance in the China mission. The text was compiled by Aleni, and, as customary, it must have been elaborated in the company of a Chinese literatus, possibly Yang Tingyun 杨廷筠 (1562–1627), who in fact wrote a preface to it. A number of existing Western texts as well as Aleni’s own experience in the field may have been the sources for the book.30 Dizui zhengguì lüe 滌罪正規略 (Abridged Correct Rules to Wash Away Sins, n.d., late Ming; 1 juan) is, according to its title, an abridged version of Dizui zhengguì. It may well be an assemblage from translations of Western tracts, as indicated in the title page (yizhu 譯著).31

A comparison of the two texts indicates that they have a similar structure (see table of comparison in Appendix 1), but although Dizui zhengguì lüe contains passages also found in Dizui zhengguì, the two texts are rather different in style. While Dizui zhengguì, due to its length, complexity, and — one must acknowledge — even its verbosity, was suited to a limited circle of devout and highly literate converts, Dizui zhengguì lüe had a much wider appeal, and it became the most popular Chinese-language introduction to the sacrament of penance. In the words of a Franciscan in the early eighteenth century, Dizui zhengguì lüe was “shorter and clearer [than the full version of Dizui zhengguì], and accommodated to the understanding of all kinds of people, ..., and we commonly use this second [abridged] edition for the Christians in China, not the first [unabridged] one.”32 Its target audience made up of “all kinds of people” may have more readily appreciated its conciseness, systematic exposition, and even the final appendix with a few didactic miracle stories on confession that was missing in the more learned Dizui zhengguì. Finally, the inclusion of Dizui zhengguì lüe in pocket-sized prayer books no doubt guaranteed the ubiquity of Aleni’s abridged text.33

29 See Margiotti 1958, pp. 542-543, note 74, listing the various respectful addresses towards Catholic priests in seventeenth- and eighteenth-century China, including a discussion by Philippe Couplet of the address during confession.

30 Turrini 1991, pp. 106-109, notes the emergence of a series of printed "confessional for penitents" in Italy in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which are no longer simple lists of sins in the late medieval tradition, but rather "explanatory and devotional texts" on the sacrament, thought for lay readers. It is among these texts (such as De sacramento poenitentiae of the Jesuit Luca Pinelli; Pinelli 1613) that the Italian Alexoni may have found inspiration for his Dizui zhengguì. In the existing collections of ancient Western books in China, we do find this kind of texts. As noted in Broecky 2002, p. 401, Jesuit missionaries to China usually brought with them at least a treatise of casuistry or a confessional summa. Other Orders did the same. The catalogue of the Beitang library (Verhaeren 1949) contains a series of entries of manuals for confessors and penitents (a total of 34); most date to the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and are in French, Italian, Latin, Portuguese and Spanish. Among them are the works of the famous Jesuit spiritual writer Paolo Segneri (1680s), including two editions of Segneri’s Il confessore istruito (nos. 3454-3455) and two of Il penitente istruito (3472-3473), belonging to the Jesuit residence of Zhenjiang 镇江 (Chin Kiam; see Deherrge 1959, p. 305) in Jiangnan, and to the College of Beijing. I have consulted a photocopy of the 1672 first edition of Segneri’s Il confessore istruito held in BAV Stampati Barberini V.XI.67, courtesy of Prof. Elisabetta Corsi; and a French translation of Segneri’s Il penitente istruito, see Segneri 1696 (Theology Library, K.U. Leuven).

31 I used the reprint of the Dizui zhengguì in CCT ARSI, vol. 4, pp. 337-580 (cf. Chan 2002, pp. 129-130); and the version of Dizui zhengguì lüe (in WXSB, vol. 3, pp. 1155-1272). See HCC, p. 625 for the dating of Dizui zhengguì. Brummer 1964 (p. 96) advances the hypothesis that since Dizui zhengguì lüe contained in the prayer book Tongku jingli 神器精樞 was edited in Hangzhou by local Christians (see Dizui zhengguì lüe, f. 1a [WXSB, vol. 3, p. 1197]), and that a number of texts in the 1620s were published under the protection of Li Zhizao, Dizui zhengguì lüe was possibly first printed before the death of Li in 1630. Another hypothesis is that it may have been printed under the aegis of Yang Tingyun, who authored the preface of Dizui zhengguì.


33 Dizui zhengguì only contained in appendix a passage on the penances of early Christian hermits in the desert based on the “Scala [Climax] Paradisi” by St. John Climacus (7th c.), which can be found in part in Dizui zhengguì lüe; compare Dizui zhengguì, juan 4, ff. 25b-28a (CCT ARSI, vol. 4, pp. 574-579) and Dizui zhengguì lüe, ff. 30a-31ba (WXSB, vol. 3, pp. 1255-1258). Compact prayer books which included the Dizui zhengguì lüe had been initially compiled by the Jesuits, but similar versions by other congregations appeared later on. Being used daily by many Christians at home and in church, they had, together with oral instruction by catechists and priests, the greatest impact in introducing sacramental penance among “all kinds
This booklet was only the most successful among a series of texts distributed by missionaries and catechists to penitents. The Flemish Jesuit François de Rougemont (1624–1676), for example, established during the 1670s in Jiangnan the practice to give out a few days before confessions “pamphlets on the correct way to make penance and confess” (libelli de modo recte poenitendi et confitendi). These were quite likely booklets inspired by Aleni’s prototype. Surviving copies of texts on confession dating from the eighteenth century show that these introductions became at times simply an outline of the penitential steps written in vernacular Chinese onto one single sheet of paper. These fliers were ideal for easy distribution by catechists preparing the local community for the visit of a confessor. They retained the essential elements of the penitential practice, and their simple language, often literally copied from Aleni’s Dizui zhenggui lüe, was suited to a rural audience. One such texts, entitled Gaojie siyao (The Four Essentials of Confession), possibly compiled by Franciscans and local Christians, was printed and distributed on one long sheet of paper in Nan’an 南安 Prefecture (Jiangxi) in the early eighteenth century. It retained the same structure of Aleni’s work, centring on the classic elements of penance (examination, contrition, confession, and satisfaction), and is translated in Appendix 3. Some later texts only slightly deviated from Aleni’s text reflecting changes in the didactic-catechetical presentation of confession in Chinese. For example, a succinct Tianzhu shengjiao gaojie daozi 天主聖教告解道理 (Doctrinal explanation of Catholic Confession, BnF, Chinois 7276-I) by the French Vicar Apostolic of Fujian Charles Maigrot M.E.P. reveals the influence of people.” Dizui zhenggui lüe is not only found in the Tongku jingji but also in prayer books by other congregations, such as the Franciscan Shengjiao zongdu 聖教總緒 (General Collection of Prayers of the Holy Teachings, 1701), in juan 5, for a total of 38 folios, BAV, Raccolta Generale Oriente, VI.100; and in the prayer book Zongdu cuyao 總督摘要 (Abridged Collection of Prayers) compiled by the Dominican Francisco Varo. Varo mentions on f. 1b of his preface a text entitled Dizui guliä 聖緒規略 [sic], included in the second juan of the prayer book, which is quite likely Aleni’s booklet. The Corsiniana Library copy (call number 44.A.1.) of Varo’s prayer book I consulted is unfortunately incomplete, and does not include juan 2, a complete copy in St. Petersburg was not available to me. The Dizui zhenggui lüe’s diffusion is also testified by the presence of a worn-out, incomplete copy of the book, listed among manuscript and printed materials that Qing officials confiscated from a Christian family in the province of Huguang in 1679; a palace memorial by the Huguang Governor-general Ding Chang 定長 and Hubei Governor Cheng Tao 程藻 (January 6, 1679 – Qianlong 33/11/29) in Qing zong qianqi Xiyang Tianzhu- jiao zai Hua huodong dang’an shi jiao 2003, vol. 1, p. 287.


35 BnF, Chinois 7276-VIII.

36 These five steps, which became ubiquitous in catechetical literature in France starting in the 1650s, followed the method contained in the “Istruzioni per’ sacramento: Della penitenza” from the Dottrina cristiana breve of Roberto Bellarmino S.J. See Dictionnaire de spiritualité, vol. 12, col. 984.

37 I have consulted the copy of Gaojie yuanji from ARSI Jap.-Sin. II, 48; Nicolas Standarter’s unpublished bibliographic notes on this text; a draft translation at the Ferdinand Verbiest Project, Leuven (U. Librehart ed.); and Witek 1999.

38 On Toledo’s De Instructione Sacerdotum, see Keenan 2004. I used the copy of Ssudao dianyao preserved in the Royal Library in Brussels, codex 21055, through the kind assistance of Ad Dudink. On this and other texts translated by Buglio, see HCC, p. 627, and Standaert 2004. It is not unlikely that the first few Chinese Jesuits trained in Macao in the 1680s had access to the Ssudao dianyao as a sort of textbook. Wu Yushan 吳漁山 (1632–1718), for example, joined Couplet in 1680 with the intention to
In sum, Chinese-language texts on confession, produced for the Chinese, fell within four main categories, addressing both Christian and non-Christian publics: simple catechetical texts on confession for the vast majority of Christians; elaborate texts (such as Aleni’s Dizui zhenggui) for Christian literati; apologetic texts for non-Christians, in defence of the sacrament; and (rare) manuals for Chinese priests.

The Elements of Sacramental Confession: Introduction

To have a clearer idea of the way the sacrament was generally administered in the China mission, I am first going to examine how a person would prepare for it, and finally receive the sacrament according to prescriptions. Manuals for confessors and instructions for the penitents offer us a picture of the ritual actions of the two parties involved, but also show us what kind of ideas about penance and confession were presented to Chinese converts. Other types of texts (missionary reports, literati’s writings etc.) illustrate not only how later generations of missionaries presented the ritual to their public and performed it, but also how Chinese Christian authors described and appraised the ritual in their writings.

The authoritative ritual manual Rituale Romanum of 1614 confirmed the mechanics of confession established in earlier times, and gave an official and uniform version of the ritual for Post-Tridentine Catholicism. The China mission, however, was established at a time of changes in liturgical manuals, and until at least the 1630s it did not receive the official text of the Rituale. Thus, the Jesuits of the Chinese Vice-Province were asked to use at the time the so-called “ritual of Japan,” i.e., the printed Manuale ad sacramenta ministranda compiled by the Bishop of Japan Luis Cerqueira S.J. (1552–1614), and first published in Nagasaki in 1605. The Manuale was receptive to the new regulations issued by the Council of Trent, but found its immediate sources in Iberian ritual books. Lodovico Buglio made an attempt to accompany him to Rome as a linguistic expert in the work of liturgical revision of Buglio’s texts. However, due to the opposition of the Vice-Provincial Giandomenico Gabiani (1623–1694), who doubted Wu’s capability to learn enough Latin at the age of fifty, Wu remained in Macao, where he studied as a novice; see Bontinck 1962, pp. 247-248. Although Wu and his two other Chinese companions Liu Yunde 劉元德 (1628–1707) and Wan Qiyuan 萬其源 (1631–1700) may have learnt enough Portuguese to communicate with their confreres, it is only natural to suppose that they also took advantage of the existing Chinese Christian books for their formation. Yet, by the late 1720, missionaries noted that very few copies of these texts had ever been printed, precisely to avoid that Chinese could read them without understanding their true meaning. See Bontinck 1962, p. 353.

39 See Palmeiro 1629, par. 3, “Administração dos sacramentos,” f. 26r., no. 2: “In baptism we will use the ritual of Japan, and we will do the ceremonies that it orders

most complete translation of it in Chinese during the 1670s, under the title Shengshi lidian 聖事禮典 (Ritual for the Holy Sacraments), and complemented it with the translation of Toledo’s De Instructione Sacerdotum, the Siduo dianyao. Both texts contain sections on the sacrament of penance. The most influential instructions for Chinese penitents undoubtedly were the texts by Aleni, Dizui zhenggui and especially its abridged version, Dizui zhenggui lüe, and I privilege their descriptions since they offered the performative framework for the faithful.

In the general introduction to Dizui zhenggui lüe, Aleni presented an organic picture of the sacrament of penance. The ritual confession (gaojie zhi lüe 告解之禮) of sins was not simply constituted by the encounter with the priest, but had to be accompanied by its three other elements:

The components [of the sacrament] are four: examination (xingcha 詢察), contrition (tonghui 懺悔), confession (gaojie 告解), and satisfaction (bushu 補贖). Examination must be detailed, contrition must be complete, confession must be full, satisfaction must be swift, and not even one element can be missing. ... When we are in sin, and we confess according to the rules, while relying on the protection of the Lord, we will avoid eternal perdition and ascend to the Celestial Kingdom.40

This description was obviously in keeping with Western models of the sacrament, and reflected a long-standing consensus among theologians and pastors. However, especially in the wake of the Council of Trent, the elements of examination and contrition (that is, a proper preparation for the ritual itself) received special emphasis.

Examination of Conscience

In the introduction to Dizui zhenggui lüe, Aleni employs the metaphor of the penitent as a sick person, and of the confessor as a doctor:

The damage to the spirit inflicted by sins is similar to a disease harming the body. When people are sick in the body, they have fear as soon as they know it, and invite a good doctor because they want to be cured quickly. [However], when there is a disease of the spirit, one does not know how to make an examination, or when one makes an examination, one does not know how to fear, or when one fears, one does not reflect.

40 See Dizui zhenggui lüe, f. 2b (WXSB, vol. 3, p. 1200).
These lists can be found both in Dizui zhenggui and Dizui zhenggui lüe, and were modelled on European prototypes, but also adapted to the Chinese context, not unlike the adaptations introduced among the native populations of Latin America and the Philippines. For example the “List of examination questions” (xingcha tuomu 親察條目) compiled in the order of the Commandments so as to facilitate self-examination in Dizui zhenggui lüe (ff. 5a-15b), which is a simplified version of the more extensive and analytical list in Dizui zhenggui (j. 1, ff. 10b-25a), enumerates a series of Chinese superstitions forbidden to Christians under the first commandment, such as sitting, fortune-telling, numerology, worship of gods and so on. That section also qualifies as sinful any behaviour slighting the Church’s rituals, and in particular a carefree attitude towards the sacramental confession of sins. Under the fifth commandment against killing, we find the sins of suicide by hanging, slashing, poisoning or drowning, and of ingestion of abortion-inducing drugs to get rid of unwanted daughters. These were crimes also according to imperial laws, and quite common in Chinese daily life.

Often, however, especially in rural missions, people went to confession unprepared, due to their own ignorance of the basics of the faith, or simply out of laziness or lack of time. Thus missionaries had to prepare themselves to interrogate in detail during confession the penitents through so-called confessionaria, i.e., list of questions for the penitent, also organized along the Ten Commandments. Most of these confessionaria were copied and memorized by new priests as a language exercise and to help them in their first pastoral duties. Given their practical nature, they were written in vernacular and Romanised Chinese, rather than in Chinese characters. One of the most famous of these lists of questions was the “Brevis methodus confessionis instituendae” compiled by the Franciscan Vicar Apostolic of Shaanxi

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41 See Dizui zhenggui lüe, f. 1b (WXS B, vol. 3, p. 1198). The medical metaphor is also taken up by Li Sixuan, compiler of Aleni’s Chinese biography, where Aleni himself is compared to a doctor: “If during confession there was someone who did not express himself clearly, or whose narrative was confused, he even more was intent upon listening carefully, like a good doctor who, when feeling the pulse carefully [tries to] know the root of the disease, and then [is able] to treat the patient in accordance with his ailment”; see Zürcher’s translation in Zürcher 1997, p. 113; cf. CCT ARSI, vol. 12, p. 255. For an instance of this metaphor in the preaching of Aleni, see also Kouduo richao, j. 3, f. 12a (CCT ARSI, vol. 7, p. 201).

42 On this topic see Brokaw 1991; Wu Pei-yi 1979 and 1990; Waltner 1994; Zürcher (article in this volume).


44 These lists resembled what was called a “general confession” by some authors, with series of sins concluded by self-accusatory expressions like “it is my fault”; see Turcini 1991, pp. 215-216. On the practice of confession among native peoples in Latin America there is already a vast literature; see for example Azoulay 1993 and Martinez 1999; on the Philippines, see Rafael 1988.

45 See Appendix 4 for a translation of the list of sins under the First Commandment. Compare the observations on the adaptation to Chinese life in Catholic confessional lists in Zürcher (article in this volume) and in Brockey 2005 and his article in this volume.

46 See the comments by Tommaso Maria Gentili O.P. (1828-1888) regarding the first few months in his mission in Fujian in 1853: “I exercised myself to read the questions and answers of the Confessionario that I had copied in Macao. I spent almost three months in this exercise”; see Gentili 1888, vol. 3, p. 127. Similar experiences among Jesuits and other orders in earlier times were the norm; see Brockey 2002, p. 370, and Brockey (article in this volume); Varo 2000.
Basilio Brollo da Gemona (1648–1704) in the late seventeenth century, and first published in 1703 as an appendix to Francisco Varo’s (1627–1687) *Arte de la lengua Mandarin* (printed in 1703). Like the lists of sins found in Aleni’s *Dizi zhengguí* and *Dizi zhengguí lüè*, the questions of the *confessionaria* reflected the reality of daily life in China, and the kind of sinful behaviour that priests wished to discipline in the Chinese context, including superstition or abortion.

Moreover, the priests had to be prepared to mentally weigh the sins of their penitents, enumerated according to the Commandments, and to suggest some order if the penitent was confused. Foreign priests had at their disposal a plethora of manuals written for this purpose, and were trained in casuistry as part of their formation. Both *Siduo dianyao* and *Shengshi lidian* suggested that if the priest felt that the penitent had not engaged in proper examination, he should dismiss him with kind words and invite him to return for confession later. It was also important to be delicate and patient towards neophytes and women. With women, in particular, it was imperative to avoid any superfluous word “not pertaining to the matter of confession.”

The confessional encounter, finally, was not only a cleansing ritual for the penitents, or a disciplining tool of moral behaviour, but also a rare opportunity for the priest to check the level of his flock’s doctrinal back-

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51 Francisco de Toledo S.J. in his famous *De Instructione sacerdotum* (I used the 1657 Paris edition; see Toletum 1657) in Book 3 on Confession, ch. 17, entitled “De examine faciendo a Confessario,” pp. 519-521, observes that in the examination before confession, the confessor has to ask whether the penitent knows the basics, such as the *Credo*, the commandments, the sacraments etc. At p. 522, the additional commentary adds that “... it is sufficient for rusticas to [say in confession that they] believe whatever the Church believes ... Thus they do not sin if they are ignorant of the mystery of the Trinity, as long as they only explicitly believe that God rewards good people, and punishes evil people.” See also the pastoral instructions by André Ly encouraging instruction of ignorant Chinese Christians in confession; Launay 1924, pp. 214-215.

52 The manuscript dialogue is entitled *Shengjiao yaojin de daoli* 聖教要理的道禮 (*sic* for 道理), and is preserved in BNF, *Chinois* 7046-I, ff. 1b-24a. An attached document, entitled *Xinli Shentu hai ke wenda* 新來神父客問答 (ff. 33b-37b) is a mock dialogue between an old catechist from Liangjiang 梁江 county in Fujian and a newly arrived priest. This suggests that this cache of materials may have been produced in Fujian. On refusal to grant confession based on ignorance of the faith, see Taurinus 1891, pp. 48-49; on the catechetical elements integrated in confession in the early modern European context, see Turriani 1991, p. 95.

"imperfect contrition" (from the Latin atterro, "to wear away by rubbing"); past participle attritus), dictated by fear of God and of damnation, was sufficient for salvation if conjoined with the ritual of penance. After Luther attacked the idea of contrition by way of his theory of grace (God's grace was sufficient for salvation), however, the Catholic Church felt the need to enshrine the centrality of contrition. However, no theological consensus was reached on the topic, and the late seventeenth century saw a flaring-up of controversies between attritionists and contritionists, especially in France.

