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Understanding the theology of natural and divine laws in the cultural and philosophical context of late Ming China

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Abstract

In this article, we discuss the introduction and reception of the theology of natural and divine laws in late Ming China. Natural law and the twofold divine laws appear collectively as an object of discussion and exposition in a number of writings by Jesuit missionaries and Chinese Catholic converts of this time. We focus primarily on Michele Ruggieri's *Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄 (The True Record of the Lord of Heaven) and then consider additional texts by Yang Tingyun and Giulio Aleni, referring to other works in passing. While laying out in more detail than previous scholarship the scholastic basis of these discussions, we nonetheless emphasize that these texts do not reflect a fixed version of scholastic teaching but accommodate their discussions to Chinese cultural sensibilities and/or philosophical concepts. Our historical analysis serves as the basis for a comparative philosophical consideration of the relationship between the doctrine of natural law and the Chinese concept of *liangzhi* 良知 “innate moral knowledge”.

Keywords: Natural law; Divine laws; Michele Ruggieri; Yang Tingyun; Giulio Aleni; Catholicism in China

Introduction

While Christianity from its inception onward strove to spread its message to foreign cultures with their own worldviews, customs, etc., the Jesuit missions to China, which began in the late sixteenth century, remain among the most remarkable examples of such cross-cultural communication and dialogue. The Jesuit missionaries braved impressive geographical distances and formidable linguistic barriers to spread their Catholic faith to a culture already possessed of rich intellectual and spiritual traditions with deep historical roots. Without doubt the most important idea that had to be communicated was that of the Christian Creator God, whose reflection some Jesuits found in the early Chinese classics. Moreover, Catholic ethical teaching, while finding points of agreement with the Confucian virtue tradition, nonetheless found itself in tension with various commonly accepted practices of the Chinese. In this article, we restrict our focus to one aspect of Catholic doctrine that the Jesuits introduced to China, namely the moral laws promulgated by God to humanity. This question of the different moral laws, i.e. natural law and the twofold divine laws, promulgated by God, is intrinsically fascinating for the theology of history it entails, and yet the manner in which this idea was explicated to the Chinese by the Jesuits remains understudied in the scholarship. Justification of our choice to focus on this topic is twofold. First,

analysing this question provides a particularly good case study for discerning Jesuit accommodation in action. Second, and more significantly, paying close attention to this historical process of cross-cultural dialogue raises questions of comparative philosophy, allowing us to reflect on similarities and differences between two central concepts in Catholic and Confucian thought, respectively: natural law and *liangzhi* 良知 “innate moral conscience”.

In this article we will focus primarily on the *Tianzhu shilu* 天主實錄 (The True Record of the Lord of Heaven) of 1584. Written by the Jesuit Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607, Luo Mingjian 羅明堅 in Chinese), this work served as the first Chinese introduction to the Catholic faith, but was surpassed by his confrère Matteo Ricci’s *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven), first published in 1603. Through comparison also with the original and somewhat more expansive 1582 Latin version of this text entitled *Vera et Brevis Divinarum Rerum Expositio* (True and Brief Exposition of Divine Matters), which Ruggieri composed with the assistance of Pedro Gómez, rector of the College of Macau, we will demonstrate how carefully and selectively Ruggieri presented this idea in order to accommodate Chinese sensibilities.¹ The choice of this text is natural insofar as it is both the first Chinese catechism and also deals extensively with the topic at hand. We will supplement our main discussion by surveying how the theory of natural and divine laws was further articulated in subsequent writings of Chinese converts and Jesuit missionaries, especially Yang Tingyun 楊廷筠 (1562–1627), one of the most famous Chinese converts who was brought to Christianity through his encounters with the Jesuits, and Giulio Aleni (1582–1649, Chinese name: Ai Rulüe 艾儒略), friend of Yang and one of the most impactful Catholic missionaries in seventeenth-century China. Yang Tingyun’s writings offer some of the most substantial reflections on this topic, and thus provide a helpful window into the other side of the story of Western–Chinese religious dialogue. Aleni’s works offer perhaps fewer new insights than the previous two, although they too demonstrate further attempts to nuance and fine-tune the process of accommodating the theology of nature and divine laws to Chinese sensibilities.

While we focus on both Western transmitters and Chinese receivers of scholastic ideas, we treat neither category in a one-sided way as entirely active or passive. Both Ruggieri and Aleni demonstrate great responsiveness to the new culture with which they are confronted, and their works are evidently the product of serious dialogue with and learning from the other. The Chinese converts in turn, while absorbing Western concepts, synthesize them with their own native philosophical and cultural tradition to generate novel insights. All the texts treated in this paper bear witness to the fruits of rich cross-cultural interaction and communication.²

It is also worth making clear from the outset that our discussion is inevitably selective and cannot hope to cover thoroughly or even mention all the relevant texts. To make the scope more manageable, we limit our discussion to texts composed before the end of

¹ For a discussion of the composition of the Latin and Chinese versions, see Daniel Canaris, “The *Tianzhu Shilu* revisited: China’s first window into Western scholasticism”, *Frontiers of Philosophy in China* 14, 2019, 198–219, at 201–06. When citing either the Latin or the Chinese text, we use Daniel Canaris, *Michele Ruggieri’s Tianzhu shilu (The True Record of the Lord of Heaven, 1584)* (Leiden: Brill, 2023). We also use, and sometimes adapt, Canaris’ translations. The *Tianzhu shilu* was subsequently revised and republished as *Tianzhu shengjiao shilu* around 1640. On this new edition, see Huiyu Wang, “Adjustments to the ‘accommodation strategy’ of the early Jesuit Mission in China: the case of Michele Ruggieri’s *Tianzhu shilu* (1584) and its revised edition (ca. 1640)”, *Journal of Religious History* 46/1, 2022, 82–96.

