

THE GREENWOOD ENCYCLOPEDIA OF
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& *Sexuality* THROUGH
HISTORY

THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD

Volume 3

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gratification during intercourse, a right that was generally retained by the older man. By the seventeenth century, ideas of erotic pleasure in pederastic unions seem to have changed markedly. Literary accounts that emphasize the duty of the older partner to gratify his younger companion are frequent and particularly rich with details about the best way for achieving mutual pleasure. See also *Adultery; Anal Sex; Homosexuality*.

Further Reading: Rooke, Michael. *Forbidden Friendships: Homosexuality and Male Culture in Renaissance Florence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996; Murray, Stephen O. *Homosexualities*. London: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

Sergio Rigoletto

PENITENTIAL PRACTICES. Catholic penitential practices, and especially the sacrament of penance or confession, were ubiquitous fixtures in the lives of Christians both in early modern Europe and in missionary territories opened up by European expansion overseas. Unlike in Central and Southern America, however, missionaries in East Asia did not operate within a framework of colonial dominance, but rather tried to accommodate local cultures and sociopolitical systems. In the early modern Chinese Christian communities, as was the case in Japan, awareness of sin and rituals to eliminate or control sins constituted one of the core religious offerings of **Christianity**. Missionaries built upon conceptions of sinfulness and confession that had already existed for centuries in **Daoism** and **Buddhism**, but they also introduced practices, such as auricular confession, which were new and controversial in the East Asian context.

Missionaries to China usually brought with them at least a treatise of casuistry or a confessional *summa*, and one of their first duties was to administer sacramental confession, memorizing confessional dialogues in Chinese even before they had reached sufficient fluency. Baptism was the initial ritual of “general confession” and absolution for catechumens. Early Jesuit *doctrinae* in Chinese dating from the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries described 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. Adult converts also placed great emphasis on baptism as a way to wash away past sins, rather than merely seeing it as a liminal ritual to join the Christian community, a fact reflected in written protestations of faith read on the day of baptism, acknowledging one’s sins.

Chinese Christians were initiated to the sacrament of penance only gradually, as missionaries did not admit neophytes to confession and communion in the period immediately following baptism, fearing a possible relapse. Moreover, instruction up to the 1620s, especially in rural contexts and among commoners, was quickly accomplished during brief rural missions, and done orally or through very simple catechisms. Thus, sacramental confession remained a rare ritual, mainly performed annually, and depending on the presence of the few priests available.

Lay leaders imparted preliminary education on the sacrament mainly through texts cheaply and easily produced in the Chinese tradition of xylograph **printing**. Chinese-language texts on confession fell within four main categories, addressing both Christian and non-Christian publics: simple catechetical texts on confession for the vast majority of Christians; more sophisticated texts for Christian literati; apologetic texts in defense of the sacrament for non-Christians; and rare ritual manuals for Chinese priests. The exhaustive *Dizui zhenggui* (*Correct Rules to Wash away Sins*, 1627) and a more popular abridged version of it, both by the Italian Jesuit Giulio Aleni (1582–1649), are the foundational texts on sacramental penance in the China mission. These texts were inspired by contemporary Italian printed confessionals for penitents (such as *De*

sacramento poenitentiae by Luca Pinelli S.J., 1613), which were no longer simple lists of sins in the late medieval tradition, but rather explanatory and devotional texts on the sacrament for lay readers. In their most simplified form, these texts became an outline of the penitential steps written in vernacular Chinese onto one single sheet of paper. These flyers 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 texts, was suited to a rural audience.