Aleni unequivocally explained to Fujianese literati the central importance of contrition, as well as the need to engage in continuous examination of conscience to achieve it, as this passage on the difference between "being moved to repentance" and contrition from the Koudou richao illustrates:

The Master said: "The sincerity of confession all depends on the fullness of sorrowful repentance (tonghui 悔恨 = contrition). Now many faithful think that to be moved to repentance (donghui 動悔) is sufficient. That is completely missing the point." [A local Christian literatus] replied: "Repentance is one, what is the difference between 'being moved to repentance' (donghui) and 'feeling sorrow in repentance' (tonghui)? The Master continued: "What is called 'to be moved to repentance' is nothing but a small movement of the heart that we obtain when we have done the examination of our sins at the time of confession. But if one is sorrowful, then he must feel enormously sad (aiyou pòqí 悔恨迫切), and correct (chényì 慎矣) [himself], without being at ease. If one prays for the Lord's help with this [disposition], then [perfect repentance] is almost surely achieved." 54

The recitation of the Act of Contrition (Huizui jing 悔罪經) memorized by Christians was designed to stir the soul to full repentance before sacramental confession. The Tridentine emphasis on contrition explains why in Chinese Christian texts the concept of tonghui figures so prominently, and almost no space is dedicated to attrition. Yet, an echo of the polemics surrounding the concept can be heard even in Aleni's Chinese texts, where he felt the need to mention the Western theological concepts in Chinese sounds: "True repentance is called in the West gong-di-li-zang 共弟利藏 [contritio - con-

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54 Koudou richao, j. 4, f. 23b (CCT ARSI, vol. 7, p. 300).

55 See two versions on the Act of Contrition, Chinese texts in Appendix 2; cf. Brunner 1964, p. 276 (p. 182, French translation), for Version A, addressed to Jesus, used until the late Ming. Version B, which became the most used, is addressed to God the Father. A third version, also addressed to Jesus, was introduced in the eighteenth century, and produced some controversy, as recorded in archival documents in ARSI; see Brunner 1964, pp. 116-117.


57 Dizui zhenggui lüe, f. 24a (WXSB, vol. 3, p. 1243); see also Appendix 3, Gaojie si-yao 告解聖要 (The Four Essentials of Confession), 2.


59 Fan, Tianzhu shengjiao xiaoyin 天主聖教小引, late Ming, f. 8b.
Although the vocabulary used by Fan smacked of Confucian rhetoric (zisong 自然, self-accusation, for example was a typical Neo-Confucian attitude found in meditation and ledgers of merit and demerit), in fact his statement was also theologically correct: in principle, perfect contrition was sufficient to obtain God’s forgiveness. And yet, Fan himself recognized that one had to confess anyway (“confess as soon as the occasion comes”). In the final analysis, as Aleni implicitly recognized in the Huizui yaozi, since nobody could be sure of having reached the state of perfect contrition, sacramental confession remained crucial. Therefore, missionaries impressed upon Chinese Christians the centrality of the ritual of penance, in spite of the possibility left open by the theological theories on “priest-less” perfect contrition.60

That some Chinese Christians had thoroughly internalized the importance of contrition in conjunction with sacramental confession can be seen in the writings of Zhang Geng 張鳴 (ca. 1570-1646/1647), a literatus from Quanzhou (Fujian), and a follower of Aleni. In an essay on baptism and confession for fellow Chinese Christians, Zhang observed:

Sorrow for one’s sins (tongzui 痛罪) is useful. We say that when someone goes against the laws of the country, we punish him with a fine in money. But to feel sorry in the heart is no use, since the money of the fine cannot be restored again to him. If we lose an inheritance, there is no

60 This is confirmed by an exemplary story entitled “Evil not confessed is never forgiven” appended to Aleni’s Dizui zhengui ilie, ff. 37b-38b (WXSZ, vol. 3, pp. 1270-1272): “Those who repent for their sins and look for absolution must first follow and act according to the rules of the [Holy] Teachings. It is like taking a medicine: it must be taken according to the prescription, and only then it will yield the desired effects. Thus to say that you can roughly tell one or two [sins], and then kowtow and beat your chest, and this is enough to be absolved, this is simply to fall into the net of the devil. How miserable! Once upon a time in the Western lands there was an old woman. She would go to church many times to recite prayers, and her heart was so moved that she even cried. Once a gentleman of great virtue all of a sudden saw that behind that lady stood a demon, in the form of a black man, who was happily jumping and laughing. The virtuous gentleman was surprised and asked him immediately: ‘This woman is there praying the Lord in earnest, why do you laugh at her?’ The demon replied: ‘This woman, committed a mortal sin when she was young, and she has not confessed it all her life. To [simply] feel contrite and ask for forgiveness does not conform with the Lord’s prescriptions to obtain absolution. And to pray with sorrowful heart is thus an empty act! In the end, she will simply go down to my hell! That is why I laugh at her stupidity!’ From this, one can see that if one does not respect the rules of the Teachings, and does not employ the [sacrament of] confession to get absolved, one goes against the prescriptions of the Lord. Even if one says that by being repentant one can absolve oneself, in fact in the end this is like keeping oneself in the dark and deceiving oneself. Sins cannot be forgiven on such grounds. How careless!”

61 Zhang Geng, Tianzhu qinti lingzi gaojie er yao gui zhi li 天主現立領洗告解二要規之理, late Ming, ff. 4b-5a.

62 See Sachsenmaier 2001, p. 212 (commentary by Sachsenmaier) and pp. 300, 413-414 (Chinese texts by Zhu). On sin and shame in Chinese culture, see e.g., Eberhard 1967; Santangelo 1991; Standaert 1993b. A semi-hagiographic case reported in the 1647 Litera Annu further confirms that shame represented a formidable obstacle to confession. A Christian in Jiangdi committed a grave sin, and in spite of the calling of his conscience to repentance, he did not dare to confess it. At night, he dreamt of a young woman who had recently died in fame of virtue and sanctity. But when he approached her to ask for protection, she covered her face with her hands, and said to him “You are so filthy and disgusting, how do you dare to look at my face?” He woke up in a sweat, but still was not moved to confess. Then, on another night, he again dreamt that two Fathers were exhorting him to confess. This time, he decided to put aside his shame and went to church, where he “confessed everything in its entirety”; see Gouvea 1998, p. 372.

63 See Kouduo richao, j. 7, in CCT ARSI, vol. 7, pp. 484-5: “June 2, 1637 was the third day of Pentecost (Pentecost Tuesday) [following the feast of] the Holy Spirit. Among the faithful there were some who had not yet made an effort to engage in confession. The Master shook them up saying: ‘Once upon a time there was a man who died. When his cadaver was cremated, the body was consumed, but his heart would not be incinerated. All were wondering about the cause, and a famous doctor
Thus, besides examination, different means were suggested to penitents to elicit full contrition and psychologically prepare them to sacramental confession, such as meditations (nian 念) about sin, death, and the impermanence of life, and the recitation of the Act of Contrition, commonly found in prayer books in at least two different versions. Aleni suggested that "although this prayer can be recited every day in the morning and the evening, it should be used especially when one is approaching baptism, confession, or a moment of danger for life, to avoid eternal damnation and seek to ascend to Heaven." In preparation for the ritual, moreover, penitents could recite other special prayers. *Tianzhu shengqiao nianjing zongdu 天主聖教念經總讚* (A General Collection of Prayers of the Teachings of the Lord of Heaven, 1628), the first extensive Chinese-language prayer book, for example, contained deprcatory prayers to acknowledge one's sins, to be recited just before confession and to be recited afterwards.5

### The Rite of Sacramental Confession: The Encounter Priest–Penitent

#### Physical Context

Once the penitent had engaged in examination and achieved contrition – Aleni explains in *Dizui zhenggui* and *Dizui zhenggui lue* – he should announce in advance to the priest his request for confession. At the appointed time, he should go in front of the altar, take off his cap and kneel at the side (ce 剛) of the priest's seat. This was also the common practice in Europe until the introduction of confessional boxes in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries: the confessor sat on a chair, a position which emphasized the priestly role of spiritual judge, and penitents knelt on a side, with their head bent to express humility.

Cerqueira's *Manuale* contains a section on the sacrament of penance (pp. 62-99), and explains in detail the elements of the ritual. According to the *Manuale*, and similarly in its Chinese translation in the *Shengshì lidian*,

...the penitent will accept with humility the sacrament of penance, and with humble spirit he will kneel at the feet of the priest, with both knees bent and without weapons, if he was carrying them. [One] will confess with serious countenance and facing towards a side of the confessor, especially in the case of a woman, who shall also wear a veil, while men will confess bare-headed.6

While the mechanics of confession reflected the medieval liturgical rules, special provisions regarded men and women, contemplating, for example, the deposition of arms, which were invariably worn by all Japanese men.

A visible bodily attitude of repentance was considered crucial in showing true contrition. In Europe, an important external sign of such humility was the fact that men approached the priest with their heads uncovered. Moreover, people who approached confession had to wear modestly, according to the sumptuary laws approved by Church and state, and instructions for confessors specified that the clothing of the penitent offered a preliminary assessment of his or her disposition.67 Unlike in Europe, however, in China it was normally considered impolite to speak to a superior, including the gods, without wearing a hat.68 For this reason, missionaries allowed men to wear caps during mass, against the European custom, and wore themselves a special bonnet, the jijin 祭巾, designed for the celebration of the mass.69 How-

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54 *Dizui zhenggui lue*, f. 26a (WSBR, vol. 3, p. 1247). Aleni suggested ten meditations about sin, death, and the impermanence of life, see *Dizui zhenggui*, j. 2, ff. 10a-12a (*CCT ARSI*, vol. 4, pp. 437-441). For two different versions of the Act of Contrition, see Appendix 2 of this essay; cf. note 55.

55 Brunner 1964, pp. 56-57 and 224-225 [Chinese text 314]; 77-80 and 260-261 [335], 262 [335-336].


68 For a discussion of the matter, see the manuscript "Apud Sinas in signum reverentiae tegendum esse caput" ("in China it is a sign of respect to cover one's head"), Gama 1668. See also Pimentel, "Brief Account" (1670s), in Wills 1984, p. 203: "... this people [i.e., the Chinese] consider the uncovering of the head a very boorish and discourteous act."

69 See Margiotti 1958, pp. 356-359, "Cappello in chiesa," and especially p. 356, note 113, quoting a letter of Greslon to Gama, June 22, 1668, Archivo Historico Nacional, Madrid, Jes. 270, int. 12, pp. 359-64: "It is decided in the old orders of the Visitors that the Christians of this mission, when engaging in the sacraments not
ever, at the time of confession, all men still had to take off their hats, while women had to wear a veil, like in Europe. The taking off of the hat was generally interpreted in China as a discourteous act, but on the other hand it could also imply utmost humility in front of an official with judicial authority. The act of kneeling was obviously also somewhat degrading, although it was possibly more accepted in China than in Europe, given the usual custom to kneel and even to kowtow to elders and government officials. Still, some literati must have felt a sense of discomfort in humiliating themselves in front of a foreign priest. Zhang Geng, in his essay on confession, had to confute the objections of those who felt that baring one’s head and kneeling in confession was shameful:

Some say that to kneel and confess in front of a priest without wearing one’s cap and bare-headed is like being subjected to an injustice. Ridiculous! When common people take the initiative to go and present a denunciation [to officials], they go bare-headed and kowtowing in a lamenting way, and it is obligatory to go in this way. Capped gentry have standing, and yet when they go to an official to receive retribution for their crimes, they do the same. Thus, asking for forgiveness without wearing a hat, while fearfully reporting to an official, does not mean that one is being subjected to an injustice. How could it be shameful to go bare-headed in

only of confession, but also of communion, remain bare-headed, as it was deemed that this was a sign of higher respect, reverence and humility ... until now the Christians, not only in Beijing, who can serve as model in this matter, but also in all the other communities, excluding the community of Fr. Antonio de Gouvea in Fujian and that of Fr. Trigault in Jiangzhou, ... have always taken communion and served mass bare-headed. In spite of Greslon’s position in favour of taking the hat off to receive the Eucharist and to serve mass, however, most missionaries were of the opposite opinion, and the usage of wearing the hat in church was tolerated in most missions. It appears, at any rate, that the hat was always taken off during confession, as also confirmed in Gaia 1668, f. 151v, where he specifies that the hat is kept during rituals, except for confession (“sacra excepta ex homolosgi”). The Catholic jijiin was probably inspired by the Daoist priest’s hat, the lei jin 厲巾. It was first approved by Pope Paul V in his brief Romaniae Sedis Antistites of 1615 and abolished in 1924; see Bontinck 1962, pp. 387-88.

The issue must have been of great importance especially for Chinese degree-holders, whose gowns and caps were a significant marker of status and of legal privilege; on judicial procedure towards the gentry in the Qing, see Ch’u 1962, p. 174. Philippe Couplet observed in the 1680s that it was customary “among the Chinese to cover the head as a sign of reverence during the sacred ceremonies, except when going to confession, when they [instead] go bare-headed, like they do when, guilty of a crime, they appear in front of the magistrates.” See Gatta 1998, p. 86, italics mine.

front of the substitute judge, the priest, who has been appointed by order of the lofty Lord?71

Zhang’s comparison of the encounter priest–penitent with the interaction between Chinese subjects and gentry with their officials was in keeping with his stern view of the “tribunal” of penance, and of the priest as a judge, and contrasted with the more benign view of the confessor as a doctor presented by Aleni.72 Zhang again underscored the negative role of shame in the encounter, something that had been often remarked as an obstacle to confession in Europe too. For that reason, manuals prescribed that eye contact between confessor and penitent had to be avoided (thus the penitent knelt on a side of the chair). The avoidance of eye contact was prescribed both to diminish the sense of shame of the penitent in front of the priest, and to prevent any sexual innuendo, in the case of female penitents. For those same reasons, priests were instructed to keep a very calm demeanour, without showing with bodily gestures or their voice any reaction to the revelations of the penitent.

According to common rules, the rite had to be performed in an open spot of the church. We do know, however, that confessors in Europe also used to hear confession through grilles in the walls of churches and monasteries. Confession in private quarters (such as in the cells of monastery, or private houses) was discouraged, although prohibitions against it suggests that it did happen. Medieval legislation insisted that confession in private homes could be allowed only in case of serious illness, and that the door of the bedrooms of women must be open at all times. The public celebration of the ritual was both linked to the early-medieval conception of the sacrament, conceived as a form of public penance, and to concerns for sexual scandals.73

After the Council of Trent, growing concerns on the matter of the improper location of confession favoured the invention of one of the most common furnishing found in European Catholic churches since the Counter-Reformation period, the confessionnal.74 What later often took the form of a

71 Zhang Geng, Tianzhu qinli lingxi gaolie er yao gui zhi li, f. 3a.
72 In fact, both metaphors were present in the discourse on confession in Europe; see e.g., the introduction in Segneri’s Il confessore istruito. Thus, the “judicial” aspect apparent in the physical encounter between priest and penitent as described by Zhang was in fact already strongly present in the European tradition as well.
73 This summary derives from De Boer 2001, pp. 91-95.
74 Starting in the 1560s, diocesan authorities in Italy expressed growing concern for the practice by members of religious orders to confess in monasteries. Thus, in 1575, Pope Gregory XIII issued an order to the mendicant orders and the Jesuits to “stamp out the abuse of hearing confessions from within the monastery provided with grilles through which [the confessors] hear the penitents” (De Boer 2001, p. 96). Such con-
closed “box,” in the early modern period remained mainly an open contraption designed to “minimize the risk of transgression and scandal” in the confession of female penitents, and, more in general “to separate confessor and penitent, while providing a public setting for the sacrament.” This church furnishing, however, took a long time to become ubiquitous everywhere in the Catholic world. In East Asia, the confessional was sporadically used. According to Cerqueira’s *Manuale*, as we have seen, the separation between the female penitent and the confessor was simply a veil over the head. Nevertheless, already around the time of publication of the *Manuale*, some instructions for the Japan mission by the Visitor Pasio prescribed that

in order to keep proper decency, and avoid occasions of rumour and scandal, in all churches, including those in villages, confessionals with grilles be made ... When travelling in villages where there is no church, [priests] should bring along a chair and a tablet with a grille that can be pulled up and lowered down, to be placed between [the priest] and the penitent.76

This portable confessional apparently was never used in China, where other means were suggested. When by 1629 the Jesuit Visitor André Palmeiro (1569–1635) issued some “Ordinances” for the Chinese Vice-Province, he offered some specific instructions on the separation between confessor and penitent, as well as on the location of confession:

> When confessing, be it either in the church or, in the case of women, in their houses, it is unnecessary to use the surplice, but in some cases the use of it in administering this sacrament is not prohibited; and, whenever possible, between the priest and the penitent there should be a net made of bamboo, or a screen, instead of the grid of a confessional.77

From this rule, we see that a certain liturgical informality was allowed while traveling (the surplice, a large-sleeved tunic of half-length, made of fine linen or cotton, and worn by clergy in the administration of sacraments, could be dispensed with, while the stole must have always been worn), and that a bamboo net or a folding screen were deemed sufficient to separate priest and penitent. Moreover, it appears that women were usually confessed in their own homes. That fixed confessionals did not make their appearance in China is confirmed by the 1664 missionary conference of Canton, which also prescribed only a simple separation, such as a veil or something similar, a measure which was particularly thought for women.78 The continued use of a simple “confessional chair” is confirmed by the Dominican linguist Varo, who translated “confesionario” as *jiezuizuo* 解罪座 (seat to absolve from sins) or *tingrenzizu* 聽人罪座 (seat to listen people’s sins) in his *Vocabulario de la lengua Mandarinita*.79 Also in eighteenth-century Sichuan confessionals were never used, but rather substituted by a square screen of bamboo, with a cotton veil at the centre to allow the conversation to flow, especially for the confession of women.80 Qing judicial materials refer to confession (*jiezuizuo* 解罪) as a process happening “inside a dark room, without separation between men and women, where they communicate secret words in private to each other.”81 Yet, confessional boxes may have existed in the larger and permanent churches such as those found in Beijing. Buglio in the *Siduo dianyao* (1670s), for example, refers to confession in a *shenting* 神廳, that could be, however, either a confessional box, or a small chapel.82

Regulations and anecdotal materials indeed suggest that the location and practice of confession for men and women varied. While men could easily be confessed in churches or other public spaces, women could initially only be confessed in their homes, and later on in special “segregated” chapels. A 1625 testimony by Francesco Sambiasi S.J. (1582–1649) regarding

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75 De Boer 2001, p. 85. The concept of the confessional first appeared in the 1570s in Northern Italy, and its form was officially sanctioned by the Archdiocese of Milan, Carlo Borromeo, in his diocesan handbook *Instructions for Church Fabrics and Furnishings* (1577). The Borromean confessional is synthetically described by De Boer (p. 91) as “a wooden structure consisting of a chair (the confessor’s seat) and a kneeling bench (for the penitent) mounted against one of its sides. Vertical panels enclosed the seat from behind and on two sides, while leaving it open at the front. The whole structure sat on a large, low base, and was topped by a roof. ... [The] panel separating the seat and the bench ... had a small window closed off by a metal sheet with tiny holes and covered on the inside with a piece of cloth, ... the grille.”


77 Palmeiro 1629, no. 9.


81 See excerpt of a memorial by Governor-general of Min-Zhe Gioro Mambo 蒙保 and Governor of Fujian Huan Guocai 黃國才, dated July 2, 1723 (Yongzheng 1/6/1), in BAV, *Borgia Cinese* 316 (5).

82 See *Siduo dianyao*, j. 1, ff. 51a and 52a.
Jiangnan gives us an idea of the Jesuit practice of confession of women in private homes:

As to the way to administer the sacrament [to women], I will only mention what we [Jesuits] used to do in Jianging, where we had no church. In the house of Ignatius Sun [i.e., Sun Yuanhua 孫元化 (1581-1632)], whose family was completely Christian, and where they led a saintly life worthy of a monastery, the main hall was the place reserved for the confession of women. There, between the priest and the women, standing up like a wall, was placed a large and thick mat, which did not allow seeing anything on the other side. And in the room stood also the butler of Ignatius Sun, a grave old man, and a Christian of great virtue.

Since there was such a guard, who was used everywhere with great strictness, trust towards the Fathers was so firm that several men, even among the idolaters, whose Christian wives were sick in bed, would ask the Fathers to come and confess the [women], something the latter often requested. And the [idolaters] were surprised that the Fathers, even in the case of moribund [women], would hear their words only at the presence of their husbands, and from afar. [The women, moreover], would conclude their confessions speedily, never taking more time than necessary, having being well instructed through existing excellent books to expose [in confession] only their bare sins. 83

This was not only the experience in Jesuit missions, but also later on in the communities evangelized by other religious orders. The Dominicans, in fact developed an especially active ministry towards women. In the early years of the Dominican mission of Fuan in north-eastern Fujian (1630s–1640s), we learn that “the husbands themselves brought the priests to their own homes in order for them to teach, baptize and confess their wives.” 84 Later on, the ritual was performed in churches, as Victorio Riccio O.P. (1621–1685) observed in the late 1660s: “confession ... is done publicly, and often with a division between the confessor and the female penitent, or in front of their husbands.” 85

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83 This is the summary of a letter from the China missionary Sambiasi, as found in Bartoli 1825, Book 4, pp. 53-54, “Gran circospezione usata da’ Padri nel confessar le donne Cinesi.”