² See Nicolas Standaert, *Methodology in View of Contact Between Cultures: The China Case in the 17th Century* (CSRCs occasional paper, 11. Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2002), 23–49 on the “Interaction and communication framework” of cross-cultural historiography.

the Ming dynasty in 1644.³ But even before then, there are many texts that we will have to neglect. Thus, for instance, we have chosen not to treat Ricci's less well-known 1605 catechism *Tianzhu jiaoyao* 天主教要 (Doctrine of the Lord of Heaven), which includes a discussion of the Decalogue influenced by Ruggieri,⁴ and will only refer tangentially to Alfonso Vagnone's (1568–1640, Chinese name: Gao Yizhi 高一志) *Jiaoyao jielie* 教要解略 (Brief Explanation of the Essential Doctrine), a revised version of the former published ten years later in 1615. A truly comprehensive account exceeds the scope of the present article, which aims to address a few texts that not only call for more direct commentary but are also sufficiently representative in their categories such that further analyses of other works can build on the present discussion. As will be discussed in this paper, writings of this time and place on natural and divine laws share many thematic commonalities, if not direct verbal repetitions. The selection of texts analysed here should thus be a promising basis for understanding other Chinese Christian works written by missionaries or converts.

As noted above, this essay has a dual aim, one historical and one comparative. While most of our analysis will trace a selective history of the introduction and reception of the theology of natural and divine laws into China, we will not limit ourselves to exposing or tracing the sources of the explicitly formulated thoughts of the authors in question. Building on sometimes briefly intimated connections between the introduced Catholic concepts and native Chinese ones, we will reflect on the intrinsic merits and plausibility of such links. In this vein, the case study we will explore most fully is the connection between the concept of natural law and that of *liangzhi*. While hinted at or briefly suggested by several authors of this period, an elaborate comparison is not to be found in these works. We provide a more thorough discussion of the question of their relation.

Scholastic background

Before entering into our primary topic, we look at Thomas Aquinas' view on law. In *Summa Theologiae* I–II, q. 90, Aquinas discusses the essence of law in general, concluding that law (1) is something which pertains to reason (a. 1, s.c.: *lex est aliquid rationis*), (2) is ordained to the common good (a. 2, resp.: *omnis lex ad bonum commune ordinatur*), (3) must be made by the whole people or the person who duly governs them, and (4) must be promulgated. He subsequently (ST I–II, q. 91) distinguishes between eternal law, natural law, human law, divine law and the law of the *fomes* (kindling wood) of sin. Eternal law refers to the divine providence to which all of creation is subject. It has the widest scope of all the laws, for it is that by which “God imprints on the whole of nature the principles of its proper actions” (ST I–II, q. 93, a. 5, resp.: *Deus imprimit toti naturae principia propriorum actuum*).⁵ Both irrational and rational beings are subject to it, even if not in the same manner. Natural law, on the other hand, is the special participation in the eternal law by rational beings (ST I–II, q. 91, a. 3, resp.). Aquinas subdivides natural law in terms of man's inclinations to the good: first in accordance with his nature in common with all other substances; secondly in accordance

³ A partial exception to this will be our reference to Giulio Aleni's *Xingxue cushu* 性學彙述 (A Brief Introduction to the Study of Human Nature). While the modern edition/translation we cite is based on the second revised edition of 1646, the first edition of *Xingxue cushu* was published between 1635 and 1639.

⁴ The original 1605 text was seen in 1934 by Pasquale D'Elia, who provided a description of the text. While this original text is unfortunately lost, later editions similar to the original have been preserved. On the textual history, see Adrian Dudink, “*Tianzhu jiaoyao*, The Catechism (1605) Published by Matteo Ricci”, *Sino-Western Cultural Relations Journal* 24, 2002, 38–50. A preliminary analysis of Ricci's adaptation from Ruggieri can be found in Kika Van Robays, “The Third Space in early Jesuit translations in the late Ming Dynasty: Self-representation and cultural mediation through translation” (Ghent University: MA Thesis, 2020), 44–74.