Catholic penitential rituals presented unique problems in the Chinese context. In Daoism and especially Buddhism, confession of sins was a public event, done by monks in front of their monastic communities, and did not entail close contact between priest and penitent as seen in the Catholic tradition. Even the so-called "ledgers of merit and demerit," texts popular among Confucian literati in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, and including what could be loosely called "examinations of conscience," never amounted to more than personal moral accounting. Overcoming shame, and revealing one's inner life to a foreigner, often considered a "barbarian" by society at large, presented formidable challenges in China. In particular, sins relating to one's sexual life (including **masturbation, homosexuality, adultery**, forbidden sexual practices, and **abortion**) were considered taboo topics in China, and questions found in confessional manuals must have sounded shocking to Chinese converts. The secrecy surrounding the rite was another problem. Chinese government officials, always suspicious of secret societies and heterodox religious groups, saw it as an indication of possible political subversion, a fact only worsened by the foreign connection of the missionaries. Given the strict segregation of sexes in late imperial China, moreover, the confession of women remained one of the most controversial aspects of Christian penitential rituals. Missionaries had therefore to exert particular caution while confessing female penitents, allowing an elder or a male member of the family to monitor the ritual from a distance. Buddhist monks were targeted in Chinese novels and plays as lecherous predators of female devotees visiting temples, or of innocent young nuns. Foreign missionaries were often seen as similarly preying upon their flocks. Especially during the period of prohibition of Christianity by imperial orders (1724–1844), cases of clerical solicitation for sexual favors during confession are indeed recorded in ecclesiastical archives. These cases show a breakdown in clergy discipline, and can be partly imputed to the conditions of clandestine proximity of the priests within the living quarters of their flocks during the period of anti-Christian campaigns. They also show, however, that unmarried rural women, sometimes vowed to religious celibacy for life, might have used their religious position within local Christian communities to create for themselves a social space outside the strictures of married life, including irregular relationships with foreign and Chinese priests. Confession represented a moment of rare intimacy, both spiritual and physical, that momentarily isolated priests and penitents from the dominant conventions of Chinese society, although it never substantially challenged the existing social hierarchy. Maybe for that reason, it was both accepted and coveted by Chinese Christians, and loathed by the Chinese government and the anti-Christian elites.

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THE PERFUMED GARDEN FOR THE SOUL'S DELECTATION

Moral Tracts in Late Ming China." In *Implicit Understanding: Observing, Reporting, and Reflecting on the Encounters between Europeans and Other Peoples in the Early Modern Era*, edited by Stuart Schwartz, 422–48. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994; Wu, Pei-yi. "Self-Examination and Confession of Sins in Traditional China." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 39, no. 1 (1979): 5–38.

Eugenio Menegon

THE PERFUMED GARDEN FOR THE SOUL'S DELECTATION (al-Nafzawi, Fifteenth Century). Written in the beginning of the fifteenth century by the North African Shaykh al-Imam Abu Abd-Allah al-Nafzawi, who was from the town of Nafzawa near Tunis, *The Perfumed Garden for the Soul's Delectation* is a titillating example of Arabic erotic literature.

The book is divided into twenty-one chapters, the last being the same approximate length as the first twenty combined. Topics covered include the traits of desirable men and women; factors that are and are not favorable to sexual intercourse; a list of names for both the male and female sexual organs; advice on bringing great pleasure to coition; a description of and treatment for the uterus of sterile women; causes and cures for impotence; prescriptions for increasing penis size; remedies for foul-smelling armpits and vaginas; signs of pregnancy; and indicators that may be used to determine the sex of an unborn child. The book presents in great detail the most lascivious and obscene material, describing erections, coitus, orgasms, sex positions, sexual movement, and sex acts, including kissing, hugging, licking, sucking, and sipping the mouth, cheeks, breast, neck, lips, waist, belly, navel, buttocks, thighs, penis, and vagina. Love, lust, lubricity, and libidinousness take center stage.

Explaining the origin of the book, the author relates that he had composed a shorter work, *The World's Illumination in the Secrets of Coition*, which came to the attention of the *wazir* (personal assistant) of Abd al-Aziz, master and ruler of Tunis. The *wazir* requested that al-Nafzawi expand the work to include additional material on a number of subjects such as cures and remedies, copulation, and pregnancy. Calling upon God's help, al-Nafzawi set out to write the book, to which he gave two different titles: *The Perfumed Garden for the Soul's Delectation*, and *The World's Illumination in the Knowledge of the Art of Copulation*.

Many of the stories contained within *The Perfumed Garden* exhibit typical traits of Arabic literature, which favors the implausible over the practical, the magical over the real, and the power of the imagination over the observable natural world. The book includes poetry, prose, rhymed prose, short stories, and a section on the interpretation of dreams. The book is a valuable resource for students of anthropology, ethnology, and linguistics, and provides insight into the customs, character, and lives of North African Arabs from the early 1400s. It is not known if the author, who was learned in medicine, pharmaceuticals, law, literature, Arabic poetry, and the Koran, wrote any other books. The frequent mention of and praise for Allah as well as the author's call for God's assistance indicate that al-Nafzawi was a religious Muslim.

The Perfumed Garden for the Soul's Delectation, which begins with the author praising God for centering men and women's greatest pleasure and joy in each other's sexual organs, is a panegyric to sex and sexuality, passionate lasciviousness, and unbridled intercourse. The voluptuous delights of the flesh are enumerated, explored, appreciated and praised in *The Perfumed Garden*. Sir Richard Francis Burton, the Victorian explorer and Orientalist, translated *The Perfumed Garden* into English in the nineteenth century. See also *Islam; Kama Sutra; Middle East*.