85 Riccio 1667, f. 68r.

The Ritual Sequence

Let us now concentrate on the ritual sequence following the kneeling of the penitent. First, the penitent had to make the sign of the cross. In China, Christians were taught to make the double sign of the cross according to the Iberian custom: tracing three small crosses on the forehead, mouth and chest with the right thumb, then a large sign of the cross on the forehead and chest with the right hand, and finally joining the hands in front of the chest, while pronouncing the formula in a mix of Chinese and sinicized Latin terms for the three persons of the Trinity. This way of making the sign of the cross opened also all prayers, and was commonly used in China until the 1950s. 86 At this point, the priest was supposed, in case he did not know the penitent, to ask before starting the ritual about his/her social standing (job and marital condition), so as to assess whether he/she could receive confession (if a man was living with a woman without being married, or had concubines, for example, he was not allowed to confess). 87

Then the penitent had to recite the first part of the Confiteor (Jiezui [shijing 解罪[時]經] in Chinese (the Manuale indeed says vulgari sermonæ), up to the point where the individual declares that sins are his own responsibility for three times (“mea culpa, mea culpa, mea maxima culpa”; in Chinese: wo zui, wo zui, gao wo dazui 我罪，我罪，告我大罪), while beating his chest (fuxin 拍心) each time. This prayer, unlike the preparatory prayers privately recited before and after confession, was truly part of the rite, since it had to be recited in front of the priest. It was included in a large number of publications, and learnt by heart by all Christians. 88

Confession proper followed this recitation of the first part of Confiteor. The beginning was invariably a declaration of how much time had elapsed...
either since baptism or one’s last confession, whether satisfaction for previous sins had been accomplished, and whether unconfessed sins had surfaced. Then the new confession could begin. Ideally, a good penitent should have already done a thorough examination of conscience, and mentally gone through the list of the Ten Commandments and the Seven Capital Sins in order to construct a map of committed sins according to species, number and circumstances. The confessor was always advised in prescriptive texts to listen without reacting to the confession, mentally noting the types and circumstances of sins revealed, as suggested in Siduo diyanyao. However, in case it was needed and – at least by the books – only if the penitent asked for it, the priest could further interrogate (jie 詢) the penitent with appropriate questions, which could be similarly organized according to the Commandments. An example of such questions is contained in the romanized confessionarium by Brollo, as well as in the Fujian “dialogue on confession” discussed earlier. If the priest felt that the penitent was distorting the presentation of his sinful actions, questioning could be further refined according to the “seven circumstances of sin”: who committed the sin, what sin, in what place, if someone assisted in committing the sin, the reason for sinning, the way, and the timing.

After finishing their confession, penitents had to admonish themselves (ziyan 自言) about their sinful state and set their mind on moral reform. Aleni presented this final process in two slightly different versions in his Dizui zhenggui and Dizui zhenggui lüe. Interestingly, in Dizui zhenggui lüe the passage carried an initial sentence missing in Dizui zhenggui, as follows:

... after I became Christian I lied, gossiped and entertained evil thoughts [i.e., venial sins], did not confess completely my sins in previous confessions, did not conduct a detailed examination of conscience, and did not elicit full contrition in myself.”

These were possibly common problems of most penitents, who approached confessions without proper preparation. The penitent had then to express a firm resolution to avoid sin in the future, and formally petitioned the priest “to impart absolution on behalf of the Lord.”

90 See Dizui zhenggui, j. 3, f. 23a (CCT ARSI, vol. 4, p. 521); Dizui zhenggui lüe, f. 26b (WXSB, vol. 3, p. 1248); see also Brollo’s list, in Varo 2000, p. 217.
91 See above, note 52, and Varo 2000, pp. 214-253 (Brollo’s text); cf. Dizui zhenggui, j. 3, f. 23a (CCT ARSI, vol. 4, p. 521); see also below, pp. 199-239.
92 Siduo diyanyao, j. 1, f. 52b.
93 The prayer is in Dizui zhenggui, j. 3, f. 23b (CCT ARSI, vol. 4, p. 522); and Dizui zhenggui lüe, ff. 28a-b (WXSB, vol. 3, p. 1251-1252).

Confession and Salvation

Then the penitents had to prostrate to the ground (fudi 伏地) and complete the recitation of the Confiteor. After this recitation, the priest was expected to impart some instructions to the penitent on proper satisfaction, a topic I discuss in next section. Finally the priestly absolution (jie shi 解释) concluded the rite. The formula was whispered in Latin, as the Chinese translation done by Buglio in the 1670s was never employed. There were two possible formulas of absolution (shizui jing 释罪經), a longer one for normal conditions, and a shortened one in cases of emergency, such as confession in articulo mortis. The essential part of the formula in both cases was the same: “Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis, in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen” (I absolve you from your sins, in the name of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen). After receiving absolution Aleni reminded his readers that they should “not forget to wear the cap on the head again and thank [the priest] with a bow; then [they could] retire.” The penitent had to keep a meditative demeanour, thank God through prayer, and avoid talking with others about “base matters” or revealing the penance imposed by the priest (an action deemed arrogant and boastful). Vernacular texts, like the dialogue from Fujian mentioned above, repeated the same general instructions for confession in an even simpler language.

Satisfaction

Satisfaction comprised three main categories of meritorious actions (gong 功): prayer, mortification, and acts of charity. The latter also included restitution to wronged people, through payment of what was due to them, or restoration of their tarnished name. Prescriptive texts considered prayer useful to counter sins of pride; mortification to tame sins of the flesh; and charity to counter sins of avarice. Among literate faithful, prayerful satisfaction was sustained also by the reading of spiritual writings. François de Rougemont deemed that such readings, together with daily examination of conscience, were the best means to maintain in the faith isolated individuals or commu-

90 For Buglio’s Chinese translation of the formulas, see Siduo diyanyao, j. 1, ff. 56b-57a and Shengshi tidian in CCT ARSI, vol. 11, pp. 442-443: 我釋爾，與爾諸罪。因 羅德肋。及貴於及斯彼利多三多，名者，亞孟。
91 Dizui zhenggui, j. 3, f. 24a (CCT ARSI, vol. 4, p. 523).
92 See Shengjiao yaojin de daoli, p. 3b: “You must take off your hat, and kneel down, make the sign of the cross, recite the first half of the Confiteor, then you have to declare your sins following the order of the Commandments. [etc.]”
93 Dizui zhenggui lüe, ff. 29a-30a (WXSB, vol. 3, pp. 1253-1255), and Dizui zhenggui, j. 4., ff.1a-a (CCT ARSI, vol. 4, pp. 525-531).
nities who could only rarely see a priest for confession and mass. On the other hand, in the context of rural society, where social relations were so powerfully linked to the concept of “face,” and poverty made neighbours dependant upon each other, the restitution of stolen goods (even of a stray chicken) or the reparation of one’s good name may have been equally important actions. In the rural context of Sichuan, for example, satisfactions were rather practical and fell within the three general categories mentioned above as follows: (1) intensive recitation of prayers, pious readings, examinations of conscience; (2) abstention from drinking wine, from smoking tobacco, and from attending operas; abstinance from forbidden foods more frequently than prescribed by the Church calendar; (3) alms for the poor, giving hospitality to travellers, visits to the sick and the prisoners, teaching of catechism to children and pagans.

Special Forms of Satisfaction: Public Penance

Although by the early modern period, confession and satisfaction were mainly an individualized business, occasionally public acts of confession and penance were still enacted. Members of various religious orders in Europe, including the friars and the Jesuits, were famous for launching campaigns of public penance, including processions and mass ritual confession, to pacify communities split by feuds. In such cases, satisfaction often preceded, rather than followed, sacramental confession, as an act demonstrating that egregious sinners had truly repented and made amends in front of the whole community.

These displays of public satisfaction also happened in China. The Jesuits, in fact, had a clear policy on this matter. Provision no. 21 of Visitor Palmeiro’s “Ordinances” for the China mission (1629) states: “When some Christian gives notable scandal, it is good to convince him to give some satisfaction, according to the judgement of the Father Superior, by asking for forgiveness in public to the community when they are meeting in the church, or in other similar ways.” In such cases, a general confession (i.e., an examination covering all the life of the penitent) was often required at the outset. Only after a public penance had been taken in front of the community, the penitent could ask for personal auricular confession, and be reintegrated in the community through absolution. In Quanzhou (Fujian), for example, a Christian who had been giving scandal to the community for eight years through his unspecified “perverse example” had been forbidden from entering the local church. However, when he decided to repent and rejoin the church, he was obliged to engage in a series of public penitential practices. On a Friday during one of the major liturgical times of the year (sexta feira mayor), possibly during Lent or Holy Week, he flagged himself in front of a gathering of the local Christians, asking forgiveness to all. Then he continued with twelve days of fasting and physical disciplining, reciting the rosary, and offering oil for the lamp of Mary’s altar in the local chapel. Once he reached a sufficient state of repentance and contrition, he confessed with a priest, not without first flagellating himself inside the church, and asking once more forgiveness in public. Such display of devotion led another local Christian man, who “did not believe in the sacrament of penance,” to ask instruction from the local Father, do a general confession, and become aware of his doctrinal error.

A similar case happened in Hangzhou around 1678, as reported in a letter by Prospero Intorcetta (1625–1696). A man, who had committed some nefarious sin and offended the Christians of the city, became repentant. He then went to the church in front of the altar where the priest had just celebrated the mass, took off his shirt and started flagellating himself on the back, asking for forgiveness. The spectacle of his bleeding flesh moved to tears all the people present, who felt pity for him. But he would have continued to beat himself, if some faithful in tears had not run to Intorcetta, who was in a nearby meeting place to hear confessions, and had not called him to the church. The missionary then stop the man’s flagellations, “consoled him with sweet words, and the man asked for a confession (sacra exomologesis). After giving him absolution, the Father left him reassured and full of spiritual solace.” This time, the Christian had decided to engage in a display of public penance on his own accord, possibly out of spiritual anguish and psychological pressure from fellow Christians, rather than because of the imposition from the local priest of some form of satisfaction for his sins.

Palmeiro’s provision on public penance, apparently, applied also to women. In the locale of Shanjian (?) in Fujian in 1643, for example, two young Christian married women, after baptism, recanted. But when an itine-

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98 See, for example, a reference to the petty sin of stealing and eating a chicken which strayed from a neighbour’s courtyard. The priest asked the penitent to return the monetary value of the animal. Other similar petty sins were cheating on weight while selling merchandise, or giving back adulterated silver, and the like; see Shengjiao yaojin de dao, BnF, Chinois 7046-1, f. 15a; see below, pp. 226-229.
100 Palmeiro 1629, f. 25v.
102 The letter is summarized in Dunin-Szpot 1710, f. 289r.
rant missionary came by, they repented and asked for mercy. The Father showed himself very strict: they first had to fast for several days, and engage in corporal penances. Then, accompanied by a crowd of Christians, they went to the church, and, prostrated on the ground, they confessed their faults and asked for forgiveness. After receiving absolution from the priest, they offered two frontals to decorate the church, a tangible and public sign of their repentance.103

Public penance remained always a possibility in the China mission, even during the period of suppression. The M.E.P. missionaries in Sichuan, for example, imposed during the eighteenth century rather serious public penances for crimes such as concubinage, usury, apostasy, theft, use of magic, witchcraft, and money forgery. The penances consisted in expulsion from church, attendance of the gates of the chapels rather than inside, flagellation in front of the priest and the catechists, prohibition to take communion, repeated public confessions, and communal prayer asking forgiveness for the penitent. Mgr. Jean Basset (1662–1707) condemned a money forgerer, Luc Khou (Guo), to stand at the gate of the church every Sunday for several months, to be flagellated and to publicly confess his sins, while a catechist, Simon Lan, had to expiate in a similar way for embezzling the funds of the mission. In 1741, Mgr. Joachim Enjobert de Martilis (1706–1755) imposed a sort of incomunicado to an apostate in Chengdu, and paid for him to stay in an inn, away from religious services and the community, while the local Chinese priest André Ly (1692/1693–1774) obliged apostates to abstain from wine and to fast for several days a week for long stretches of time. Mgr. François Pottier (1726–1792) would bar these individuals from sacramental confinement for an entire year, and from the community of faithful for six months. Some of the local M.E.P. missionaries became in fact so notorious for their severity, that Propaganda Fide in an instruction dated April 29, 1784 felt compelled to oblige confessors to give absolution to penitents who had done their penances, something the Jansenist-leaning M.E.P. priests, both French and Chinese, were reluctant to do. The warning had to be repeated in 1796, when Mgr. Jean-Didier de Saint-Martin (1743–1801), Vicar Apostolic of Sichuan, and a member of M.E.P. himself, censored the rigorist attitude of his priests in China and Tonkin, and found that excessive public penances and refusal of sacramental confession could be quite harmful to the community and counterproductive for individuals, simply pushing notorious sinners into complacency.104


104 Information here is taken from Launay 1920, vol. 2, p. 327; from a 1796 letter of Pottier to the Lazarist Aubin on the problem of confession, ibid., pp. 33-35; and from Launay 1924, pp. 34-35.

PART 2
The Importance of Confession in Christian Life:
Sacrament, Community, and Fear of Damnation

So far, we have mostly seen how the sacrament of penance was presented in prescriptive texts to different social groups, and how the ritual sequence was generally practiced. In this second part, using a number of Chinese and Western sources, including reports on the daily religious life of the Christian communities penned by missionaries, I will explore the practice of confession as experienced in social and religious life.105 In particular, I will focus on two dimensions of the sacrament of penance: the ritual as a community-building device, and the ritual as a response to psychological and spiritual needs in individual experience. Finally, I will also briefly discuss another important dimension of the ritual, i.e., its disciplinary nature.

Confession was an important ritual that rhythm the life of the Christian community like no other ritual, mass included. Without confession, one could not fully participate in the eucharistic banquet, as dramatically highlighted by the practice in eighteenth-century Sichuan to allow to approach the altar and take communion only to those faithful who could show a written patent issued by the confessor attesting proper confession.106 While communion at mass was not always distributed to all, confession was a ritual that all baptized could partake of. We know that women were rather assiduous in asking for confession, more than men, and although initially the Jesuits reserved sacraments to adults, with the rooting of local communities also children became the target of early Christian initiation by all orders and congregations.107 Confession was the first sacrament, after baptism, to be offered to neophytes. The acts of the Synod of Sichuan of 1803, reflecting the eighteenth-century practice in that province, for example, prescribed that

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105 I chose to also employ a number of miraculous and pious stories from Literae Anmae and similar sources, since they are not merely a reflection of hagiographic conventions, but also a mirror of individual experiences in the local Christian religious life of China. Similar stories, in fact, can also be found in rare sources authored by Chinese Christians in their own language, as has been shown by Erik Zürcher (Zürcher 1985).

106 See Sacra Congregatio 1907, vol. 1, p. 407, no. 683, for a reference to a condemnation by the Particular Congregation for China of Propaganda Fide, dated January 14, 1806, against the current praxis of confessors in Sichuan to issue a special permit with a seal (martula sigillum signata), testifying confession and thus permitting to receive the eucharist during mass the following day.

107 The lower male attendance of confession is suggested by a Dominican missionary in eighteenth-century Fujian: “more than half of the [Christian] men reserved ... confession for the hour of their death”; Royo 1733, p. 335.
children be initiated to the sacrament of penance at the age of seven or eight, although it was probably common for priests to delay the rite to the age of nine or ten, when the children had received better religious instruction.  

Confession was an individualized ritual, and yet it was public insofar as it was celebrated under the eyes of all, albeit at a distance. Visibly, and yet secretly, the penitent was showing to all that he or she had reconciled with God. At times, confession took a communal dimension. As the cases of public penances I discussed above show, confession could be denied to egregious sinners whom the community and the priest recognized as such, until they had engaged in public acts of penance. This shows how the sacrament of penance was one of the building blocks of community life, which affirmed belonging and reconciliation. Moreover, ritual confession, together with the mass, confirmed belonging to a Christian community not only in the eyes of all members, but also in the eyes of the figures of authority, the priest and the lay leaders.

Existing statistics seem to confirm that confession was the one ritual that the vast majority of Christians experienced at least once a year, if not more. It represented a rare moment of personal encounter with the priest, and together with the mass, it forced all to convene from different villages to a designated church or home for what was a special moment of reconciliation and feast.

Confession and the Gathering of the Community

The periodic obligation to confess derived from a central idea in the theology of the sacrament of penance: confession with a priest was considered necessary for the forgiveness of grave sins (also called mortal sins; for light, or “venial,” sins, other forms of devotion and mortification could be sufficient). Without priestly absolution of mortal sins, damnation was unavoidable. The Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 had mandated as compulsory a yearly confession, usually before Easter (therefore also called “Easter precept”), and in spite of increasing advocacy of frequent confession in post-Tridentine Catholicism, most Christians still confessed only once a year.

In China, frequent confession was even more difficult than in Europe, due to two main practical obstacles: insufficient number of priests and large areas to be covered by so few ministers. The sacrament was thus mainly offered in conjunction with the celebration of important feasts of the liturgical year. In rural villages without resident priests, however, itinerant rural missions were conducted at different times of the year, and not necessarily during the liturgical seasons of Lent and Advent. In ordinary times, active communities could avail themselves of other devotional forms to foster a sense of belonging (e.g., lay-led common prayer, catechetical instruction and charitable activities), but during annual priestly visits and the main liturgical seasons, the sacraments officiated by the priest represented the core of common activities.

Confession and communion in the larger Jesuit missions during the seventeenth century were mostly administered during major solemnities, as observed in the 1636 Littera Annuia of Beijing:

During feasts [Christian men] attend church, and during solemnities they confess and take communion in great numbers. ... A similar devotion can be seen among women, who meet in special oratories, where we celebrate mass for them, preach and hear confessions.

Easter, the major feast of the year, saw large number of confessions. Confession during the Holy Week was sometimes accompanied by display of images of the Passion, by special preaching, and by corporal penances. During Holy Week in mid-1630s Jiangnan, for example, not only men, but also women would “meet, hear mass, confess very frequently ... and some of these women were so devout in their penances, that the Father had to control their fervour, taking away from them the instruments of penance they use, that are so fierce as to make one scared.” Similar devotion could be seen among the members of the women confraternity of Fuzhou in the early 1640s, who would meet during Holy Week in the house of some Christian in three different quarters of the city, doing their confession, attending mass and listening to sermons. Christmas was another important season for massive numbers of confessions, and on Christmas Eve urban churches were filled with Christians awaiting their turn to confess.

In the region of Shanghai, where confraternities started to be established in the 1630s, also the feasts of the patrons of the confraternity, and in particular of Our Lady, were an occasion for the male members to congregate and confess in a chapel, usually once a month. Women, on the other hand, would initially meet in private houses to assist to the mass and do their confession in days they

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108 See Taurinus 1891, p. 44.
109 A clear indicator confirming the centrality of the sacrament of penance in the community’s religious life is given by statistical data found scattered in missionary sources; for a preliminary tabulation of some data, see Appendix 5.
113 Reference to a crowd of penitents on Christmas Eve in the Fuzhou church in 1645, in Gouvea 1998, p. 244; for similar activities in 1670s Changshu, see Golvers 1999 p. 410.
chose together with their spiritual directors ("determinão dia en que se ajun- tão todas em huma caza").\textsuperscript{114} Also in Fuzhou, devout men would confess once a month, and take communion on the main feasts within the activities of a Confraternity of Our Lady.\textsuperscript{115}

In more isolated communities, intense rounds of confessions and celebration of the Eucharist happened during the occasional trips of itinerant missionaries, and took place whenever the priest reached a locale.\textsuperscript{116} For example, Girolamo de Gravina S.J. (1603–1662) toured the Christian communities of the region of Changshu for the duration of a month in 1643. He was so overwhelmed by the number of Christians who wanted to confess “day and night” that he had no time to recite his own prayers. In his words, “the fervour of these Christians was such that they did not let me breathe!” During that visit, “one thousand four hundred people did a [general] confession of all their life.”\textsuperscript{117} Even during periods of suppression of Christianity, and in rural contexts, such as in the Dominican mission of Fujian in the 1740s, priests would frequently visit secret churches to administer confession and celebrate mass “during major feasts in the larger villages, and during minor feasts in the smaller hamlets.”\textsuperscript{118} In the same period, Jesuit missionaries in Huguang (Central China) travelled on boats to visit their communities of poor converts, disembarking and exercising their ministry mainly at night, whenever they reached a locale. In these situations, confessions were usually heard in some house between 11 pm and 3 am, followed at 4 am by mass and communion. Christian men would travel up to twenty-five miles to be confessed. Occasionally, if their boat was recognized by their converts, missionaries were asked to hear confessions directly on the vessel along the rivers.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{114} Gouvea 1998, p. 74.
\textsuperscript{115} Gouvea 1998, pp. 103 and 217.
\textsuperscript{116} For mentions of visits to various communities and rounds of confessions in Fujian, see for example Gouvea 1998, pp. 153 (Shaowu, 1643) and 158 (Lianjiang, 1643). Girolamo de Gravina arranged in the late 1640s for Christians living in smaller villages of Jiangnan to confess once or twice a year, during a day of their choice free from work in the two periods of Advent or Lent. By dividing them in confraternities, and by selecting free days, “the job becomes easier and [their] conscience is soothed”; see Gouvea 1998, p. 371. In the mid-nineteenth century the Dominican Gentili observed that the so-called Easter precept (confession and communion once a year) was calculated in a given village “from one year to the next, whatever the time [of the missionary’s visit] happens to be.” See Gentili 1888, vol. 3, p. 151.
\textsuperscript{117} Gouvea 1998, p. 128.
\textsuperscript{119} See Krali 1964, pp. 19 and 22.