⁵ For the *Summa Theologiae*, we use and occasionally modify the translation of Laurence Shapcote, *Saint Thomas Aquinas. Summa Theologiae. Prima Secundae, 71–114* (Green Bay, WI: Aquinas Institute, Inc., 2017).

with his nature in common with other animals; and thirdly according to his unique rational nature, consisting of the natural inclination to know the truth about God and to live in community (ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2, resp.). This law is not a written law, but it is promulgated insofar as it is instilled into the minds of humans so that it can be known naturally (ST I-II, q. 90, a. 4, ad. 1). The strongest biblical basis for this notion is found in Romans 2, which mentions how the Gentiles often act according to the law naturally (Vulgate 2.14: *naturaliter*) despite not having the divine law revealed to them. Aquinas also explicitly refers to this Pauline passage in this context (ST I-II, q. 91, s. c.). Human law consists in turn of further human derivations from this natural law. Where it diverges from the basic principles of natural law, it ceases to be law in the normative sense but rather becomes a corruption of the law (ST I-II, q. 95, a. 2, resp.). The frailty of human judgement, however, necessitated the promulgation of the twofold divine law, consisting of the Old Law promulgated by Moses and the New Law promulgated by Christ. The former consists of moral, ceremonial, and judicial precepts, although the latter two kinds of precepts lose their place in the New Law (ST I-II, q. 108, a. 3, ad. 3). The law of the *fomes* consists of sensual inclinations. Whereas in animals, this inclination has the force of law in an uncomplicated manner, in humans the situation is more complex. While it is a deviation from the law of reason most proper to humans, in light of their fall, it too possesses for them the nature of a law (ST I-II, q. 91, a. 6, resp.).⁶

This very cursory sketch leaves much of importance unsaid,⁷ although we will have the opportunity to provide more detailed discussion of several of these laws below. For the purposes of this present article, we will limit our attention to only the natural law and the twofold divine laws. This decision is hardly arbitrary. In fact, the doctrine of these “Three Teachings” (三教 *san jiao*), as they were called, is found in a number of missionary writings as well as in texts by Chinese Christian converts.⁸ The first was usually called the 性教 *xingjiao* (“Teaching by Nature”), and the second was (almost always) called 書教 *shujiao* (“Teaching by the Book”), while the third received various appellations, including 恩教 *enjiao* or 寵教 *chongjiao* (“Teaching by Grace”), 身教 *shenjiao* (“Teaching of the Incarnation”), and others. The present analysis of how this doctrine was articulated to Chinese audiences certainly does not claim to be exhaustive, but it nonetheless offers a substantial overview of these discussions in the relatively early period of Catholic missions in China.

Michele Ruggieri

We begin our analysis with Ruggieri’s *Tianzhu shilu*. The work consists of a preface followed by sixteen chapters written in the form of a dialogue between a Chinese and a Christian “monk” (僧 *seng* in the Chinese),⁹ standing for Ruggieri himself. (The original Latin version, although longer, is divided differently into thirteen chapters.) While the opening chapters concern God’s existence and the possibilities of knowing Him, followed then by a treatment of creation and the afterlife, in chapter 8 we turn to the topic of the laws given by God to humanity. Here the Christian begins with a discussion of an unwritten natural law present in all humans, limiting the content of this unwritten law to just

⁶ See Mark Johnson, “St. Thomas and the ‘Law of Sin’”, *Recherches de Théologie et Philosophie Médiévales* 67, 2000, 80–95.

⁷ For a helpful discussion of Aquinas’ views on law within the scope of longue durée Western intellectual history, one may consult Leo J. Elders, *The Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas: Happiness, Natural Law, and the Virtues* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2019), 197–228.

⁸ A brief discussion of this topic is found in Erik Zürcher, “Jesuit accommodation and the Chinese cultural imperative”, in D.E. Mungello (ed.), *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning* (Nettetal: Steyler Verlag, 1994), 31–64, at 47–9.

⁹ In the Latin version of the text, it is *sacerdos* “priest”.

two principles: 其中只有二事: 第一條, 使人心中自知, 只有一位天主所當敬奉; 第二條, 使人存一推己及人之心。"In this law, there are only two commandments: the first is that we have in our heart an innate knowledge that there is only one Lord of Heaven who should be worshipped; the second is that we must harbor a mindset of 'putting ourselves in the place of others'" (8.4). These correspond to the aforementioned natural inclinations to know the truth about God and to live in community (ST I-II, q. 94, a. 3, resp.). Of course, Ruggieri is even more immediately building upon Jesus' summary of the Law as found in the Gospels (see Matthew 22: 37–40, Mark 12: 29–31, and Luke 10: 27). It is intriguing to consider the Latin original of this passage, for while Ruggieri correctly asserts that the Confucian classics parallel the latter principle (cf. *Analects* 15.24), he expresses his doubts over whether the Chinese tradition really has a notion comparable to God, floating 天 *Tian* as the most likely but not certain candidate. Ruggieri would eventually become convinced that Chinese did possess a notion akin to God in *Tian* and *Shangdi*, but when composing the *Tianzhu shilu* he silently passed over the question.¹⁰

In terms of how we know this natural law, Ruggieri later becomes a little more specific. He writes:

乃天主默示人心也。世人為王者, 亦不得與人法度, 而救其魂靈升天。蓋為善去惡, 此乃正灋, 人人不須學習于書館, 而此心自知。亦猶物之全者大, 物之半者小, 此理亦不待學而自明也。

The Lord of Heaven silently revealed it to people's hearts. Even the peoples who rule as kings cannot give laws through which souls are saved and delivered to heaven. Hence to do good and shun evil is the just law which we do not need to learn from schools but is known innately in our heart. In a similar vein, the notion that the whole of an object is bigger than its half can be intuitively understood without prior study (8.8).

Aquinas had argued that natural law is derived from the fundamental principle of practical reason, *bonum est quod omnia appetunt* "good is that which all things seek after", which yields the first precept *bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum* "the good must be done and pursued, and evil must be avoided". This is self-evident, in the same way as the proposition that the whole is greater than the part (ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2, resp.). Ruggieri somewhat simplifies by skipping over the discussion of the first principle and precept. Other subtleties of Aquinas' doctrine do not find full reflection in Ruggieri's text. For Aquinas; ... not man's natural inclinations as such, but the obligations derived from them as they are formulated by reason in view of the end of human life constitute the natural law".¹¹ As he states, *omnia illa ad quae homo habet naturalem inclinationem, ratio naturaliter apprehendit ut bona* "All those things to which man has a natural inclination, reason naturally apprehends them as good" (ST I-II, q. 94, a. 2, resp.). In other words, while humans possess a number of natural inclinations pertaining to their nature as substances, animals and rational beings, for these inclinations to take on the status of precepts of the natural law they require the judgement of reason that expressly determines their objects as goods to be striven after (and their contraries as evils to be avoided).¹² Ruggieri in this context does not explicitly

¹⁰ For Ruggieri's evolution on this matter, see Daniel Canaris, "Between reason and typology: strategies for evangelising China in the writings of Antonio Possevino (1533–1611) and Michele Ruggieri (1543–1607)", *Erudition and the Republic of Letters* 5, 2020, 397–426, at 406–10.

¹¹ Elders, *The Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 210.

¹² Cf. also Elders, *The Ethics of St. Thomas Aquinas*, 209: "Natural law is the order of our tasks and obligations as acknowledged by reason. It is not inborn as such, but only in the sense that its principle is given with human nature. It is also natural in this sense that by spontaneous acts reason formulates its first principles on the basis

reprise his earlier emphasis on 理 *qua* “reason” (理 in the passage cited above is used in the sense of “principle” or “notion”). For example, in the first chapter, Ruggieri intelligently constructs an argument by analogy for the existence of God. On the level of human society, a foreigner could see how Guangdong Province in China is governed through a tiered bureaucratic system by which the larger administrative units answer to more centralized and elevated ones, and infer that the other provinces must be the same, and that China as a whole must be governed by a single sovereign who holds sway over the many provinces: 他雖未嘗親至京師，目見君王，然以理度之，誠知其有一位人君也。 “Even if he has not been to the capital and beheld the sovereign with his own eyes, by making inferences with reason, he truly knows that there is one sovereign.” [1.8]. The term 理 is here employed in the sense of “reason”, the faculty by which we can grasp reality that transcends sensory perception. In this later passage, however, it would seem that the obviousness of its principles are due more to a passive reception of the law from God, which is then how the heart can know them by itself (自知).¹³

While reducing the complexity of the scholastic theory of natural law, Ruggieri also formulates this teaching in a manner that would resonate with his Chinese audience. Ruggieri writes in the preface of the *Tianzhu shilu*: 人之身體髮膚，受於父母，為人子之報父母者，皆出於良知、良能，不待學而自然親愛者也。 “Our body, hair and skin are received from our parents. As their children, we repay our parents because of our innate moral knowledge (*liangzhi* 良知) and our innate moral ability (*liangneng* 良能). Our love for our parents does not come from learning but nature”. He obviously alludes to *Mengzi* 7A15:

孟子曰：「人之所不學而能者，其良能也；所不慮而知者，其良知也。孩提之童，無不知愛其親者；及其長也，無不知敬其兄也。親親，仁也；敬長，義也。無他，達之天下也。」

Mencius said, “What people are able to do without having learned it is an expression of original, good ability (良能). What they know without having to think about it is an expression of original, good knowledge (良知). There are no young children who do not know enough to love their parents, and there are none who, as they grow older, do not know enough to respect their older brothers. To be affectionate toward those close to one – this is humaneness. To have respect for elders – this is rightness. All that remains is to extend these to the entire world.”¹⁴

When he then states that the natural law does not need to be learned in school but is innately known, Ruggieri recapitulates the basic idea of innate moral conscience that he had expressed at the beginning of the preface.

While he does not directly compare natural law in this section to the Chinese *liangzhi* 良知 “innate moral knowledge” and *liangneng* 良能 “innate moral ability”, the explicit parallels between the Western and Chinese concepts that were subsequently drawn by Chinese

of the fundamental inclinations and demands of human nature”. See further Martin Rhonheimer, “Natural law as a ‘Work of reason’: understanding the metaphysics of participated theonomy”, in John Berkman and William C. Mattison III (eds), *Searching for a Universal Ethic: Multidisciplinary, Ecumenical, and Interfaith Responses to the Catholic Natural Law Tradition* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2014), 142–7.