But such fervor was not universal. In the mid-eighteenth century, the Chinese priest André Ly, active in Sichuan, lamented that local Christians, men and women, had grown into a “bad habit”: even when they lived near the church, they would wait for the coming of a feast and the evening hours to confess, rather than show up early in the morning.

They all come en masse, and overwhelm the confessor until the middle of the night. It is not rare that many would come without examination, without confession, and as a consequence, they leave [after confession] without developing increased love for God and fear of sin. What is then left of the pious advice of the confessor and of sacramental penance?\textsuperscript{120}

Obviously, Father Ly and his faithful had a different conception of confession: the first, educated by the French missionaries of M.E.P., wanted to use confession as a tool of spiritual direction, while the faithful may have been more interested in absolusion as a form of ritual cleansing, which unburdened their conscience, and opened the way to heaven. Also Jesuit priests lamented that seasonal massive bouts of confession were an enormous burden for them, did not allow them to impart good spiritual direction, and also may have had little effect on the life of Christians. In his spiritual diary, François de Rougemont (1670s) chastised himself for being impatient, hasty, or too harsh during a six-day intense period of confessions and baptisms that obviously tried his mental and physical state.\textsuperscript{121}

Missionaries might have found more rewarding to confess in an intimate setting Christian literati and officials, and their relatives. In the case of particularly important individuals, in fact, missionaries would make special trips to confess them and their families, and to celebrate mass. For example, one of the resident Jesuits in Nanjing in the mid 1630s (possibly Francesco Sambiasi) travelled to a locale four days away from his Nanjing residence “to confess and console” a Christian official.\textsuperscript{122} In another case, an important military official (zongbing 總兵) and jinshi, called Lucas Chen, invited Sambiasi to visit him and his Christian family near Changshu (Jiangnan) in 1643. During the visit everybody, including the women, “who were as devote as European ladies ... confessed and took communion many times.”\textsuperscript{123}

Such special care obviously might have abated during the latter part of the seventeenth century, when the number of elite Christians dwindled, although Court Jesuits in the early eighteenth century described with pride the piety of the Manchu noblemen of the Sunu clan, including a large number of

\textsuperscript{120} See Launay 1924, p. 267; cf. Olichon 1933, pp. 298-299.
\textsuperscript{121} See Golvers 1999, pp. 409-410.
\textsuperscript{122} Gouvea 1998, p. 70.
\textsuperscript{123} Gouvea 1998, p. 127.
women, and their attendance of confession and the eucharist in special chapels in their palaces.\textsuperscript{124}

No matter whether they were divided in groups of men and women within the same church building, separated in oratories for men and women belonging to confraternities, in the private chapels of officials, nobles and literati, or in ordinary homes, secret chapels and boats during periods of persecution, Christians continued to cherish confession with a priest as one of the ritual moments defining their religious identity.

**Women's Devotion to the Sacrament and Social Pressure**

A revealing proof of the importance of confession is offered by the attitude of women to the sacrament. Men had to surmount their own personal sense of shame to approach the confessor and reveal their weakness and sinfulness, as Zhang Geng and Zhu Zongyuan had noted. But women had to do more than that. They had also to infringe upon the rules of propriety, which demanded a strict segregation of the sexes, and to overcome the social prejudice against the clergy current among the vast majority of literati.\textsuperscript{125}

In late imperial China, there was a widespread perception among men that female piety was associated with religious heterodoxy. Women frequented temples, were acolytes of monks, nuns or shamans, and sometimes formed religious sororities. All of these activities were also connected in men's minds to sexual misconduct.\textsuperscript{126} Lineage rules preserved in genealogies prescribed the seclusion of women as a way to ward off bad influences from the so-called “three muns” (Buddhist nuns, Daoist nuns, and female fortune-tellers) and six “service women” (brokers, matchmakers, sorceresses, witchers, medical women, and midwives). Moreover, such rules also prescribed visits to temples, festivals and other celebrations, as Chinese literature was replete with stories of lewd monks taking advantage of young girls in temples and during festivals.\textsuperscript{127} Imperial laws also reflected a great deal of suspicion of the clergy in sexual matters, and suggested severe punish-

\textsuperscript{124} See Witek 1993; Menegon 1996; Corsi 2004.

\textsuperscript{125} Women too, of course, had to overcome shame to confess in full their sins. An appendix to Aleni's *Dizui zhenggui lue*, ff. 31b-34b (WXS1, vol. 3, p. 1258-1264) contains an exemplary story, where a lady damned in hell lists the main categories of women's sins (obviously in the confessor's eyes): “The major kinds of sins committed by us women are 1. impure actions against the sixth commandment [= sexual sins]; 2. too much attention being paid to jewellery and appearances; 3. believing in witches (wu zhi), sorcerers (xi zhi), and occult arts; 4. omitting sins in confession out of shame or taboos.” *Dizui zhenggui lue*, f. 34a (WXS1, vol. 3, p. 1263).

\textsuperscript{126} Furth 1990, p. 197; Mann 1997, p. 191.

\textsuperscript{127} Liu 1959, pp. 94-95; Mann 1997, p. 192; Durand-Dastès 2002.

ments for sexual crimes committed by Buddhist monks or Daoist priests.\textsuperscript{128} Such prohibitions and suspicions notwithstanding, women continued to test the boundaries of permeability between the inner and outer spheres of their lives, participating in religious activities and pilgrimages outside of their homes.

The choice of the Jesuits to endorse Confucianism and literati culture, rather than Buddhism, obliged them to maintain a relatively detached attitude to women, as Philippe Couplet (1622–1694) observed in 1688:

If the Fathers who first entered in this Kingdom to preach the Gospel had continued to wear like the Bonzes, they would have had an easier task in dealing with women. Women have the freedom to talk to these Priests of the Idols, and to visit their temples to recite their prayers. But the first missionaries decided that it was more important for our religion to deal with magistrates, with literati and with family heads, rather than with those persons [i.e., women] who are more naturally disposed to piety, and who can anyway be instructed in our religious mysteries without visits and meetings, either through the reading of books, or through the intermediation of their husbands.\textsuperscript{129}

For this reason, women conducted a separate ritual life. Yet, in spite of this, women grew into a large part of the Christian community, and, as Couplet observed, the part “more naturally disposed to piety.” The Jesuits established private chapels for them, and as mentioned in the first part of this essay, would conduct confession with female penitents in special places that could be easily monitored by males of the household. This practice was later also followed by other orders.

Unlike the Jesuits, the Dominicans had a more direct approach to women. Especially in the turbulent times of the Ming-Qing transition in their mission of Fuan (Fujian), the ministry to women intensified, paradoxically also because of anti-Christian sentiments:

Due to the persecution, Christians hid Fr. Juan García for more than three years [in the 1640s] in the most secret places of their houses, which is where women usually reside. Thus [García] had to dispense with their usual customs, and had to see and deal with the [women on a daily basis]. Due to this, [women] started losing the horror they had previously experienced in seeing and dealing with the [male] priest, and they learnt about his [good] intentions through his words and manners. Thus we [Dominicans] started disregarding the ancient ceremonies [separating the sexes], and women would no more flee us. Up to this day, without our


\textsuperscript{129} Couplet 1688, p. 8.
or their awareness, this has continued to prepare the way that the Lord has chosen to make [women] grow in faith and devotion.\(^{130}\)

Local women became so defiant against patriarchical strictures, that they would not be afraid to gather in some house, where “the minister would go secretly, and there he would confess them, give them communion and teach them, without any risk of scandal.”\(^{131}\) With time the situation stabilized, and in keeping with the Jesuit example, local Christians financed the construction of two separate churches for men and for women, and the activities of Christian women, although still segregated from men, started to expand beyond the inner quarters. Women would even “travel from afar, and sleep for a few days at a time in the apartments of [other local] women due to their desire to receive instruction in the Christian doctrine.” Some started not only “following the common path of the ten commandments, but even the path to [religious] perfection [i.e., an intense religious routine].”\(^{132}\) This latter group was the first nucleus of “Christian virgins” (beatas), who would later become ubiquitous presences in the Dominican communities.

That even Christian women married to pagans would be allowed to confess and communicate, further underlines the powerful role of the sacraments in affirming their Christian identity. In a set of regulations written in 1685 for his fellow ministers, the Dominican Francisco Varo classified three kinds of Christian women married in non-Christian households within his jurisdiction in Fujian: (1) those married to “gentiles,” who received permission from the groom’s family to confess and follow other Christian obligations; (2) women who were forbidden by their families to go to church, but who secretly confessed, prayed, fasted, and received communion (they were the majority); and, more rarely, (3) women who were obliged to formally apostate.\(^{133}\) This picture confirms that in fact most women would see the priests even under the most unfavourable conditions, as the exemplary biography of a Fuan Confucian chaste widow in the Kangxi period (1662–1723), Lian Zhushi 蕭珠使, lamented in a bitter tone:

Some women neighbours [of Lian Zhushi] were misled into following the Teachings of the Western Ocean heterodoxy [which was then spreading] in our county. Lian Zhushi told them with altered countenance: “Only [I], a widow, know how to avoid shame! How can you kneel to those Ba-le

\(^{130}\) Capillas 1894 (1647), p. 72.
\(^{131}\) Riccio 1667, f. 68r.
\(^{132}\) Capillas 1894 (1647), p. 72.
\(^{133}\) Varo 1685, f. 30r.

巴勒 [Padres], in order to pray for happiness and advantages?” But she was the only one to see this and speak.\(^{134}\)

Indeed, by the early Qing communal activities of women, involving travel to receive confession and communion, were a common occurrence, as illustrated by a report about the Christian community of Guangzhou (Guangdong) administered by Franciscans in the 1670s. Here we get the picture of how confession of women was conducted within a communitarian ritual moment, as opposed to more private rituals during visits to single households:

So that one may know how much a minister must do when he goes to the churches of the women, I will here report on the manner we keep. First, the Christians or the catechists warn [the priest] that the [women] of a certain quarter desire to receive the sacraments. When receiving this notice, the minister [also] communicates the day on which he will go there to celebrate mass. All the Christian women of that quarter tell each other and get together; and some, [because they are visiting] their female relatives or because they have a need [in the city], come from places farther off. At the convened hour, they all come together in a certain house. The Father takes along an old Christian of authority to accompany him, unless the master of the house [where they meet] is already of that quality. [The priest] goes to this function only with a catechist and a sacristan, leaving at the gate as a guard the mentioned elder. This function starts with some exhortation to those who have to confess and take communion. Afterwards, pulling a veil or a semi-transparent curtain between the penitent and the priest, the minister starts confessing them. These confessions are usually many, and almost all those women, who are already Christian, receive the sacrament. We only forbid it to those who, having been recently baptized, request to receive the sacraments of confession and communion without knowing too well what they are. Once confessions are finished, we celebrate the mass, and during the mass we give communion to those women who are well disposed [to receive it].\(^{135}\)

Thus, all women in this community ritual, with few exceptions, were allowed to confess and communicate. The reassuring presence of a Chinese male chaperon, and the public setting of the ritual defused any possible suspicion of sexual misdemeanour. In the period of suppression of Christianity, on the other hand, when nightly visits and clandestine rituals in pri-

Confession as a Response to Personal Psychological and Spiritual Needs

The sources and statistics mentioned above point to the important position of confession in communitarian life. Besides being a public ritual, however, confession also had a strong personal dimension: after all, its core part was an individual encounter between priest and penitent. What were the reasons that made this ritual so crucial in the individual consciousness of Chinese Christians? In this volume Erik Zürcher explores answers to this question, by investigating texts written by late Ming Chinese literati, mainly in Fujian, and by showing that confession fit very well with their Neo-Confucian mindset of self-cultivation.

The sacrament, however, fulfilled another important psychological and spiritual need of late imperial individuals: to guarantee protection from the plots of the malignant, by cleansing one of sins (always induced by the devil’s enticement) and by offering a needed “insurance policy” for salvation in the afterlife. As students of Chinese religion know well, people felt, and still do, that the human and natural landscapes are inhabited by spiritual forces continuously at work. A rationalistic French Vicar Apostolic observed in 1793 in Sichuan, that “[t]he supernatural is not extraneous to the thoughts [of the Chinese], but they often do not distinguish if it really exists, or if it is only in their imagination.” As a matter of fact, for the vast majority of missionaries and Chinese Christians the saturation of daily life with spiritual presences was not a byproduct of the imagination, but a reality. What missionaries witnessed in China, and Christians accepted as a reality, was a world filled with diabolical manifestations, to entice people to commit sin, and to finally condemn them to eternal damnation. Small Christian communities or isolated individuals surrounded by “temples of the devil” and by daily behaviours going against the Christian commandments (concubination, infanticide, different calendrical and fasting rhythms, and so on) required powerful supernatural defensive weapons. Together with exorcism and sacraments (i.e., amulets), confession was one of the best ways to keep the devil at bay. It also assuaged anxieties for personal salvation until the next priestly visit, as people were concerned about dying without confession and often lived with spiritual anguish for their fate in the afterlife.

Fear, however, was de-emphasized in the Jesuit confessional discourse, since it was seen as the source of the inferior form of repentance, attrition. As observed at the beginning of this essay, it was Jesuit interest in moral reform through Bonaventure’s “Spiritual Ways” that had found good reception among late Ming literati, rather than “heterodox talks of paradise and hell.” In Jesuit spirituality, confession was indeed seen as yet another means of progress for the soul. The emphasis on confession in its spiritual dimension (rather than simply in its ritual or disciplinarian dimensions) was enshrined in the Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius, where we find a special form of self-examination, the so-called “general confession.” A general confession was a review, in the company of one’s confessor, of one’s entire life, not simply to receive sacramental absolution, as in regular confessions, but also to lead to a more radical improvement in one’s moral and spiritual life.

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136 This topic will be the object of a specific study in the future, based on materials from archives in Rome. Apparently, Jesuits and M.E.P. missionaries remained more restrained in their contacts with women, and exerted a tighter control on their moral life through an exacting routine of spiritual examination and physical penance. This might be a reason why so far I have been unable to find records of egregious misdemeanour among these orders. This is confirmed by studies of solicitation in Spain and New Spain in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries, based on the records of the Inquisitions of Toledo, Sevilla, and Mexico. They statistically indicate that mendicant friars, especially Franciscans, and to a lesser degree Dominicans, and secular priests, were the usual culprits of solicitation. The Jesuits guilty of this crime were fewer. See Haliczer 1996; Alejandre 1994; Sarrión Mora 1994; González Marmolejo 2002.

137 See Zürcher’s article in this volume.


139 Theories on the afterlife were a common target of accusation by Chinese officials crusading against popular Buddhism, sectarian groups, and Christianity too. During an anti-Christian campaign in the county of Fuan in the late 1750s, the Prefect of Fuming found that in the eyes of the people he called “Fuan rustics” (Fuan yumin 福安愚民), the soteriological aspect represented the main attraction of Christianity: “What tricks [Fuan] people into following [the missionaries] is their theory of afterlife, which is mysterious like an hallucination and unexpectedly can touch a nerve in the stupid folks and move the crowds. [Such theories] thus become even more attractive than those of Yang Zhu and Mozi.” See Fuan xianzhi 1866, j. 8, p. 134.
life. This shows that confession for the Jesuits was not simply a periodic ritual to cleanse sins and avoid damnation, but rather a devout practice to direct spiritual growth. In general, the Jesuits presented confession as an act of reconciliation depending on the infinite mercy of God, and less as an act guided by fear for damnation. This vision, which was already found in late medieval texts, became the leitmotiv in Jesuit writings, as it appears from the insistent use of medical metaphors, like those employed by Aleni in his Chinese texts. The confessor is compared to a good doctor healing the penitent from his or her sins. The traditional imagery of confessors as judges, potently re-affirmed by the decrees of the Council of Trent, was thus less prominent among Jesuit authors, at least in the initial period of the history of the Society. In keeping with this view, Ricci had presented in his writings the "unitive way" as the highest degree of perfection, pursued by the Jesuits themselves through their exacting spiritual practices, and had proposed it to Chinese literati.

Yet, the Jesuit had also implicitly observed that most people held "lower" motivations to avoid sin: profit (salvation) and loss (damnation). This majority needed guidance (jiao 教) to be freed from sin and be led to salvation (the purgative way). This guidance was offered by the priest through sacramental confession and other forms of spiritual direction. Among these other means, were meditation on sin and on the so-called Four Ends (Quattuor Novissima, i.e., death, judgement, heaven and hell), all elements adumbrated in Ricci's works, and important components of the so-called "purgative way." As the Jiangxi Christian literatus Xiong Shiqi 萧士琦 recognized in

plain language in 1621, laziness in matters of spiritual practices and devotions (what is known in Latin as acedia, or sloth, one of the seven capital sins) was among the chief problems in communities without a resident priest. Xiong was quick to draw an analogy between the way the examination system rewarded the diligent students, and the way God, the head examiner (zhukao 主考), rewarded spiritual discipline with paradise, while punishing with hell the lazy people who fall into sins.

To maintain a good degree of spiritual and devotional "tension," therefore, China missionaries, including the Jesuits, had to use "the promise of gain" and "the fear for loss," as many religious orders (Jesuits, Capuchins and others) were doing in their "popular missions" across Europe at the time. In reporting an edifying case of penitential fervour by a recent convert in Beijing in 1604–1605, Ricci observed with evident contentment, that "God is putting his fear in the hearts of these new Christians" ("Iddio va ponendo il suo timore ne’ cuori di questi novelli cristiani"). In fact, even among more intellectually refined audiences, Ricci introduced a practice that was specifically designed to elicit horror for one's sins, to meditate on death, and to contemplate with all senses the frightening perspective of hell: the first week of the famous Spiritual Exercises of Ignatius of Loyola. Jesuit spiritual directors usually offered to lay people only the first of the four periods of increasing spiritual progression laid down in the Exercises.

In the final analysis, as observed by Jean Delumeau, in spite of the theologians' lengthy explanations on the importance of contrite repentance, pastors in the field had to accept the reality that attrition out of fear for damnation was the prevalent attitude among penitents. In 1667, even Pope Alex-
ander VII recognized that attrition had in practice triumphed as “the opinion of most schools.” 142 Thus, the “pastoral of perfection” advocated in theory was most of the time reduced to a “pastoral of fear.” The utmost fear was to die in mortal sin. 146

Confession at Death and “Pastoral of Fear”

The persons ... who confess frequently are more assured that when death will reach them, they will be in the grace of God, and as a consequence, they will be saved. On the contrary, those who confess only very rarely will be quite likely surprised by death first or later, as it is easy to fall again into sin, given the bad disposition to which they are accustomed.