¹³ To be sure, while the Western tradition has had its advocates for voluntarist interpretations of natural law (see Francis Oakley, *Natural Law, Laws of Nature, Natural Rights: Continuity and Discontinuity in the History of Ideas* (New York: Continuum, 2005), esp. 63–86, where Ockham, among others, is treated) Ruggieri does not say anything to suggest that he is advocating a voluntarist position in direct opposition to Aquinas’ rationalistic understanding. It is better to assume that he is being somewhat vague and indeterminate in order to avoid getting into rather abstract territory, and perhaps also to accommodate Chinese philosophical ideas (see below).

¹⁴ The allusion is noted in Canaris, *Michele Ruggieri’s Tianzhu shilu*, 80. For the translation of *Mencius*, we use Irene Bloom (trans.), *Mencius* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

converts find an anticipation here.¹⁵ It may be noted that Ruggieri's de-emphasis on the role of reason in formulating the precepts of the natural law also makes his exposition (whether or not that was his primary intent) somewhat closer to the Chinese understanding of *liangzhi* or *liangneng*. For in Mencius as also later in Wang Yangming, innate ability or innate knowledge are rooted in affections, or moral sense, rather (or to use relative rather than absolute terms, more) than in rational reflection. To stick to the example of filial piety used in *Mengzi* 7A15, that its basis is affective as opposed to rational/reflective in nature, is demonstrated clearly in the story provided in *Mengzi* 3A5:

蓋上世嘗有不葬其親者。其親死，則舉而委之於壑。他日過之，狐狸食之，蠅蚋姑嘬之。其類有泚，睨而不視。夫泚也，非為人泚，中心達於面目。蓋歸反藁裡而掩之。掩之誠是也，則孝子仁人之掩其親，亦必有道矣。

Now, in high antiquity there were some who did not bury their parents. When their parents died, they picked them up and cast them into a ditch. Another day, when they passed by, they saw that they were being devoured by foxes and wildcats and bitten by flies and gnats. Sweat broke out on their foreheads, and they averted their eyes to avoid the sight. The sweat was not because of what others would think but was an expression in their faces and eyes of what was present in their innermost hearts. They returned home and brought earth-carrying baskets and spades to cover them over. Burying them was truly right, and filial children and benevolent people also act properly when they bury their parents.

As is apparent from this description, Mencius describes this awareness as rooted in primal emotions. The sweat that they exude on their faces bears witness to a feeling coming forth from the deepest recesses of their heart. Mencius does not say that the people used rational reflection to come to the conclusion that they had to bury their parents, nor does he say that reason approved of the emotional inclinations as proper moral ends. "Burying them was truly right" (掩之誠是也), but the moral intuition that realizes this is based on moral sentiments. The absence of reason as the fundamental standard distinguishes Mencius and his successors from Aquinas' notion of natural law.¹⁶

Admittedly, one may potentially detect a secondary place for rational reflection also in Mencius' ethical theory,¹⁷ but determining its precise status is much debated and would probably not have been perceived as its defining feature by Ruggieri. The case may be different for Giulio Aleni, who addresses this question in a context different from his explicit treatment of natural and divine law and which thus can be mentioned here. In his *Xingxue cushu* 性學叢述 (A Brief Introduction to the Study of Human Nature), 6.3, Aleni writes:

¹⁵ We discuss this further below. Cf. also Erik Zürcher, *Kouduo richao: Li Jiubiao's Diary of Oral Admonitions: A Late Ming Christian Journal. Volume 1* (Sankt Augustin: Institut Monumenta Serica / Brescia: Fondazione Civiltà Bresciana, 2007), 262 and Erik Zürcher, "Jesuit accommodation and the Chinese cultural imperative", 49.

¹⁶ The same applies to Wang Yangming. On Wang's notion of *liangzhi*, see Tzu-li Chang, "Re-exploring Wang Yangming's theory of *Liangzhi*: translation, transliteration and interpretation", *Philosophy East and West* 66, 2016, 1196–1217, esp. 1202: "*liangzhi* is an innate, affective capacity for identifying right and wrong". For Wang Yangming, *liangzhi*, not *liangneng*, is the central concept, as moral knowledge in his eyes will necessarily come with the ability to act. Cf. Yong Huang, "A Neo-Confucian concept of wisdom: Wang Yangming on the innate moral knowledge (*Liangzhi*)", *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 33, 2006, 393–408, at 396. Thus it makes sense that Wang Yangming, in the *Inquiry on the Great Learning* 大學問, states: 是非之心，不待慮而知，不待學而能，是故謂之良知。 "The sense of right and wrong does not need to think over it and yet it knows, does not need to study it and yet is capable of it, therefore it is called *liangzhi*". What Mencius had listed as the features of *liangzhi* and *liangneng* respectively, he lists together as characteristic of just the former.

¹⁷ Cf. e.g. David B. Wong, "Feeling, reflection, and reasoning in the *Mencius*", in Yang and Chong (eds), *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Mencius*, 517–38.