Then they will be eternally damned. 147

This was only one of the reasons advanced by theologians and spiritual writers advocating frequent confession in the seventeenth century. 148 Yet, given the relative few opportunities to confess in China, for the vast majority of Chinese Christians the complex sin-death-damnation was probably the biggest anxiety-producing feature linked to sacramental confession. To die without confession was quite possible in China. A list of Christian vocabulary and useful sentences compiled by a missionary as a linguistic exercise, entitled Fengjiao de shiqing 奉教的事情 (Matters of religion; 1680s?), seems to confirm this anxious link among sin, death and damnation. Grouped together under two adjacent headings we find the following concepts:

- Good death; to die with or without consciousness; to die quickly; to die well; to die badly; hell of eternal suffering; purgatory; limbo puerorum; limbo sanctorum; to descend to hell; paradise; to ascend to heaven; soul; souls of purgatory; not to have exhaled the last breath yet; to exhale the last breath; the soul has left the body; cadaver; corpse; to leave the world; to die; to die without confession. 149

This cascading sequence of concepts related to death and the afterlife climax in the last expression of the list: “to die without confession” (meiyou gaojie si 没有告解死). Confession was strongly connected in the mind of

many with the last hour (linzhongshi 臨終時), and numerous anecdotes on confession in articulo mortis can be found scattered in missionary sources. The juncture was momentous indeed. The devil was literally waiting for the delicate time of the last hour to snatch away the souls of the faithful, as revealed in an episode involving an old Chinese Christian woman “on her way to the other life” in the 1640s. She called for a priest, confessed and received the extreme unction. However, just before dying, the devil appeared to her, and tried to convince her that the sacraments she had just received were invalid. She then shouted at him, showing him the rosaries and religious medals hanging on the wall, and thus forced him out of the room, dying in peace soon thereafter. Had she surrendered to the diabolical delusion, she would have endangered her soul. 150

Missionaries, whenever possible, were called in haste to the bed of a moribund, as a cleansed soul was considered necessary for salvation by many Chinese Christians. In fact, Aleni had impressed upon his readers in Dizui zhenggui, that “according to the custom of Western countries, whenever someone falls ill, the priority is to first get absolved, and only then to call for a doctor.” 151 An episode related in the 1644 Littera Annuat of the Jesuit mission makes particularly explicit how important Chinese Christians considered sacramental absolution at death. A Christian woman, who had converted while being a servant in the house of the famous Christian literatus Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1565–1630) in Hangzhou in the 1630s, retired to her native village, where she was the only Christian. She remained attached to the devotions of her religion, in spite of pressure from neighbours and relatives to perform Buddhist rituals. At the ripe age of 90, in the late 1640s, she became ill, and begged her family to call a Catholic priest to give her the sacraments. But her non-Christian relatives refused. She became mortally ill, worsening day by day, but every time her relatives thought she was dead, she would come back to life. Finally, she told them “since you do not wish to call the Father to confess me, thus I am suffering and dying without dying (morrerendo sem morrer). You certainly know that I would not die before first confessing.” The relatives agreed to call the Father, who confessed her and gave her the extreme unction. After a few hours, she passed away. 152

Given the scarcity of priests, when news that a missionary was passing by in a given area reached local people, they made sure to call him for ur-

145 See Delumeau 1990a, chapter 4, “Les motifs de repentir” and chapter 5 “Êtes-vous ‘attrib’ ou ‘contrit’?”

146 On the pastoral of fear, see the magnum opus by Delumeau (1990b).

147 Segneri 1696, pp. 271-272.

148 Pinelli 1613, pp. 148-152, lists seven reasons for frequent confession, most of them related to a better monitoring of one’s moral progress; see also Segneri 1696, pp. 263-274, where more space is given to the fear of damnation.

149 BnF, Chinois 7046 III, f. 31b.


151 Dizui zhenggui, j. 3, f. 18a (CCT ARSI, vol. 4, p. 511).

152 Gouvea 1998, p. 200. The letter continues at p. 201 with a similar case, that of the mother of Li Zhizao.
gent death-bed confessions. This is the case of two literati in the region of Jiangzhou (Shanxi) in the 1630s. One of them called an itinerant Jesuit to his home, then "confessed with much contrition and tears, and died soon after very satisfied for the mercy received from God." The other literatus invited the priest to make a detour from his usual route in order to confess his mother-in-law who was sick: but the lady died before the ritual could be started, under the eyes of the missionary. In the Dominican mission of Fujian, missing the call of a moribund could cost dearly to the missionary. In 1771, while the Dominican José Muñoz (1742-1808) was preparing to leave a village in the region of Fuan by boat to reach a locale six hours away to impart the last rituals to a dying Christian (confession, viaticum and extreme unction), a message from a local family reached him, asking for the same service in the vicinity of the village. The missionary advised the family to ask another priest for help, since he was on the move. Offended by the refusal, the family leaked to a group of non-Christians the whereabouts of Muñoz, who was ambushed, robbed of all his belongings, delivered to the authorities, and later expelled from China.154

The imagery of judgement in the afterlife and its legal implications were powerfully present in the mind of converts approaching death, and concerns for salvation triggered their desire to ritually cleanse their soul before departing from this life, in the hope to see fulfilled the promise of "immortal life and new worlds for oneself and one's relatives." The wife of the third nephew of Xu Guangqi in Shanghai, for example, reported to the local missionary a vision she experienced at the time of the death of her husband in far-away Beijing. Still unaware of his death at the time, she dreamt of Christ sitting on a throne, surrounded by innumerable angels. On the right side was a man, playing a spinet. She saw herself kneeling in front of the throne. A voice thundered: "I wish to come and pass judgement." She asked whether this was the universal or particular judgement, and the voice replied it was to be a particular judgement. She asked when, and the voice replied it would come in the tenth month. Once awake, the terrorized woman started preparations for her own death, which she believed was coming soon. She called the priest and made a full confession. The Father explained to her that the particular judgement alluded in the dream was nothing but the sacramental confession she had just experienced. But soon news came from the capital that her 35-year-old husband had died, and it appeared that he was in fact the man seen playing music near the throne of God. The episode is closed by the sentence: "all the people of the family were left in fear."156

The faithful’s preoccupation with confession at death became particularly urgent and widespread during moments of social breakdown and military upheaval. During the Qing siege of Fuzhou in 1647, for example, the number of confessions and extreme unctions increased enormously among the besieged, especially women, who felt enfeebled by hunger, and became aware that their end was near.157

When confession in articulo mortis was truly impossible because no priest could be called, Christians had to resort to substitute methods, and try to reach the perfect contrition that could assure their salvation. A prominent Fujianese Christian, baptized by Aleni and later member of a Dominican community, Miao Shixiang (1639, d. 1649) from Muyang (Fuan district, Fujian), for example, found no other way to make his last confession before being killed at the hand of Qing troops during the Ming-Qing wars than to write a letter to his Dominican confessor. Besieged in the walled town of Fuan, this remained his last resort to pacify his conscience:

Considering that death was unavoidable, [Miao] kept on moaning and crying almost continually, not because he was going to die, but because he could not receive the sacraments. And being well instructed, he did his best, engaging in fervent Acts of Contrition. And in order to elicit greater [contrition], he made an examination of conscience, as if he was going to confess, and wrote all his faults in a letter addressed to Father [García], asking absolution for those faults, and for all the remaining ones in his life. Juan [Miao] knew well that confession by letter is not allowed, but rather condemned by the Church. Nevertheless, he did all this to show his desires, and as a clear declaration of his true Christian death. He gave this sealed letter to a Christian, who was not a soldier ... This person, after the fall of Fuan, personally brought the letter to Fr. García as Miao had asked him. The Father cried while reading it. In the letter Miao also gave order to bequeath [to the Church] a value of three hundred measures of rice from his property every year for the good of his own soul.158

153 Both cases in Gouvea 1998, p. 91.
155 These words referred to a 70-year-old military official in Chengdu (Sichuan) who became a zealous Christian in the early 1640s, "grande discipulo do que prometia vida immortal e novos mundos pera si e pera os seus." See Gouvea 1998, p. 211.
156 Gouvea 1998, pp. 133-134.
158 Riccio 1667, f. 234v. In a culture so centred on writing, where communication with superiors and with the gods was mostly written, and where personal "ledgers of merit and demerit" were so popular, missionaries were asked by their Chinese audience whether it was possible to confess in writing. Initially, in the Japan mission,
Clearly, the welfare of one’s soul in the final moments pushed Miao to use all the means at his disposal to receive absolution, even if the ritual expert he needed was not available to him. Since true contrition could in principle be sufficient for God’s forgiveness, as Aleni had taught in Fujian, Miao’s efforts were not in vain. But to make sure that his soul, which would have certainly ended up in purgatory (full contrition spared from hell, but not necessarily from purgatory), he also invested in a supplementary “insurance policy,” asking for masses to be celebrated as suffrages for his own soul (which is the usual meaning of the expression “for the good of one’s own soul”).

Another episode from Fuzhou confirms that Chinese Christians were concerned about the moment of their death, and desired to obtain forgiveness for their sins, even in the absence of a priest. A local female lay leader in 1649 became mortally ill in a town where there was no priest to assist her. Before moving there from Fuzhou, the woman had engaged in ministry to the dying for years, encouraging them to recite the Act of Contrition, and to pray to the saints. When approaching death, she instructed her children to put on her heart her rosaries and religious symbols, and holding a cross in her hands, she spent her final hours, as she had done with others before, repeatedly reciting the Act of Contrition.¹⁵⁹

¹⁵⁹ Gouvea 1998, p. 427. The idea of “good death” and repentance-confession at death is found in several Chinese Christian texts, including the Kouduo richao. A treatise on the topic by João Fróis S.J. (1591–1638), Shangzhong zhi guizi 善終助規則 (Rules to Assist in a Good Death; CCT ARSI, vol. 5, pp. 333-437) includes a discussion of confession in articulo mortis: “When they are getting close to death, sick people should have their heart filled with the grace of God and this is something particularly urgent to do. Thus the person helping them [to die well] should make every effort to assist the sick in achieving [grace] and not desert this duty. The best method is to encourage the sick to receive the sacraments of the Church ecclesiae sacramenta in romanization, e-gi-le-xi-ya zhi ge-la-meng-duo. The Lord employs these sacraments as a sort of useful instruments to fix crooked things. When outside we use holy water to sprinkle, inside we bestow holy protection in order to cleanse sin. This is why we should advise the sick to do confession and to take the other sacraments as soon as possible. This is very urgent and should not be delayed. In fact, to engage in these rituals not only does not harm the body, but is indeed beneficial to life. Do not say ‘repent and confess in the coming days or hours.’ Today and now should be the set day and time, as the coming days and hours are still unsure. Now it is easy, but if you delay, it will be difficult. Now there is the favourable condition, later, who knows? If one refuses to follow orders when in a peaceful [disposition of]

And yet, the celebration of the sacrament was always preferred to the emergency methods forced by war and distance. In Songjiang in 1648, one of the teenage sons of Candida Xu 許 (1607–1680) – the granddaughter of Xu Guangqi – had not been able to confess for some time, since the nearest Jesuit in Shanghai had been prevented from visiting due to the Ming–Qing hostilities. During an agitated night, the boy dreamt of a white stone stele, inscribed with all the sins that he had committed since he had reached the age of reason up to his present age of 16. The youngster decided to make a written list of all his sins, and in a letter he asked the Father to assign to him corporal penances as satisfaction of his sins. He also considered his penances as a way to beg the Lord to allow the priest to reach in safety his town, and ritually confess him. When the Father received the letter, he was moved by the boy’s devotion, although in fact the list of sins was merely “childlike matters and little more than nothing” (“ninherias e pouco maus de nada”).¹⁶⁰ But the priest certainly got the message: he was eagerly expected by his Christians in Songjiang, so as to impart confession.

Positive Incentives for Confession

Fear and scruples, however, were not the only “incentives” for confession. Hope for a better life was another one. Confession opened the gates of salvation, and Christians imagined quite literally that the departed would be blessed with a better life filled with success, as an anecdote tells us. When a former Buddhist monk, Paul Li, who had become catechist in the Hangzhou mission, realized he was nearing his end, he confessed many times and received extreme unction. During that night, he passed away. Soon he appeared in a dream to a local Christian man, who had lapsed in his religious practice. In the dream, the former monk was wearing the robes of a high official, and was preceded by flag- and insignia-bearers. The sleeping man, who apparently failed to recognize him, asked the cortege who the official was, and he was told his identity: Paul! He awoke, and decided to change the course of his life. While the pious Jesuit António de Gouvea (1592–1677), compiler of this report, remarked on the role of the deceased as a kind of “catechist from the afterlife” urging fellow Christians to convert, we can notice that Paul appeared in the trappings of power reserved to men of

success in the examination system. Afterlife here was imagined as a step up in the ladder of success. 161

Moreover, at times Christians saw the ritual of confession as a powerful way to heal their body as well as their souls. The metaphor of the confessor as a physician of the spirit became in this cases a rather literal reality. In Songjiang (Jiangnan), for example, a Christian man who had abandoned the Church after having gotten a concubine, became very ill in 1636. He then repented of his sin, asking for divine mercy and forgiveness, and scrupulously followed the instructions of the local Father, who ordered him to get rid of the concubine. After a “confession full of repentance” he re-acquired his health. 162 In Yanping (Fujian) in 1645, a sick man asked the visiting Jesuit to go to his home and confess him, before taking his medicine: “but the medicine of confession was effective not only for his soul, but also for his body, so that in brief he was healed.” 163 Alenì experienced similar episodes in the mid-1640s in other Fujianese locales, such as Jianchang and Taining, where the efficacy of the sacrament of penance (“a efficacia do Sacramento da Penitência”) was proved by the speedy recovery of a moribund Christian, whose money had all been spent in vain on doctors. 164 Even people on the brink of death were healed through the administration of the last sacraments, usually including confession and extreme unction (not the Eucharist, which was given only rarely), as it was the case of an elderly woman in the region of Quanzhou (Fujian) in 1643. 165

**Intercession of Mary and Confession**

Anxiety surrounding confession could be soothed not only by hopes in its efficacy to gain a better life, and even to be healed, but also by the presence of intercessors in Heaven. Especially Mary, the mother of Christ, was seen as a maternal and merciful helper of sinners. Mary could assist sinners in reforming their life and obtaining forgiveness in two occasions at least: when they were ashamed or afraid to confess, and at the moment of death.

As mentioned earlier, shame was one of the most common impediments to full confession, and especially so in China. Missionary reports tell us that Mary would appear in dreams to the faithful, and push individuals to reform and to request confession. 166 In a case reported in the 1643 *Littera Annuæ* from Hangzhou, for example, we see Our Lady appearing in a dream to a man who had become cold in his faith. She asked him to repent for his sins and not be afraid. He retorted that his sins were too great to be forgiven. She replied: “My rosary will take care of this, if you immediately emend your life.” Once awake, the Christian confessed and started a new life. 167 In the same document, we see a woman fearful to confess her sins to the priest, and assailed by scruples. She fell ill, and Mary appeared to her, and encouraged her to confide in God's mercy, while she, the Mother of Christ, would pray for her. Then the Lady gave her an elixir to drink in a porcelain cup, and disappeared. After six days of illness, the woman recovered, confessed all her sins (“confessou-se com clareza”), including those she had failed to reveal earlier, and reformed her life. 168 In another rather dramatic episode, a merchant who had gone bankrupt, who was a member of the Confraternity of Our Lady in Shanghai, repeatedly tried to commit suicide. During his last attempt at drowning, Mary appeared to him, telling him that in order to escape a temporary trouble, he was going to gain eternal damnation. She ordered him to hasten to the church and confess, so as to become free from the temptation to kill himself. When he did so, with tears of repentance, he regained his balance. 169

Mary was also an important intercessor at the moment of death, and her motherly presence was a soothing reassurance that salvation was at hand. Every Christian who had memorized the Hail Mary (and practically all learnt it by heart since childhood, and often recited it at night in choirs in the family) was aware that the Holy Mother could pray for them “in the hour of death.” 170 When priests could not come for the final rites, including confession, Mary could be invoked as advocate in the tribunal of the afterlife, as the following case shows. In 1733, in the region of Zhangzhou (Fujian), an octogenarian Christian, who had spent years bed-ridden, reciting innumerable rounds of the rosary during his waking hours, fell mortally ill and became blind. Then he told his son that in a vision he had seen Jesus,

164 Gouvea 1998, p. 259. See also the mention in the biography of the son of Zhang Geng, Michael Zhang Shi 張世, of his desire to confess with visiting Jesuits during his illness, see *Zhang Mi-ge-er yiji 張國格爾遺記 (Deeds of Michael Zhang)*, BuF 1016-VII/VIII, f. 7b.
166 This phenomenon was also common in Europe; for examples of Mary ordering to visionaries to confess, or to request their villagers to confess as a sign of repentance in fifteenth-sixteenth century Spain, see Christian 1981, passim.
who had announced to him his death within three days. On the third day, he
could no longer talk, but asked for a brush, and wrote, in spite of his blind-
ness “The most holy Mary is accompanying me in judgement.” Soon after
he passed away murmuring “Yawu Muliya 亞物瑪利亞” (Ave Maria).171

Faith in the intercession of the Holy Mother was nourished by Chinese-
language hagiographic stories circulating among Christians. Vagnone’s
Shengmu xingshi 聖母行實 (Life of the Holy Mother; Jiangzhou [Shanxi],
1631) in particular, which seems to have been a popular reading among
Christians, contained a series of episodes from the lives of saints under the
rubric “The Holy Mother assists us during the difficult time of death.” The
last of these stories might have rung particularly appealing, given its almost
contemporary nature. Alfonso Vagnone mentions that some decades earlier a
“literatus from north-western [Europe]” had shown strong devotion to the
Holy Mother in his youth, and was contemplating a religious life as priest.
But in spite of attempts by Mary to lead him to the good way, the devil suc-
cceeded in leading him astray. One day he fell gravely ill, started feeling re-
pentance for his deeds, and called a priest to be confessed. During confess-
on, he had a vision. The Lord of Heaven was sitting on a throne, and was
about to judge his sins. At the right was the Holy Mother, and under them
he saw St. Ignatius standing. Then he heard the Lord pronounce a severe
judgement over the sins of his entire life. The Holy Mother explained to the
Lord in detail her silent efforts at re-educating him, and his failure to do so.
Thus the eternal punishment was pronounced as the only fair outcome
possible. When the man heard that, he was speechless, and could only prostrate
himself at the feet of St. Ignatius, asking for mercy and promising to never
forget this grace. The saint then prayed to Our Lady, who again turned to the
Lord, and was able to obtain mercy for him. Finally, St. Ignatius not
only obtained for him sacramental absolution, but also made the man regain
his health. The man’s life, under the protection of these powerful interces-
sors, changed course thereafter.172

1734.

172 See Shengmu xingshi, juan 3, ff. 42b-43a (WXSJ, vol. 3, pp. 1514-15) of the 1680
Guangzhou reprint, reproduced in WXSJ, vol. 3, pp. 1273-1552. More examples of
Mary’s intercessions can be found in Arcadio del Rosario’s O.P. Renlei zhen’an 人
類真安 (The True Peace of Humanity), a collection of miracle stories of the rosary
completed in the 1680s. Compare the similar story about Zhang Shi 張識, who, at the
moment of death apparently contemplated his own judgement in front of God, and
was helped by two intercessors, the Apostle Matthew and Matteo Ricci himself; see
Fang 1970, p. 263, referring to a passage in Alemi’s Daxi Xitai Li xiansheng xingji
大西泰利先生行跡 (Life of Matteo Ricci); cf. CCT ARSI, vol. 12, p. 222. See
also Standaert 1993a, p. 58.

Here, the hagiographic episode presented together the spiritually and
physically healing powers of confession, almost taking out of the hands of
the priest the sacrament. The moment of confession had become a stage for
the trial in heaven, complete with celestial defence attorneys. But in fact, in
the reality of daily life, the faithful had still to face as their interlocutor the
priest, mostly a foreign man, the only one who held the authority to absolve
them.

Confession and Priests: Discipline and Authority

Many scholars have examined confession as a technology of domination, and
have unequivocally shown how it became a central mechanism in the discipl-
ing of Catholic societies in Europe and the colonies at the hands of the
Church and the state.173 Liam Brocley explores in this volume missionary
reports in Portuguese and looks at the Jesuit attempt to reform Chinese mo-
res through a host of means, including sacramental confession.174 Indeed,
the sacrament of penance was the most direct tool available to the priest to
control religious and social behaviour. The power of confession on the daily
life of Chinese Christians, however, should not be overemphasized. Confes-
sion was usually celebrated once or twice a year, and while women were
more assiduous in the practice, as a missionary observed, in some places
“more than half of the [Christian] men reserved ... confession for the hour
of their death.”175 Only the most devout Christians were encouraged to take
communion frequently and thus confessed regularly, and monitored their
moral life through examination of conscience.176 Moreover, for the tiny
Christian communities, drowned in a sea of people who followed different
religious tenets, and whose social customs were at times in contrast with
those of Christianity, the moral constraints of Christianity were clearly a
choice that individuals and families accepted to follow, rather than a machi-
nery imposed on them by the Inquisition or the state apparatus. Pre-existing
ideas of sin and retribution in Chinese culture, as already observed by

173 Recent summaries of the extensive historiography on Catholic confession can be
found e.g., in Myers 1996; De Boer 2001; Rusconi 2002.
174 Cf. also Brocley 2002.
175 Royo 1733, p. 335.
176 See the testimony of the beata Lucia Guo Xiaoshi 郭曉使, in Archives des Missions
Étrangères de Paris, Chine, vol. 436, f. 137. Starting in the seventeenth century,
some Spanish theologians encouraged frequent communion (and its corollary, fre-
cquent confession), arguing that this would shorten the time spent in purgatory by
the soul. The sacrament of penance became “a part of popular culture, ... and women
especially heeded the call for more frequent confession.” See Halicz 1996, p. 35.
scholars (see article by Erik Zürcher in the present volume) without doubt eased the acceptance of ideas of Christian penance and of the sacrament itself.

We should search in the psychological realm, rather than in coercive Church policies, an explanation for the attraction to the practice of confession among Chinese Christians. Confession exerted a certain social and religious control over Christians, but, as I have suggested, it also was an important spiritual and psychological soothing device in the face of illness and death. The two interlocking dimensions of discipline and relief are poignantly illustrated in letters written in 1695 by the leader of the Zangzhou Christian community, Yan Mo 嚴謨 (b. 1640?; gongseng 1709; d. post 1718). At that time this ancient Jesuit community had been assigned to the care of the Dominicans. In previous years, Yan Mo had been involved in a series of debates on the topic of ritual, supporting with philological arguments based on the classics the Jesuit acceptance of certain Chinese ceremonies. For that reason, the Dominicans ostracized him and most of the local Christians, and denied them the sacraments. When his nephew Michael was seriously ill, Yan Mo asked the Dominican priest Magino Ventallol (1647-1732) to confess the young man on his death-bed. The friar, however, agreed to perform the confession only on the condition that Yan Mo recanted in writing his previous theological treatises. Yan lamented the situation in letters to the Jesuits Monteiro and Rodrigues, asking them to travel to Zangzhou to impart the needed sacraments. In the letters, Yan compared the hoped-for visit from the Jesuits to celebrate the sacraments to a case of “starved people finding food or the dead being revived.” He also wrote that denial of sacraments, and especially confession, was like being “under hot water and burning fire.” The impassioned pleas of Yan Mo show that sacraments – and confession in particular – were indeed a coveted spiritual solace for converts, especially when illness forebode death and possible damnation without a clear conscience.

Rather than concentrate on the disciplinary effects of confession on Christians, here I would like to show the other face of the coin, and highlight the position of authority that rituals like confession and mass conferred on the priests. This aspect was apparent in a very candid exchange between the Jesuit Rui de Figueiredo (1594-1642) and Joseph Zhu Yufu 朱毓朴, a Ming imperial relative in the Kaifeng region in the 1630s. When asked why there was the need of an intermediary to obtain God’s forgiveness, the missionary expressly acknowledged to Zhu that one of the reasons for God’s bestowal of the power of confession was to give the priest authority and standing vis-à-vis the community:

[One of the reasons why God gave the priest the power to confess is that] it protects the missionary. He thus will be respected and loved by the people, they will approach him, listen to his religious instruction, and follow his teachings. … He will be respected and loved because he enjoys such great powers, and because all those who have sinned must ask him to confess, otherwise God does not give absolution. There is no form of respect higher than this in the world. The sovereign in the court and the officials have power and influence over people, but absolutely cannot rival [the power of the priest]. How could he not be respected and loved by the people? … People will approach and follow him because, when they have sins, a priest must give them absolution, otherwise one cannot hope to avoid the pains of hell and enjoy heaven. These extremely important matters of the faithful are entrusted by God to the priest, how could people not approach and follow him? Clearly, Christians who had accepted the idea of sin and retribution also accepted the need of a priest to confess. Conversely, the priest needed confession to exert his authority in the community. But priests had to be vigilant in defending their prerogatives as ritual experts. Occasional incidents that threatened the position of supremacy of the priest reveal that the prestige of their position – also in their capacity as confessors – was coveted by Chinese religious leaders in local communities, leading to the creation of split groups, run by visionaries who interpreted rituals and doctrine in creative ways. This phenomenon was exacerbated by the lack of priests in the difficult times of suppression of Christianity in the eighteenth century. These alternative religious leaders, usually men, were sometimes catechists with a

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177 See Standaert 1995.


179 CCT ARSI, vol. 3, pp. 317-318. Zhu’s extensive text is entitled Shengjiao yuanlii 布教源流 (The Source and Spreading of the Holy Teachings). The preface is dated 1635. The author was one of the many members of the Ming imperial family scattered in the empire. He purposely composed the book in vernacular Chinese and in a popular style, probably taking down notes from his oral exchanges with the missionary Rui de Figueiredo over a period of nine months between November-December 1635 and August 1636 (cf. Chan 2002, pp. 186-189). The text is organized in four books, further subdivided in juan. The fourth juan in book four, which is dedicated to rituals (liyi, i.e., the seven sacraments), is about confession and entitled Jiehua jiezi liyi 解説解罪禮儀 (in CCT ARSI, vol. 3, pp. 315-345). The chapter quite possibly reflects both the typical oral instruction on confession by a Jesuit missionary, as well as the way a convert understood the priest’s explanations. Indeed, the tone is familiar and the language plain.
good knowledge of Christian practices and doctrine, or more rarely local mediums, or former sectarians who had converted to Christianity, and who simply decided to create a new cult combining their previous teachings with some of the new ones. These individuals, as it customarily happened among lay Buddhist groups, tried to use the new religious symbols and rituals to cement their authority over the local community of believers. Auricular confession, so clearly the preserve of ordained priests (mostly foreign), and an unknown practice among native sectarian groups, thus became a bone of contention with "heretical leaders," who would act as priests and administer confession, or substitute it with similar practices.

The Jesuit Sambiasi reported an early case in the 1640s. A medium in the region of Changshu was possessed by a spirit talking through a brush. One day the spirit painted the image of a king. The local people hung it immediately on an altar to kowtow to it, but the brush of the medium wrote to them "Do not worship this image, but that of the Da Zhu 大主!" They were left in doubt until a local Christian told them that the spirit must have been referring to his Tianzhu 天主. The man then brought an image of the Saviour to the temple, and "idolaters and Christians, all mixed up, met once a week to make their reverences to it." Then the spirit started "manipulating" the crowd, ordering them through numerous written scriptures (con ispessere scrittura, lit. "thick writings") to wake up early in the morning and recite prayers, while rebuking them for their sins. The people involved started thinking that the spirit was an angel of the Christian God, and, kept the matter secret, believing that they had been elected by divine powers. One day, the spirit wrote to them:

Get ready for a full confession of all your sins. On such and such day, you will all gather, and from heaven the apostle Philippe will descend to listen to your sins. You will reveal them to him in secret, and he will absolve you.

They were delighted, commented Sambiasi, because that sort of absolution came directly from heaven, and cancelled not only the guilt, but also the punishment in the afterlife, like a jubilee. They prepared themselves, gathered, and confessed their sins. Then the brush of the medium wrote on the white page:

The apostle Philippe has come, has heard you and has absolved you from all your sins. You will not need to remember or re-tell these sins, since this confession is much better than the ones you usually do with the Father, as celestial things are better than earthly ones.

They were all pleased, and such spiritual communications continued to happen for some time. But when Sambiasi, during one of his customary pastoral visits, was informed by some Christians of the facts, he gathered all faithful, and scolded them for their "useless mental confession" and for believing in a malignant spirit. The possessed medium then started to scream and to curse the missionary, promising retribution. But that was to no avail, and apparently the Jesuit regained his position of authority.\(^{180}\) This episode reveals to us that some Christian practices, in particular confession, had caught the imagination of local religious experts, like this medium in Changshu. Existing rituals, like the Buddhist chanhuat that Erik Zürcher describes in his article in this volume, or similar Daoist practices, may have been the model followed by the medium and the spirit that talked through him to design this syncretic rite of blanket absolution granted by a Christian divine being descending from heaven.\(^{81}\) By eliminating the priestly face-to-face interaction, the medium was robbing the ordained priest of his authority in the community.

These phenomena possibly became more common after the mid-eighteenth century, when Chinese priests began to be ordained in some numbers, and Chinese "impersonators" would become credible. For example, in the early 1750s - a period of strict government surveillance against Christians in Fujian, following the arrest and execution of all foreign missionaries in the province in 1748 - a man in the territory of Fuan impersonated the only Dominican remaining in the province, the native Juan Feng de Santa Maria (alias Feng Shiming Wenzhi 烏世明 文子, 1719-1755), and went about exorcising demons, celebrating mass, and confessing the faithful.\(^{82}\) Usually, however, when it was not possible to take the garb of the obviously foreign priest, local lay leaders tried to bypass the clergy and create a direct connection with God, like the medium of Changshu had done. In Shanxi in the early 1730s a local catechist, for example, "preached a new way to confess and take communion, that is, to put an empty chair in front of a sacred image. Christians kneel in front of the chair, confess their sins, and after confession put a towel under the chin, and communicate."\(^{183}\)

In spite of these incidents, however, it appears that the strict monopoly of priests over auricular confession remained mostly unbroken. Priestly exclusive authority in the realm of sacraments was certainly enhanced by their unique connection with a distant hierarchy of religious power in the Far

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\(^{180}\) Summary of an original report by Sambiasi in Bartoli 1825, Book 4, pp. 531-533; cf. Pfister 1932-1934, pp. 139-140.

\(^{181}\) On Daoist confessional practices, see Masaaki 2002.


\(^{183}\) Margiotti 1958, p. 472, citing the 1734 "Memorie della Cina" by the Procurator of Propaganda Fide in Macao, Miralta, in APF, SOCP, 1732-34, f. 254.
West, their knowledge of rituals, and of a mysterious ritual language, Latin, used during the celebrations. So central was the priestly authority that even apparent linguistic deadlock did not obstruct the rite officiated by the priest and was overcome in creative ways. For example, Buglio’s *Siduo dianyao* allowed the use of translators (*tongshi* 達事) during confession in case the missionary was ignorant of the local dialect (*tuyu* 土語). However, if the penitent did not wish to communicate his or her sins in this way, one could still write one’s sins and give the list to the priest during the ritual. An exceptional case happened in 1670, after the faithful had been deprived of sacraments for several years due to the expulsion of priests from the interior of China to Guangzhou in the wake of the Calendar Case (1664–1670). Francisco Pimentel (1629–1675), a Jesuit who accompanied as chaplain a Portuguese embassy to the Kangxi Emperor in that year so describes "how [he] could give confession, not knowing anything of the language":

The system was as follows. Seeing myself pursued all along the route by Christians who came from very far to seek me out so that they could confess themselves, and that they were most disconsolate when they found that I did not know the language, I asked a Chinese learned man, whom the Fathers had placed at the service of the Lord Ambassador to prepare papers when necessary, to make for me a confessional register in Chinese letters, placing at the top what could be under each precept, and in a separate place the number of times up to five. Above that it was to be indicated by the fingers. Beside the Chinese letters I put the Portuguese. They confessed the kind of sin, and then quickly looked for the letters that stated the number of times, and in this way they made it clear.

Yet, some were not ashamed to ask an interpreter to convey in oral translation their sins to the priest:

Many were not content, but called my slave, and through him stated all they had on their consciences, even though I told them they were not obliged to do so. These confessions were of great importance for some, for when I returned from the court I found them already dead.[…]

So that the women also could take advantage of this opportunity, they gathered in a house and quickly sent for me, and there they said their confessions and then I said Mass for them and gave them Communion, but never did a single woman confess on paper, although many of them were literate, but all confessed through interpreters despite the declaration I made to them that they did not have that obligation except on the point of death; to which they replied that they did not want to miss this opportunity because they did not know if they would have another in their lives. 184

Although he was not their “parish priest” and could not even understand them, Pimentel was sought after by men and women as the only individual capable to cleanse them of sins, and thus prepare them to possible death. Elsewhere other ingenious methods were employed in case the confessor could not understand the penitent. In the Sichuan mission, for example, an interpreter would be asked to read a list of examination questions. Each time the penitent heard the sin he had committed, he would squeeze the hand of the confessor. Another way was to put a small rope between the hand of the confessor and that of the penitent: when the sin was read aloud by the interpreter, the penitent would pull the rope, as many times as he had committed the sin. In both cases, it was necessary for the interpreter to turn his back to the confessor, and leave time between interrogations to conduct the procedure in an orderly manner. 185

In these instances of “mediated confession,” we clearly see re-affirmed the centrality of the priest in ritual life. And yet, we also realize that the ritual manifested its own efficacy not so much through a connection with a specific priest, and through an individualized spiritual dialogue, but rather through the correct performance of a minimal sequence of actions, culminating in absolution. This was the kind of religious service that many Christians expected of missionaries. The efficacy of the rites was intrinsic to their correct performance (orthopraxy), and the authority of the priest derived from his power to impart efficacious rituals. As I will show in the next section, most Christians, especially in the eighteenth century, prized this “efficacious” nature of rituality.

### From Moral Reform to Ritual Efficacy?

An Attempt at a Chronology of Confession: The Example of Indulgences

In the different parts of this essay so far, I have given a bird-eye view of the ritual prescriptions and practices related to confession. In the process, I have offered some sense of the chronological development of confession in the China mission, from a conception of the sacrament as a tool of moral self-reform in a “Confucian” vein, very much linked to Jesuit early spirituality (what I have called a “pastoral of perfection”), towards a more ritualis-

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184 *Siduo dianyao*, p. 1, f. 51b. To send such a list to a priest outside of confession was never allowed.

tic approach, once Christianity started expanding in the 1630s. This approach found powerful incentives in the “pastoral of fear” more suitable for the masses of Christians. With notable exceptions (such as some of the “Jansenist” spiritual practices in the M.E.P. mission of Sichuan), the trend appears to have intensified during the eighteenth century, partly as a result of the impoverishment of spiritual life determined by the government suppression of Christianity and the lack of priests. To draw a solid chronological history of the sacrament of penance in China would entail a study of the spiritual and theological discussions on penance in Europe between the Council of Trent and the early nineteenth century, and how they were transferred to China, a task that would take me too far. Rather, I will here concentrate on one of the practices that reflects a rise in a form of rituality privileging the aspect of efficacy and immediate spiritual benefits over concerns for moral reform of the self during the eighteenth century: indulgences.

Together with baptism and confession, indulgences were seen as another tool to diminish the impact of sins on one’s life and the afterlife. The word originally meant “kindness or favour,” but acquired in late antiquity the meaning of “remission of a tax or debt.” By the early modern period, most Catholic theologians defined it as an extra-sacramental remission of the temporal punishment due to sin, after the guilt had been forgiven. Baptism cancelled all sins committed previous to it, as well as all the penalties attached to those sins. Confession, on the other hand, removed the guilt and the eternal punishment for mortal sins, but not the so-called temporal punishments, that is penances both imposed by confessors in this life and to be expiated in purgatory. Indulgences, which were granted by the Church, allowed penitents to repay their debt in this life through alms, prayer, and minor forms of personal penance, thus avoiding harsh and unrealistic public penances, and diminishing the pains of purgatory as well. Moreover, starting in the fifteenth century, indulgences started also to be applied for the benefit of the dead, as a form of suffrage.187

The practice, however, soon lost its spiritual dimension, becoming a true money-making scheme for monarchs and popes to finance their building projects or their war campaigns. As it is well known, abuses in granting indulgences were one of the targets of attack by Martin Luther (1483–1546), and as a consequence, the practice lost some of its attraction even in the Catholic camp in the sixteenth century. Nevertheless, the Council of Trent, in its anti-Protestant spirit, reaffirmed their orthodoxy and “salutary nature for the Christian people.” While initially Pius V abolished monetary indulgences, curtailing their importance and appeal, the establishment by Clement IX in 1669 of a Congregation to tightly control the granting of indulgences reflected resurgence in interest for indulgences as opportunities for spiritual benefit among the laity. After they ceased to be monetary, indulgences were increasingly used as a stimulus directed at the laity to perform spiritual exercises and engage in new devotions. The Church bestowal of indulgences, and the laity’s enthusiastic reception of them, produced an inflationary phenomenon, with people asking for more and more spiritual benefits in exchange for their prayers and penances.

This attitude reverberated in the China mission only starting in the very late seventeenth century. The Jesuits apparently did not give great importance to indulgences in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in China. This reflected the climate in Europe, as well as the spirituality of the Order, interested in moral reform, rather than in a more “mechanical” kind of rituality. This may also help explain why the Jesuits promoted the public penances described above in cases of particular gravity, somehow resuscitating the Christian practices of public penance of late antiquity. However, starting in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, after the arrival of other religious orders and congregations, sources start mentioning indulgences more frequently, and texts in Chinese on indulgences appeared.188

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188 See HCC, p. 625, for early references to indulgences in the China mission. Here I quote the description of various kinds of indulgences that I will mention in this section, as found in The Catholic Encyclopedia 1913–1922, vol. 7, entry on “Indulgences”: “An indulgence that may be gained in any part of the world is universal, while one that can be gained only in a specified place (Rome, Jerusalem, etc.) is local. A further distinction is that between perpetual indulgences, which may be gained at any time, and temporary, which are available on certain days only, or within certain periods. Real indulgences are attached to the use of certain objects (crucifix, rosary, medal); personal are those which do not require the use of any such material thing, or which are granted only to a certain class of individuals, e.g., members of an order or confraternity. The most important distinction, however, is that between plenary indulgences and partial. By a plenary indulgence is meant the remission of the entire temporal punishment due to sin so that no further expiation is required in Purgatory. A partial indulgence commutes only a certain portion of the penalty, and this portion is determined in accordance with the penitential discipline of the early Church. To say that an indulgence of so many days or years is granted means that it cancels an amount of purgatorial punishment equivalent to that which would have been remitted, in the sight of God, by the performance of so many days or years of
One of the oldest and most famous indulgences was that of the Porziuncola, originally to be gained through a pilgrimage to the Franciscan sites in Assisi (Italy). It is no wonder that this and other indulgences were first presented in a systematic way in Chinese by a Franciscan, Pedro de Piñuela (1650–1704) in his work Dashe jieliu 大赦解略 (A Short Explanation of Plenary Indulgences, BnF, Chinois 7275-I).189 In his 1689 preface to Piñuela’s work, the Christian literatus Liu Ning 劉凝 (ca. 1625 – ca. 1715) from Jiang-chang 建昌 (Jiangxi) explained to Chinese readers the connection of the other forms of remissions of sins, baptism and confession, with plenary indulgences. Liu praised

the Supreme Lord for his love, since he has given us baptism to cleanse the root of our original sin, and then again confession to expiate the filth of one’s sins. Even if we cannot avoid spending time in purgatory, we have the hope to go to heaven. Pitying people’s weakness, however, God has also given us the great grace of plenary indulgences (dashe 大赦).

He continued hinting that he had learnt about this practice from the Western literatus Piñuela, who had obviously explained to him that the Holy Mother and the saints had a treasury of merits at their disposal, that they could share with the faithful to free them from the pains of purgatory. Also the Franciscan opened his own explanation of the matter unambiguously connecting the rituals of baptism and confession to indulgences, calling them all “regulations” of Christianity (lingxi zhi gui 頌洗之規; jiezi zhi gui 释罪之規; dashe zhi gui 大赦之規). Moreover, it appeared clearly from the friar’s illustration of the necessary steps to obtain them, that plenary indulgences were a way to push the faithful to confession, mass attendance and prayer (especially the rosary).

The popularity of indulgences in eighteenth-century Chinese Catholic communities was mainly boosted by the diffusion of confraternities and the concern for the salvation of oneself and the deceased. Initially established mainly in urban centres in Jiangnan by the Jesuits in the 1640s to conduct religious activities in absence of priests, confraternities were later also established by other congregations. One of the attractions of a confraternity was the opportunity to earn merits for oneself and the souls in purgatory through the common prayer of the members.192 Let us examine an example from Fujian.