《孟子》‘多賴’章，口期易牙，耳期師曠，目期子都，獨至於心，指出同然在於理義，分明各一脈絡；後又分別其官：耳目不能思而蔽於物，心則能思而屬大體。可見甘食、悅色，是皆覺性所動，不關靈體。理義悅心，乃真靈體。

The section “mostly lazy” in the *Mengzi* [i.e. *Mengzi* 6A7] says that all mouths follow the chef Yiya, ears follow Kuang the musician, eyes follow Zidu, but the mind alone follows reason-righteousness, which is shared by all people. Evidently, the five organs and the mind are different and their faculties also. The ears and eyes are incapable of “thinking” [si 思] and are obscured by things, whereas the mind is capable of thinking and represents the greater part of oneself. Being infatuated with gourmet food or beautiful persons is due to the functioning of the sensitive nature, but this has nothing to do with the spirit [lingti]. Reason-righteousness pleases the mind, and this is the true spirit.¹⁸

Aleni combines two passages from the *Mengzi* as part of this argument. In the former passage (6A7), Mencius reflects on what all humans share. Our outer sensory organs, our mouths, ears, and eyes, all have common preferences. They all react positively to the cooking of Yiya, the music of master Kuang, and the beauty of Zidu. Mencius then follows up: 至於心，獨無所同然乎？心之所同然者何也？謂理也，義也。 “Should hearts prove to be an exception by possessing nothing in common? What is it, then, that is common to all hearts? Reason (li) and righteousness (yi).”¹⁹ While Mencius here may imply but does not make explicit a sharp differentiation between the heart-mind 心 and the sensory organs, instead focusing on the fact that like the latter, it too finds a common expression among all humans, in *Mengzi* 6A15, to which Aleni seamlessly turns in the second half of the cited passage, Mencius distinguishes more clearly between the organs of the ears and eyes, which cannot “think” (思), and the organ of the heart-mind, which can. Following the greater part of himself (大體), i.e. the heart-mind, a person becomes a great man (大人). Following only the sense organs, the smaller part of oneself (小體), one becomes a petty person. Aleni ends by introducing his phrase 靈體, combining his favoured term 靈性 with Mencius’ 大體, showing his identification of Mencius’ concept with his own notion of intellectual nature. At the same time, Aleni’s identification should not be accepted without qualification. For instance, it is very questionable whether Mencius’ li 理 can be properly translated into “reason”, as D.C. Lau does.²⁰ This would be an isolated usage in the *Mengzi*. Moreover, the concept of si 思 does not appear to be used in opposition to relying on moral feelings. On the contrary, the contexts in which the term is used suggest rather that it refers to bringing to consciousness one’s true but all-too-often submerged authentic moral feelings. In *Mengzi* 6A6, we find the following assertion: 仁義禮智，非由外鑠我也，我固有之也，弗思耳矣。 “Humaneness, righteousness, ritual propriety, and wisdom are not infused into us from the outside. We certainly possess them, but we don’t bring them to mind” (authors’ translation). The preceding context describes how the four virtues are found in our hearts,²¹ and

¹⁸ Translation adapted from Thierry Meynard and Dawei Pan, *A Brief Introduction to the Study of Human Nature: Giulio Aleni* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).

¹⁹ Translation slightly adapted from D.C. Lau, *Mencius. Revised Edition* (Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 2003).

²⁰ Cf. e.g. A.C. Graham, “The background of the Mencian theory of human nature”, *Tsing Hua Journal of Chinese Studies* 6, 1967, 215–71, at 235, who understands li as “order”.

²¹ We leave aside the question of why, unlike in *Mengzi* 2A6, the heart of compassion, the heart of shame, the heart of respect, and the heart of discerning right and wrong are described as the virtues themselves, not the “sprouts” of the virtues. On this, see for instance Bo Xu, “Mengzi’s theory of human nature and its role in the Confucian tradition”, in Yang and Chong (ed.), *Dao Companion to the Philosophy of Mencius*, 79–98, at 89–92.

Mencius, by saying 弗思, is here lamenting that we allow these feelings to become lost. (An analogous interpretation can *mutatis mutandis* easily be made of 6A17.) These passages do not justify understanding *si* as “rational reflection” conceived independently from relying on moral affections.

Thus, we can say that for Mencius reason lacks the same primacy of position as in Aquinas’ thought. At the same time, Ruggieri’s omission of the emphasis on reason, which accommodates the Mencian position, is not without basis in Scripture. Paul, in Romans 2, states that the Gentiles “demonstrate the work of the law written on their hearts, their conscience bearing witness for them” (Romans 2.15 Vulgate: *ostendunt opus legis scriptum in cordibus suis, testimonium reddente illis conscientia ipsorum*). Paul here speaks only of the “heart” and does not appeal to something equivalent to “reason”. Here one may potentially see an idea, albeit one expressed only *in nuce*, corresponding more to the Chinese understanding of *liangzhi* as developed in the School of the Heart (心學).²²