Dominicans established devotional confraternities such as the Confraternity of the Rosary, the Confraternity of the Girdle of St. Thomas, and the Confraternity of the Name of Jesus by the late Kangxi period (1680s–1720s) in Fujian.193 These groups were eminently devotional, and their aim was the accumulation of merits for the individual members, the earning of indulgences for the souls of purgatory, and the organization of processions and special functions. Confraternities of the Rosary (Meiguijinghui 玫瑰經會) were also endowed with a printed statute at the initiative of the Dominican

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189 For a summary of research about confraternities in China (and their different kinds, i.e., associations, congregations and sodalities), see HCC, pp. 456-461. The popularity of indulgences is also reflected in the publication in the 1780s of the Chinese translation of a short treatise on indulgences originally written by the Secretary of Propaganda Fide Stefano Borgia, entitled Enshi lüeshuo 恩赦略說 (A Short Explanation of Indulgences). In the Archives of Propaganda Fide, SCOP, vol. 67 (1791–1792), ff. 247-266, 267-285, 286-304, there are three copies of the Beijing edition of this small booklet in Chinese, sent to Rome by Procurator Giambattista Marchini in 1790. In ff. 233v-234v, Marchini explains that this booklet is the translation of Borgia’s Instruction on Indulgences originally given to the Congregato della Sacra Famiglia Giuseppe Cian [Zhang]. It was first translated into Chinese by the Bishop Cadradense Jean-Didier de St. Martin M.E.P. in 1787 with some other decrees. The manuscript was sent to the Bishop of Beijing Alexandre de Gouveia to be printed. Once this was done, copies were sent back to Macao, but de St. Martin discovered that some literati had corrected the text, and made it more concise and stylistically beautiful to them, but had ruined the original and orthodox meaning. Thus this book was never distributed. Marchini mentions a plan by Jean-Didier de St. Martin to later publish a corrected version again in Sichuan, and indeed a copy of the Sichuan edition can be found in the Bibliothèque Asiatique M.E.P., Paris (thanks to Ad Dudink for pointing the BAMEP copy to me). On this text, see Margiotti 1968, pp. 455-456, “Appendice: Piccola aggiunta alla bibliografia del Card. Stefano Borgia”; D’Arelli 2001.

190 References to such confraternities can be found in González 1955-1967, vol. 2, p. 296, quoting a letter by Fr. Matheu (1721) and another by Fr. Hoscote (1731); p. 441, referring to a letter by Fr. Teradillos (1756).

192 Preface by Liu Ning, October 13, 1689, in Piñuela 1689, ff. 1a-2b.

193 Piñuela 1689, f. 6a, describes the steps to get an indulgence as follows: repent, recite prayers, attend mass, receive communion, and chant the rosary and Angelus.
Vicar Apostolic of Fujian, Magino Ventallol in the early years of the eighteenth century, and thus we know most about their structure.\footnote{Ventallol (post 1718).}

Membership in the Confraternity of the Rosary was obtained by application to a Dominican priest, and only members could accrue benefits. Everybody, “rich and poor, man and woman, old and young, disabled or sick” was allowed to join. Even dead people could be enrolled, as others could pray on their behalf. Merit was gained through recitation of the rosary, and the practice was usually done privately. On the first Sunday of the month members were called to gather for common prayer. Also, special masses were celebrated for the souls of dead members on a series of Marian feast days. The only public activity of the Confraternity was a communal “welcoming” of the Holy Mother (yuying Shengmu 興迎聖母), that is a procession with her statue. The procession entailed special rituals and indulgences. The statue suggested as a meritorious deed the encouragement given to sick members to confess, and the escort of the holy sacrament to the house of the sick, or at least, if that was impossible, kneeling at the sound of the bell accompanying the sacrament. In case of death of a member, merit could be gained by paying for the celebration of masses, as well for a funerary ceremony at which a banner of Our Lady proper to the Confraternity could be brought.\footnote{Ventallol (post 1718), f. 17a.}

But, as clearly stated in the preface to the rules, the main purpose of the Confraternity was to obtain the remission of one’s sins in order to “ascend the path of Heaven,” and to gain indulgences for the souls of the dead in purgatory (lianzui 煉獄):

All those who recite this prayer [i.e., the rosary] will be bestowed with grace by the Lord of Heaven, and through the remission of sins they will ascend the path of Heaven. From the beginnings [of its establishment in Europe] until today, many in the whole world have entered this confraternity, and many have recited this prayer, many have received the merciful spiritual benefits of the Holy Mother who has performed numerous miracles. Over time many popes have granted great [i.e., plenary] and small [i.e., partial] indulgences to this confraternity. ... If one desires to obtain such grace, one must fully repent, confess, and take communion without being in sinful state. Otherwise, the state of sinfulness will hamper the indulgence, and how will it then be possible to have the penalty for the sins [to be expiated in] purgatory (lianzui 煉罪) remitted?\footnote{Ventallol post-1718, “Preface.” Gentili, a successor of Ventallol in Fujian in the mid-19th century, describes the procession of the Virgin’s statue for the feast of the Rosary in Zhangzhou, precisely the community where Ventallol resided most of his latter years. Gentili mentions that one of the main aims for the members of the Confraternity during the feast was to obtain copious indulgences; see Gentili 1888, vol. 3, pp. 215-216.}

Invariably, plenary indulgences were conditional to full contrition, sacramental confession, and communion. The confraternity’s aim, however, was not simply indulgence-earning for oneself, but also for one’s departed. This derived from the Catholic tradition but fit well with Chinese concerns for the deceased ancestors. Indulgences in the Catholic tradition were formally granted by the pope and consisted of a diminishing or cancelling of the punishment that God meted out at the time of the particular judgment over the souls in purgatory, while the souls in hell had no recourse. Living people could obtain this relief in form of “suffrage” from the Church due to their meritorious deeds or their prayers. The Virgin Mary and the saints were considered powerful intercessors in this process. Given the importance of filial piety in China, the Catholic system of indulgences could be quite attractive to Christians, who could gain through their merits and prayers the salvation of their baptized ancestors.\footnote{The description of the “communication of merits among saints” (communion of the saints; shengshen xiangtong gong 境神相通功), under which indulgences were subsumed, was explained to Chinese Christians in catechisms like the jiaoqiao jielue 教要解略 (see CCT ARSI, vol. 1, pp. 203-204), which compared the concept with the imperial bestowal of privileges on deceased ancestors; cf. Dudink 2004, p. 30, note 121. So-called “forms for the transmission of merit to the souls in purgatory” (tonggong lianling dan 通功煉靈單 or simply tonggong dan 通功單) were circulated at the time of death of Christians, carrying their names and a request that all Christians pray for the deceased; for eighteenth-century examples, see Qingzhong qianqiu Xi- yang Tianzhujiu zai Hua huodong dang'an shiliao 2003, vol. 1, pp. 287 and 421 (reproduction of a form confiscated by authorities in Sichuan).}

These Fujianese confraternities survived the suppression of the Yongzheng period. Looking retrospectively at the history of his Vicariate in 1773, a successor of Ventallol, the Spanish Dominican and Vicar Apostolic of Fujian Francisco Pallas, observed that at that date “in the Vicariate there are several places where, although none of the churches that stood there before the general destruction [of 1724] exist any longer, nevertheless we find Confraternities of the Rosary, established [in the past].” He did not know if they had been founded with the due solemnity, but he petitioned the Pope to forgive all defects, and “allow members to enjoy all the indulgences that members of similar Confraternities, men and women, enjoy elsewhere.” This confirms that earning of indulgences was indeed a central and permanent feature of the Confrater-
Other Confraternities, such as the Jesuit-sponsored Confraternity of the Annunciation of Our Lady in Beijing, worked in similar ways. The 1734 rules stipulated that complete contrition, sacramental confession and communion were the conditions for members to earn a plenary indulgence. This was also true of moribund members, who needed to be contrite, to confess, and to invoke the name of Jesus and Mary at their death-bed to be saved.\(^{199}\) Once again, the Confraternity’s activities aimed at inculcating among members the importance of regular confession to attain the purity to either communicate or be saved in the afterlife. Similar provisions could also be found in the statutes of another confraternity in Beijing, sponsored by the Carmelites in the Qianlong period, the Association of the Scapular of Mary.\(^{200}\) This picture is confirmed in a 1788 letter by the Propaganda missionary in Beijing Giacomo Ferretti (ca. 1754–1824). In mentioning the devotional activities of a number of confraternities in the capital, such as his own Confraternity of the Seven Sorrows, the Confraternity of the Carmel in Haidian district, the Confraternity of the Holy Sacrament at the French Jesuit church, the Confraternity of the Annunciation of Mary at the Cathedral, and the Confraternity of Good Death at the Dongtang church, he found that they were very useful since they encouraged Christians to meet at least monthly, to confess and to communicate.

Excesses, however, were not lacking, as Ferretti acknowledged. For example, in the Chinese language manual of his own confraternity he found written that “the Virgin goes down every Saturday to Purgatory to free souls of deceased confreres.” Members had also a wrong concept of sin, since they considered a mortal sin to miss fast on Wednesday, but not on Friday and Saturday, which were the canonical days for abstinence. Finally, like “some rascals in Naples” (“alcuni lazaroni napolitani”), Beijing Christians sometimes tended to “trust more Saint Gennaro than Jesus himself,” that is to rely on the intercession of saints more than on God’s mercy.\(^{201}\) These behaviours indicate that Christians were very much concerned with the efficacy of their devotional activities and rituals, and in particular with the indulgences for the dead, and this seem to be a second important factor that encouraged their diffusion.

\(^{199}\) See the statutes of the Confraternity, section Shengmu lingbaohuai dashe guiti 聖母領報會大赦規條 (Regulations of the Plenary Indulgences of the Confraternity of the Annunciation of Our Lady), in Soares 1694, f. 7a.

\(^{200}\) See the statutes on indulgences in Prugmayer 1759, ff. 45a–49b.


The desire for efficacy, compounded by rivalry among missionaries, probably encouraged a sort of inflationary phenomenon of indulgences. In Huaguan, for example, the Portuguese Jesuit João Duarte (1671–1752), in competition with the Vicar Apostolic Johannes Müllener C.M. (1673–1742), issued in the late 1730s printed fliers with formulas of partial indulgences so outrageous, that the Vicar asked Rome whether they were authentic. The indulgence stipulated that “with contrition and the recitation of seven Our Father and Hail Mary on any day of Lent, except on Sundays and other days of the year, one earns 154,000 years of indulgences. Moreover, without confessing and taking communion, it is enough to repent and recite these seven Our Father and Hail Mary to earn plenary indulgence and the liberation of a soul from purgatory, ... as it would be for the special indulgence of the Seven Churches of Rome.”\(^{202}\) The earning of partial indulgences without confession and communion made it particularly easy to intervene in favour of one’s deceased relatives. Other indulgences required some more effort, although their authenticity was also doubted by Müllener: those who recited 34,000 Our Father and Hail Mary, or attended 34 masses, or fasted for 34 times, or mortified themselves for 34 times, or did 34 deeds of mercy, would free 34 souls from Purgatory and convert 34 sinners ... and so on.\(^{203}\) Yet, most indulgences were simply attached to medals and rosaries distributed by missionaries (so-called “real indulgences”). Their possession, together with prayer, was sufficient for the earning of the benefits. When imported medals were lacking, missionaries resorted to small paper images in the form of medals, as Duarte did with stamps of the Immaculate.\(^{204}\) Thus in these cases contrition, confession, and communion were not always necessary.

\(^{202}\) Letter of Müllener to Propaganda Fide, Aug. 30, 1737, in APF, SOCP, vol. 47 (1738), f. 140r. The Chinese-language transcript of this flier can be found in APF, SOCP, vol. 47 (1738), f. 150v-v, Lingbao dao da dao da dao dao 餞拜會活動 灘禮大赦單 (Table of the Plenary Indulgences on Moveable Feasts of the Confraternity of the Annunciation of Our Lady).

\(^{203}\) See APF, SOCP, vol. 47 (1738), f. 154r: “教皇新頒大赦，一件念天主經三萬四千遍，念聖母經三萬四千遍，一件聽彌撒二十四遍，一件守大齋三十日，一件克己三十四次，一件行善，每行善事三十四次，一件行對人之大善，三十四次改惡行善，諸此專心心向耶穌聖心所求。”

\(^{204}\) See APF, SOCP, vol. 47 (1738), f. 155r. This document contains a series of indulgences for those who pray the Rosary or part of it in front of an image of the Immaculate Mary. At the back of the letter is glued a small image of Mary made with a black ink stamp of poor quality. The oval stamp seems to be of Chinese manufacture, with an image of the Virgin surrounded by the kind of clouds typically found in Chinese paintings.
In sum, indulgences were not only a way to encourage confession and communion, but also a system that allowed Christians to eliminate the consequences of sins through personal devotion and a rituality sustained by recitational prayer, fasting, sacramentals, and the like. Although they trusted the power of relics and prayer, Ricci and Aleni would have probably found the eighteenth century penances shallow and of little consequence for moral growth. But for many Christians, they provided a method of accountability to deal with sin and its consequences in their life, and offered a personal way to enhance the efficacy of sacramental confession.

CONCLUSION
Confession and Salvation

In 1683, the Sicilian Jesuit Prospero Intorcetta wrote back home, describing the work he had been doing in the previous five years on the beautiful church of Hangzhou, built in baroque style by his confère Martino Martini. The church’s interior had been all covered in colors and Chinese varnish, but, Intorcetta proudly observed “what attracts an infinite multitude of people of all conditions and of both sexes to see and admire [the building] is the large number of sacred images.”

The paintings, eighty-four in total and some very large indeed, were placed in different parts of the church, and organized in different groups by themes. On the main altar, besides an image of the Saviour, one could see the genealogy of Christ starting with Abraham, some episodes of the early life of Christ and of the Virgin, the Evangelists and some Fathers of the Church. The two side altars, dedicated to St. Paul and St. Peter and closed by grilles, contained more images of male and female saints and two baptismal scenes (of Christ, and emperor Constantine, possibly a reference to hopes of conversion for the Chinese emperor), among others. The frontispiece of the choir contained images about the latter part of the life of Jesus, including the Last Supper and the Resurrection. At the entrance gates were 206 four paintings of the Four Ends (death, judgment, paradise and hell). On the walls of the naves, the paintings were divided in upper and lower levels: on top were images of Apostles and saints, whereas in the lower level, covered by “golden grilles to defend them from the touch of the people” (con suoi cancelli dorati avanti che li diffendano dai tocco delle mani del popolo) were ten images of Christ’s miracles, including the exorcism of a possessed man and the resurrection of Lazarus. All images had an explanation in Chinese characters attached to them.

One can imagine the missionary or the catechists explaining the pictures to visitors, using the vivid images to proselytize, or even individuals wandering by themselves in the temple. While literati could read the Chinese inscriptions, illiterate could enjoy the figures and the stories as explained to them. As Charles Le Gobien S.J. (1653–1708) put it, in describing the paintings at a later date, “every painting was like a preacher, who announced to all onlookers the truth of the Gospel, in a way accommodated to the capabilities of each, and to their intelligence. Each would get some teaching: the rustic people (il popolo rozzo) from the figures that they saw, and the literati from the explanations attached.”

Upon entering the gates, the first images encountered by a visitor were the most shocking: the Four Ends, presenting the themes of death and the afterlife. Then, followed a cycle of sensational depictions of the kind of efficacious miracles that attracted many Chinese to Christianity (Intorcetta called them popolo): exorcism of evil spirits and healing. The cycle also contained a depiction of the remission of sins: Christ saves the adulterous woman from stoning, and forgives her. On the other hand, the higher level of the church and the altars carried glorious images of Christ and his life, and dignified portraits of saints. This was a gallery of exemplary figures, and of the majestic, almost imperial images of Christ.

I find highly suggestive that the Jesuits who planned the paintings were keenly aware of the different levels of readings involved. Literati may have been more attracted to the pictures in the altars and the upper fringe of the

207 Couplet’s depictions in his Simo zhenlun and the Wierix’s prints can give us an idea of what the paintings in Hangzhou may have represented. A very good summary of the historical development of the idea of the Four Ends can be found in Dictionnaire de spiritualité, vols. 23-24, entry “Fins derniers” by Paul Thion, cols. 356-382. On images of the Four Ends in early modern Europe, see e.g., Martins 1997. On images of Christian hell and paradise in China, see Standaert 1994; cf. Civil 1996, especially pp. 393-399, “L’enfer dans les ‘Imágenes de la Historia Evangelética’”, i.e., the work of Jeronimo Nadal S.J., reproduced in China by Aleni.
naves. The popolo may have found more enticing the miracle stories and the Novissima, so close to their touch and eyes. Yet, all visitors alike were aware of the two levels, and Christians experienced the two dimensions as closely intertwined in their catechetical instruction and ritual practices. In the perspective of my essay, the Hangzhou cycle of paintings seems to bring together the complex interaction of the pastoral of perfection and of fear which underpinned sacramental confession.

At the beginning of his mission Ricci spent notable efforts in introducing the ideas of sin and self-examination. This reflected the Jesuit spiritual style, so concerned with moral betterment (e.g., through the Spiritual Exercises), fitting well with the Confucian discourse of self-cultivation. However, the meditation practices also prepared the ground for the sacrament of penance. Moreover, as I have shown, the sacraments of baptism and confession were both firmly linked to the idea of salvation, and especially confession— to the themes of the passing of time and of memento mori presented by Ricci.

Starting in the 1630s, Aleni’s prescriptive texts fully illustrated the ritual elements of confession within the context of the early Jesuit spiritual emphasis for self-cultivation, paying great attention to examination and contrition, and to disinterested love for God as motivation for repentance, as contemporary writings by Christian literati also confirm. Yet, the search for perfection was never separated from fear and scruples, and the practices of the purgative way. As Part Two has suggested, the daily experience of confession was powerfully connected with the Christians’ concern for salvation in the afterlife. The kind of audiences that increasingly occupied the missionaries, as well as their growing numbers, determined a growing neglect of individualized spiritual direction through confession (with the exceptions, of course, of the most devout sectors of the communities, or of the most scrupulous priests, like the M.E.P. missionaries in Sichuan), and a rise in a penitential mentality concerned with efficaciousness, that found its climax in the phenomenon of indulgences in the eighteenth century. Although annual confession and confession in articulo mortis remained paramount concerns, indulgences allowed Chinese Christians who had little chances to see a priest, especially in time of persecution, to earn “salvation credit” in the afterlife for themselves and their beloved, supplementing the efficacy of the sacrament of penance.

It would be an error to think, however, that literati and commoners held different feelings towards the eternal consequences of their sins. One of Aleni’s followers, Li Sixuan 李嗣玄 (d. after 1661), expressed his fears rather clearly. When “confession and absolution had fallen into abeyance” due to the disruptions of the Ming-Qing war in his native Fujian (Fujian) in 1646, Li was overwhelmed with horror for his sins, and yet felt also consoled at the remembrance of the spiritual guidance and the sacramental absolution that Aleni had given him the previous year:

Sin and crime were piled up like mountains— thinking of that made one perspire [with fear]. But just because I was so afraid [of the consequences] of my own sins, I was even more grateful for the favours received from my teacher Aleni, and I could not help weeping, tears running down and across [my face].

In those perilous times, death was a daily matter, and the piling up of sins, as it had been the case for Miao Shixiang in Fuan, created enormous anxiety. Even in times of peace, however, apprehension over sins and death never abated. This poem by the prominent Hangzhou Christian Zhang Xing-yao 張星曜 (1633 – post 1715), entitled Shiou ming 死候銘 (On Death) and belonging to a set of four poems, Shiou ming 四末銘 (The Four Ends), was possibly inspired in the 1680s by the first printing of the Novissima commissioned by Intorcetta for the local church, the one on death. It eerily echoes the canzone translated by Ricci into Chinese that opened my essay, but with an even stronger sense of urgency:

The time of your death,

is so sudden that it cannot be known.
The good and evil of your life,
at this point cannot be altered.
Wife and children all encircle you.

---

209 The Jesuit Gottfried Xaver von Laimbeckhoven (1707–1787) thought that even the most ignorant Christians in the eighteenth century retained at least the idea of salvation, and “believed that if they received the Holy Oils on their deathbed, they would go straight to heaven.” However, these people usually cared little for confession and communion on the point of death, a further confirmation of an increase in mechanistic rituality during periods of suppression and diminished priestly control; see Krah 1964, p. 141.

210 Erik Zürcher’s translation of the biography of Giulio Aleni by Li Sixuan, in Zürcher 1997, p. 115 (see Chinese text in CCT ARSI, vol. 12, p. 256). The main task of Aleni’s tours at this time of civil war, apparently, was precisely to administer confession; see Zürcher 1997, p. 113, and CCT ARSI, vol. 12, p. 255.
as their love and longing seek to hold you,
But sickness and pain oppress your body,
while the fear and dread are unbearable.
If the Lord does not protect you,
you will surely be bound by Satan.
Convert to good and correct your faults,
guarding against danger hour by hour.
Do not indulge the desires of your flesh,
nor departs from thoughts of the Way.
Time is a galloping colt,
you still must be unwaried in your efforts.\(^{211}\)

Only “converting to good and correcting one’s faults” could free the dying
from the bounds of Satan. Only sacramental confession could make the fear
and dread of one’s sins bearable. Confession, it appears, had truly become
one of the central rituals of Chinese Christianity, a ritual that offered relief
and hope of salvation, as a community of believers and as individual sin-
ners.

\(^{211}\) I have adopted Mungello’s translation (Mungello 1994, p. 169), but modified it in
two points: qianshan saiguo 態善善果 “Move toward the good and away from evil”
I rendered as “Convert to good and correct your faults”; and shangwu zizi 尚務孳孳
“and it you must urgently heed” as “and you still must be unwaried in your efforts,”
where zizi 孳孳 means “diligent, hardworking,” and alludes to the expression
zizi/zizi wei shan 孽孽/孳孳為善 “persevere in doing good”; see Zhang, Shengjiao
zanning 聖教贊銘 (Inscriptions in Praise of the Holy Teachings), BnF, Chinois
7067, f. 11b.

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### Appendix 2

**Confiteor and Act of Contrition**

See Brunner 1964, pp. 275-276.

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**Act of Contrition 悔罪經**

Version A (addressed to God the Father) in WXSBS, vol. 3, p. 1246-1247:

至仁至慈者。天地大君，統一普生無上真主，我重罪人。自為所生，今因愛慕吾主至切之情超於萬物，哀誠深悔，以前種種罪惡，願失天下萬福，盡歸天下萬苦。不願積罪於吾身至無善主。以後堅守聖命，一切棄絕罪惡之端，至死無敢復犯。敢望吾主聖子耶穌，既為我等罪人。甘心受難，便我祈求。願賜無量，全然賜赦。全然佑改，如是恆守，以至死後。得享吾主無限真福。亞孟。

Version B (addressed to Jesus) in CCT ARSI, vol. 4, pp. 441-442:

吾主耶穌基利斯督，爾乃是真天主。與眾聖助。及斯彼利多三多。始造天地萬物。而常為之主宰。爾又統是真人。生於瑪利亞之童身。自受聖助受死。救我眾。我今為爾是吾人。又且愛爾萬物之上。一心痛悔我曾貶於爾。自後決意毋敢為非。並應遠犯惡之端。以時恭請聖士而誡德。自願告解我罪。而承所令罪罰。我願生命功行苦勞。供獻吾主前。補我從前所有罪過。亦望允我祈求。願賜無量。特特無限仁慈。念爾聖血實死莫大恩功。全然賜赦。全然佑改，如是恆守。以至死候。亞孟。
Appendix 3

_Gaojie si yao_ 告解四要 (The Four Essentials of Confession)

Bibliothèque nationale de France, Paris, _Chinois_ 7276-VIII

Printed at the Yiyi 友義 Hall, Hengpu 洪浦, alternative name for Nan’an Prefecture 南安府, Jiangxi 江西. The text is printed on a single long page (59 x 21 cm.), clearly prepared for distribution as a quick reference for penitents and people receiving catechization.

The Franciscans established a mission in Nan’an starting in 1686, thanks to the assistance of a local “mandarin” called “John Li Pe-ming.” Augustin de S. Pascual O.F.M. and Pedro de la Pituela O.F.M. (especially the second) were the founders of this community. There were one main church (St. Joseph) and two chapels for women _intra muros_ (one dedicated to Our Lady). The community was very fervent, according to the _Lettres édifiantes_. In the surrounding countryside there were at least another three churches by the early eighteenth century. Although the resident Franciscans were expelled in 1724, Christian communities might have continued to exist, since one is mentioned in 1748 (see Dehergne 1967, pp. 238-240).

Translation

In His boundless mercy the Lord of Heaven has established the ritual of baptism, so that we may be forgiven the sins [committed] before becoming Christians. He has also instituted the ritual of confession, so that we may receive forgiveness [lit. amnesty] for the sins [committed] after baptism. Those who after conversion still unfortunately commit sins in front of the Lord, depending on [His] grace and protection, must do their duty (i.e., take responsibility for their sins) and engage in the ritual of confession, and only then can they receive the grace of forgiveness of sin. If people are slow and do not do their duty, then they reject the love of the Lord of Heaven for humankind. Therefore I have now composed these few sentences to give guidance to the Christians, and help them in receiving absolution from sin. There are four essentials in confession:

1. Examination (xíng 省);
2. Repentance (huǐ 悔);
3. Confession (gào 告);
4. Satisfaction (bǔ 補).

1. The examination must be detailed, and one must examine thoughts, words, actions and omissions. There are three three types of evil thoughts: in the first case, evil thoughts arise, and we are quick to suppress them; in this case not only no sin is committed, but one also acquires merit. In the second case, evil thoughts arise, and they come and go, and are not extinguished. Certainly there is sin here. In the third case, evil thoughts arise, and not only they are not suppressed but they linger on in the heart, so that one enjoys them and desires to put them into practice. Even if they are not realised outside, sin is generated inside, and this is not far from actually committing the sin. The three must obviously be differentiated, and in considering the gravity of a fault we must distinguish the venial (lit. light) and the mortal (lit. heavy) sins. As to faults in words, among the venial ones are idle talk or nonsense etc., which do not wound people too much, but still are sinful. Among the mortal ones are making empty oaths, giving false testimony and cursing, as well as expose the secret faults of others, and this inevitably harm others and oneself, and thus must be examined. In making examination of one’s actions, one should examine the Ten Commandments, the Four Precepts [of the Church], and the Seven Capital Sins, and for each consider if he did something evil. Even in the good actions one should consider whether there is something not good mixed within, such as when one becomes Christian and gives alms, but does not think of the Lord, and rather is moved by the search for wealth or fame. To examine omissions one must check if one should have done good and did not do it, and then examine whether the transgressions of others are due to you. If the head of a family does not take charge of those under him, and sits idle looking at them breaking the Commandments, while instead he should teach them, and he does not do it, the sin is on him. Thus all who want to confess must first recall all the places frequented, the actions done, the people met either in the time after baptism, or from the moment of one’s last confession. Then they have [to ascertain] if in thoughts, words, actions and omissions they have sinned towards the Lord, towards others or towards themselves. If they have committed [such sins], then they have to specify how many times. Those who do not first engage in this examination as a preparation should not lightly ask to be confessed. Because if one does not do examination, and as a consequence does not confess a mortal sin, then not only the [confessed] sins are not absolved, but rather one adds another mortal sin. If one uses of this examination [system] but does not recall all, although there is a sin which is not confessed, there is no harm in this.

2. Contrition must be sincere. Human repentance is not difficult, but true repentance is. In measuring the weaknesses of people, how is it possible to be truly repentant by oneself? Only the Lord can move people to repentance. But if we sincerely pray the Lord for this, we will be always given the full and true gift of contrition. True contrition comprises several principles. First: love for the Lord. Through faith we know that the Lord is the highest and most excellent, and that he has by his own volition created us and preserves
us. He became incarnated for us to help us to go to Heaven, and continuously bestows graces on us. In our hearts we shall love the Lord above the creation, mankind and ourselves. Due to our sins we fail to live up to this duty, which is a most hateful and evil thing to do. Second: betterment of oneself. In repenting for previous sins we shall set our will so that we may never again dare to go against the will of the Lord in the future. We should also decide to extinguish the reasons that cause one to sin. We should also agree to give satisfaction by either returning money or goods to people, or by restoring their name. Even if we were to lose all the things of the world, be despised by others and be harmed, we shall never infringe upon the Commandments and the [Four] Precepts. Third: willingness to confess. The Lord has established the ritual of confession to absolve humans of sins. All those who feel contrition for their sins should then confess. It may be that to confess is felt as unpleasant, and yet one must set one’s will in going in front of a priest and confess all the sins committed. Then one will be careful in respecting the rituals instituted by the Lord. Otherwise repentance is untrue and sins cannot be forgiven. Fourth: hope of absolution. Once a sinner has firmly decided to reform with true contrition, he will have to hope for the Lord’s mercy. If one relies on the boundless merits of our Lord Jesus in saving the world, and accepts his responsibility, no matter how many and how serious his sins, he will no doubt be forgiven. But all those who lose hope will just add a sin. Some ask: “We through faith clearly know that the Lord punishes sinners with the eternal pain of Hell, and denies them ascent to Paradise. If one repents for fear of the eternal pain or for shame for one’s sins, can he obtain forgiveness?” I respond: In the religion of the Lord the basis is love, and fear is the last factor. Even if to fear the Lord is good, it is better to love the Lord. If repentance comes from love, those who reform, wish to confess and hope for forgiveness, will be forgiven by the Lord even if they are unable to confess [sacramentally]. But if one repents out of fear, even if one decides to reform, is willing to confess and hopes for forgiveness, he will certainly not be forgiven by the Lord, if he actually does not confess. But if one confesses out of fear for the severe punishment of the Lord, one will obtain the grace of forgiveness of sins by the Lord.

3. Confession must be full. Those who wish to confess must make an examination of conscience and show feelings of repentance. Then they shall go in front of a priest, take off their cap and kneel, and recite the Confiteor (Jiezuijing 解罪經) up to the point [where it says] “I confess my most grave sin etc. (mea maxima culpa),” and then confess to the priest as if they were in front of the Lord. First one should explain how long elapsed either since the time one converted or since the time one last confessed. If one did not fulfil the works of satisfaction prescribed in the previous confession, or there is something he neglected to mention [in previous confessions], he shall first declare it. One shall confess the sins committed, one by one, following the order of the Ten Commandments, the Four Precepts and the Seven Capital Sins, in thoughts, words, works or omissions. One should not talk about irrelevant or unimportant matters, nor the bad behaviour of others. However, of each sin one should clearly enumerate the number of times committed. If one does not remember every instance, he should at least describe the sin in general, and that will be sufficient. If one engages in a faulty examination, or by purpose hides a sin out of shame or fear, even if he has hidden only one sin and all the others have been confessed, nevertheless, together with the omitted sin, even the other confessed sins will not receive forgiveness, but he rather will be committing a mortal sin of deception. [In such cases], those who want to obtain forgiveness must again confess all in detail, as if one had not confessed yet, and they should also confess their sin of deception. If one forgets a sin, there is no consequence. But if one remembers the sin the next time he confesses, he must confess also that forgotten sin. All penitents must acknowledge that they are sinners, humbly meditate on one’s faults and on the orders of the most respectful and good Lord of Mercy, feeling ashamed and blaming themselves for their faults. If they do not dare to hide their sins in this way, then they will have made a full confession. Once the sins are disclosed all, one shall recite [the remaining part of the Confiteor] until the end.

4. Satisfaction must be swift. After having confessed and obtained the grace of absolution, one must soon fulfil what the priest has ordered. Of the utmost importance is to eliminate the occasions of temptation into sins, such as the presence of a concubine at home, or some hatred in one’s heart, or unfair business practices etc. If one does not heed to the advice of the priest, he will never be forgiven. If one owes people money or damages someone’s name, one should make reparations. If one does not do it, his sins will not be forgiven. If one’s substances are insufficient, one should agree to repay once he has enough money. Moreover, one should not delay the penance set by the priest. Be it recitation of prayers, fasting or giving of alms, one should take the initiative by himself in accordance with [what] the priest [has said]. How can those who do not take action and are lazy be without sin? The instructions of the priests do not represent himself, but the orders of the Lord, so as to be forgiven. Once the works of satisfaction are done, one should also thank the Lord for his grace and ask his protection to avoid sin in the future.
Appendix 4

Examination List from Dizui zhenggui lüe, ff. 5a-7b
(WXSB, vol. 3, pp. 1205-1210)

"First Commandment:
I am the Lord thy God. Thou shalt not have strange gods before me."

[5a] "Those who, right after conversion, still harbour in their heart lingering
doubts, either for some reason or because they have not repented for their own
sins yet, and have not set their will on reforming, but still receive baptism in a
superficial way, commit a sin.
Those who, after conversion, are assailed by doubts regarding God, or, if
the catechism is not clear, do not ask for explanations, but on the contrary con-
tinue to take their time and discuss [matters of faith], commit a sin. […]

[5b] Those who believe in portents regarding the future, look for oracles,
use the services of diviners, trust homelogy or have faith in fengshui practices
or in astrology, commit a sin.
Those who celebrate false rituals in temples dedicated to gods and Buddh-
as, chant sutras and incantations, or pay common dues in order to have a jiao
ceremony, or pray to the gods for favours, collaborate to the production of [pa-
gan] paintings or heterodox images, burn paper money, and hold such false
beliefs for the sake of getting rich easily, commit a sin.
Those who write charms and recite incantations and have apparitions of
strange phenomena commit a sin.
Those who hide heterodox books and images, or in order to get rid of them,
donate them to others, commit a sin.

[6a] Those who secretly congregate with Buddhist monks, Daoist priests and
other sorcerers, and do not avoid their subtle influence, or allow to mix in het-
erodox things, following the world and the [opinion of] men, without distin-
guishing true from false, or without exercising self-judgement and being deceit-
ful in matters of duty commit a sin.
Those who believe in the books of the eclectics (baijia) or of the sorcerers
and numerologists, take some words that are similar to those found in these
texts and expound them to others, confounding their minds, commit a sin.
Those who, if they have fallen into sin, lose hope in the Lord’s mercy, and
as a consequence become discouraged and suppose they are destined for damn-
ation in hell, commit a sin.

[6b] Those who at will commit sins and evil, counting on the mercy of the
Lord, or falsely engage in things that should not be done expecting to be ab-
solved in confession and to go to heaven without any merit, only increase their
sins.
Those who, when in poverty, sickness or difficult times do not self-examine
their sins, but on the contrary blame the Lord for not helping and protecting
them, or curse themselves, commit a sin.

Those who hope that the Lord will do miracles and thus try the Lord, com-
mit a sin.
Those who have sinned, but falsely say that it is unnecessary to go to con-
fession, and that they can get absolution by themselves, or when the opportunity
[to confess] is there [7a] do not exert themselves in seeking confession and do
not ask for confession, commit a sin.
Those who have sinned and ask for confession, but do not first examine their
faults, and get to the point of forgetting to confess grave sins, or are not con-
tinue towards the Lord and do not set their will towards a swift reform, or hide
and do not confess completely their sins, make their sins even more egregious; those
who do not fulfil the penance meted out by the priest, commit a sin.
Those who have more attachment to the things of the world than to the Lord,
or because of worldly occupations neglect religious works and do not treasure
the grace of the Lord commit a sin.

[7b] Those who are preoccupied of the judgement of others and do not en-
gage in dutiful good deeds or are ashamed in front of others to profess [Chris-
tianity], and in fear of officials, when asked about it, do not directly acknowledge
that they are Christians, commit a sin."

Appendix 5

Statistical Analysis and Tables

Here I offer a preliminary statistical assessment of the practice of sacramental
confession. I mainly rely on eighteenth and early nineteenth century figures,
since it was only in the eighteenth century that ecclesiastical authorities appa-
rently started asking missionaries for some precise accounting of their pastoral
work, including the number of confessions. The statistics I have examined so
far show notable differences in the relationship between the number of confessions
and the number of communions depending on the religious order. This indi-
cates that there were different opinions on the role of communion, either con-
templated by the more lenient missionaries as an obligation to be fulfilled at the time
of confession, or rather seen by the more rigorous priests as a rare reward, of
which only the best Christian were worthy. Theological debates in Europe on
frequent communion, the personal background of single missionaries, as well as
their pastoral experience in China, had a bearing on the attitude of the clergy on
this matter, and this also accounts for changes over time.

The Jesuits and the M.E.P. missionaries, apparently, were much more re-
luctant to administer communion than other orders. In Changshu, for example,
the number of people who confessed in 1644 was around 2,000, but those who
communicated were only 500 (25%). The source comments that "this is already
a large number, considered the severity with which the Fathers behave in this
made of confession, and I suspect this was due to the fact that confessors were available all year round in the urban setting of the Beitang. On the contrary, the number of yearly confessions and communions is given for the rural communities of Bei Zhili, for an aggregate of 3,621 and 2,668 respectively, possibly because those communities were only occasionally visited by itinerant priests.\(^{217}\)

Overall, we see a relatively high percentage of Christians (around 50% – 60%) being confessed yearly in Jesuit, M.E.P., Dominican and Lazarist communities. In this percentage, I suspect that a higher portion was made up of women and children rather than men, since sources lamented that male attendance of the sacraments was often a problem.

### Dominican Mission of Fujian, 1730s–1740s

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Locale and missionary</th>
<th>Yearly Confessions</th>
<th>Source</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1734</td>
<td>Fuan and neighbouring villages (Serrano)</td>
<td>670</td>
<td>GH II, p. 257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1735</td>
<td>Muyang (Alcober)</td>
<td>300 (out of Christian population of 600 adults + 300 children, i.e., 30%)</td>
<td>GH II, p. 257</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1736</td>
<td>Muyang</td>
<td>587 (528 communions)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1738</td>
<td>Fuan (Serrano)</td>
<td>Adults (with communion): 985 Children (no communion): 78</td>
<td>GM II, p. 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1739</td>
<td>Fuan and neighbouring villages (Serrano)</td>
<td>Adults (with communion): 1007 Children (no communion): 78</td>
<td>GM II, p. 113</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1740</td>
<td>Fuan (Serrano)</td>
<td>585</td>
<td>GM II, p. 116</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1742</td>
<td>Fuan (Serrano)</td>
<td>800</td>
<td>GM II, p. 471</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1745</td>
<td>Muyang and vicinity (Sanz)</td>
<td>1,056</td>
<td>GM II, pp. 136-137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1746</td>
<td>Qidong (Novai)</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>id.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1747</td>
<td>Qitian (Royo)</td>
<td>300</td>
<td>id.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1748</td>
<td>Dingou (Diaz)</td>
<td>382</td>
<td>id.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1749</td>
<td>Ganiapan (?) (Alcober)</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>id.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1750</td>
<td>Qitian and vicinity (Royo)</td>
<td>1,497</td>
<td>id.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1751</td>
<td>Dingou and vicinity (Alcober)</td>
<td>1,100</td>
<td>id.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

---


**Guanzh and vicinity (F. Díaz)**
- 751

**Qidong and Fuan (Serrano)**
- 1,357


### Dominican Mission of Fujian, 1760s: Fuan mission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Number of confessions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1760</td>
<td>1,150 (Teradillos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,356 (Felici)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>700 (Miao de S. Rosa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1761</td>
<td>1,282 (Teradillos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2,936 (Felici)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1762</td>
<td>1,624 (Teradillos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,434 (Loranco)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,889 (Miao de S. Rosa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,113 (Huy de S. Tomás)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1764</td>
<td>1,321 (Teradillos)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>350 (Miao de S. Rosa)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>857 (Huy de S. Tomás)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1,500 (Nien)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


### M.E.P. Mission in Sichuan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Yearly confessions</th>
<th>Yearly communions</th>
<th>Number of Christians</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1758</td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>487</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1767</td>
<td>2,056</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1769</td>
<td>3,040</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1770</td>
<td>2,996</td>
<td>1,984</td>
<td>5,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1771</td>
<td>2,564</td>
<td>1,710</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1773</td>
<td>2,155</td>
<td>1,384</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1775</td>
<td>3,647</td>
<td>2,697</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1777</td>
<td>5,010</td>
<td>3,100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1778</td>
<td>4,800</td>
<td>2,965</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1780</td>
<td>5,940</td>
<td>2,841</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1781</td>
<td>6,366</td>
<td>2,328</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1786</td>
<td>6,000</td>
<td></td>
<td>[in 1784: 15,000]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1787</td>
<td>6,580</td>
<td>1,938</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1790</td>
<td>11,053</td>
<td></td>
<td>[in 1789: 20,000]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1792</td>
<td>13,963</td>
<td>5,227</td>
<td>25,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1796</td>
<td>14,660</td>
<td>6,265</td>
<td>[in 1795: 30,000]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1801</td>
<td>17,485 (23,490 ?)</td>
<td>8,225</td>
<td>40,000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1804</td>
<td>1,832</td>
<td></td>
<td>47,867</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1810</td>
<td>34,215</td>
<td>14,598</td>
<td>[in 1809: 56,165]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1812</td>
<td>34,562</td>
<td>14,038</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1813</td>
<td>34,723 (3,382 do not confess ?)</td>
<td>13,805</td>
<td>55,000-60,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Second of the Four Last Things: Judgment
Philippe Couplet, *Simo zhenlu* 四末真論 (1676),
BAV: Borg. cin. 345.7, f. 5b.

The Third of the Four Last Things: Heaven
Philippe Couplet, *Simo zhenlu* 四末真論 (1676),
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