Ruggieri next discusses the giving of the divine law (*lex divina*), divided into the Old Law and the New Law. He describes the promulgation of the Old Law by Moses as follows: 先時規誡者，乃默示乎人心，不能使人盡知。故天主復作次之規誡，令一道士曉諭普世。 “As the first law was revealed silently to people’s hearts, it could not be fully known by people. Thus, the Lord of Heaven sent another law through a priest to make it known to the whole world.” (8.16; see also 8.5). The formulation deserves comment. The remark that humans needed a written law because they could not completely know the law silently promulgated in their hearts has a basis in Aquinas’ claim that the divine law was necessary on account of the incertitude of human judgement especially when it comes to the particulars of human action (*ST* I–II, q. 91, a. 4, resp.). The comment that a priest (i.e. Moses, named at 8.12) gave the law to all peoples is not only incorrect from a biblical standpoint but also different from what Ruggieri wrote in the Latin text: *Secunda lex a Deo lata scripta dicitur ... et populo quondam a Deo electo ... promulgata* / “The second law given by God was said to have been written ... and was proclaimed to a people once chosen by God.” (8.12). The change is plausibly explained by Canaris: “The notion that there was a ‘chosen people’ unknown to the Chinese prior to the establishment of the Christian law would perhaps have been rather unsettling for the Chinese and very difficult for Ruggieri to explain”.²³ The Christian then explains how this second law was too cumbersome and that humans kept sinning according to it, so that the Lord of Heaven had to transform into a man²⁴ and give them a third law, lighter for people to bear (8.16).

It should further be noted that Ruggieri in the Chinese text simplifies the complexity of why God had to give several laws. In chapter 7 of the *Vera et Brevis Divinarum Rerum Expositio*, which deals with the promulgations of the divine laws, we are told (8.3):

Deus igitur, quem tibi rerum omnium factorem praedicavi, hominum cum sit dominus, non est passus, ut dixisti, eos sine lege et institutis instar ferarum vivere; immo semper curavit, ut homines, legem aliquam velut lucem prae oculis habentes, rectam sibi in coelum viam munirent. In huiusmodi autem legum promulgatione ita se

²² For this last point we are indebted to an anonymous reviewer. Also relevant is Wei Hua, “The dilemma of conscience: from Paul and Augustine to Mencius”, *Religions* 15, 2024, 265. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15030265>. While not focusing on natural law directly, Hua compares Paul’s notion of conscience with the Chinese concept of *liangzhi*.

²³ Canaris, *Michele Ruggieri’s Tianzhu Shilu*, 142.

²⁴ Ruggieri here elides over Trinitarian distinctions and makes no differentiation between the Father and the Son. For a discussion of how Trinitarian ideas were gradually introduced by the Jesuit missionaries in China, see 肖清和 (Xiao Qinghe), 明清漢語神學研究的可能路徑-以核心關鍵詞「三位一體」為例 [A Possible Way to Study Sino-Christian Theology in the Ming and Qing Dynasties: Case Study on the Keyword “Trinity” (Sanwei yiti)], 道風: 基督教文化評論 *Logos & Pneuma* 50, 2019, 95–129.

habuit, ut, hominum captui se accomodans, paulatim eos sub iugum velut mitteret et mansuefactos ad aeternae felicitatis bona percipienda quodammodo componeret. Therefore, God, whom I have taught you is the maker of all things, since He is the Lord of people, has not allowed, as you have said, people to live without law and customs like beasts. Rather, He has always ensured that people have some law like a light before their eyes and secure for themselves a correct path to heaven. With the promulgation of such laws, He has accommodated Himself to human understanding and gradually submitted people to his yoke and accustomed them to perceive the goods of eternal happiness.

This prepares the discussion of how God first provided humans with the innate natural law, then with the second law given by Moses, and finally with the third and most perfect law given by Christ. God did not present the most consummate expression of divine teaching right away, but waited until humans were ready to accept it. This is expressed also later in the Latin text in the context of explaining why Christ's New Covenant came as late as it did (9.10):

Habuit igitur se Deus instar medici, qui aegrotum febris correptum videns, antequam medicamenta admoveat, corpus per inediam praeparat, ut facilius medicinae detur locus et aegrotus ipse maiori cum aviditate remedijs utatur; pari ratione oportuit et antecedentibus alijs remedijs, homines paulatim aptos reddi ad hoc supremum suscipiendum et multis annis salutem e coelo venturam hianti ore expectare. Therefore, God behaved like a doctor seeing a sick person struck by a fever. Before the doctor administers medicine, he prepares the body through fasting, so that there is more room for the medicine and the sick person will have more appetite for the remedy. In the same way, people had to be by earlier remedies gradually prepared to receive this greatest of remedies and for many years await with gaping mouth the salvation to come from heaven.

This type of explanation, namely that people required time and preparation before they could receive the fulfilment of the Law, goes back to the very early Christian literature. The first of the two extracts cited above uses the language of accommodation, equivalent to what is also termed condescendence. The success of a teaching is determined not simply by its own internal coherence and power, but by its appropriateness for the level of the audience. The person in the higher intellectual or spiritual position must lower him/herself to meet recipients at a level where they can comprehend the teaching, and gradually lead them upwards in insight, a point expressed already in 1 Corinthians 3: 2 and Hebrews 5: 12. And in the Patristic tradition, we find a fully developed theology of divine condescendence (Greek: *synkatabasis*; Latin: *condescensio*), in which God's providing humanity first with the Old Testament and then with the New Covenant established through Christ was interpreted as God lowering himself to our human level, training us with the less spiritually advanced Old Covenant before we were ready to receive the new one.²⁵ We find this notion as well in Aquinas, the more direct source for Ruggieri. See for example *ST* I–II, q. 91, a. 5, resp., *ST* I–II, q. 98, a. 2, ad 1, *ST* I–II, q. 106, a. 3, resp., and *ST* I–II, q. 107, a. 1, resp.,

²⁵ See for example François Dreyfus, "Divine condescendence (*Synkatabasis*) as a hermeneutic principle of the Old Testament in Jewish and Christian tradition", *Immanuel* 19, 1984/1985, 74–86; Margaret M. Mitchell, "Pauline accommodation and "condescension" (συνκατάβασις): 1 Cor 9:19–23 and the history of influence", in T. Engberg-Pedersen (ed.), *Paul beyond the Judaism/Hellenism Divide* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001), 197–214; and Paul K. Hosle, "The didactic nature of Gregory Nazianzen's *Poemata Arcana* and the theme of continual, gradated progress", *Vigiliae Christianae* 78, 2024, 385–409.

which all employ, following Pauline precedents, the language of the Old Law as a pedagogue for children requiring tutoring before they could receive the New Law. The phylogenetic development of humanity at large is understood on the model of ontogeny.

The theme of divine condescension is omitted in the Chinese text. Thus, for instance, the analogy of God as a doctor is rewritten as follows (9.10):

古者人雖為惡，天主只賦規誡，令人遵守，尚望世人知悔，是以不化。及久世人不知悔過，天主乃不得已降世教人，亦猶人於初病之時，醫者不施藥物，只令戒食諸毒，望其自愈而已。及至病薦，然後用藥以濟之，此亦一定之道理也。 Although people of antiquity did evil, the Lord of Heaven only imposed commandments and ordered people to observe them. He still hoped that people would repent, and thus He did not transform Himself. After a long time, people still did not repent, and the Lord of Heaven had no choice but to descend into the world to teach people. This is just like how when a person first falls sick, a doctor does not administer medication, but only commands that [the patient] abstain from all poisons in the hope that he can recover by himself. Only when he is extremely sick does he take medication for assistance. This is a sure principle.

Here, the Lord of Heaven hoped that the second law or the Old Covenant would have sufficed, but when He perceived that they kept sinning without repenting, He had no choice but to incarnate and promulgate the third law. We lack here the notion that the second law was in its deepest sense a propaedeutic for the coming of Christ. Ruggieri knew with Aquinas that the divine law was something that could not be grasped let alone practised readily by untutored souls. And yet Ruggieri may have wished not to emphasize the idea that it required many millennia of collective moral and spiritual training to receive the New Covenant lest it be potentially counterproductive for the end goal of making converts. So instead, he insists on the aspect of the teaching which concerns the lightness of the law. In the preface of the *Tianzhu shilu* (pp. 6–7), Ruggieri highlights the point that the law is manageable and not overly burdensome. But here too we have a strategic reduction of nuance. Aquinas, it is true, asserted that the New Law was less burdensome than the Old Law, but only as it concerns the external works which the Old Law prescribes in abundance through its ceremonial precepts. Aquinas qualifies this, however, by conceding that in terms of the interior works (i.e. that virtuous deeds should be performed with pleasure) the New Law is more demanding (*ST* I–II, q. 107, a. 4, resp.), which is what allows us to consistently see how the New Law required the maturation brought about by its predecessor. But on this distinction the Christian in Ruggieri’s dialogue is completely silent. Ruggieri has de-emphasized the intellectual and moral demands of the New Law in order to make it more palatable to his intended audience. In so doing, he himself engages in a form of accommodation to the level of his readership.²⁶

We can next turn to the content of the New Law. As the Christian states to his Chinese interlocutor, it consists of eleven articles on the Lord of Heaven, the Ten Commandments and the three special teachings (i.e. the vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience), and the sacraments (10.2). The eleven articles listed in turn reflect most of the contents of the

²⁶ It should be noted that the importance of accommodation to the level of one’s audience is also mentioned, with evocations of much the same scriptural language, in the Roman Catechism of the Council of Trent, and so Ruggieri is being consistent with both long-standing and recently emphasized principles of how one should engage in religious instruction.

Apostles Creeds.²⁷ This follows Aquinas' designation of the New Law as primarily a law of faith (*lex fidei*), consisting secondarily in moral and sacramental deeds (ST I-II, q. 107, a. 1, ad. 3). We are not told here explicitly that some of these credal statements cannot be demonstrated by reason. Instead, the Christian makes the threatening assertion that anyone who rejects even one of these articles will go to hell. The Chinese interlocutor is made to express his assent to the Christian's words, but we know that in reality the Chinese were not so easily persuaded. Ricci wisely omitted or de-emphasized a number of these articles of faith in his *Tianzhu shiyi*, although he did include a fuller list of such articles in his *Tianzhu jiaoyao*.²⁸

As for the moral content of the New Law, Aquinas considers it to have been taken over from the Old Law – the judicial precepts of the latter, on the other hand, lose their binding force over individuals and the ceremonial precepts are abolished (ST I-II, q. 108, a. 3, ad. 3)²⁹ – and insofar as he considers the various moral precepts of the Old Law reducible to the Decalogue (ST I-II, q. 100, a. 3), the Christian's elevation of the Ten Commandments as the moral core of the New Law also makes sense. We also find Ruggieri carefully framing the Ten Commandments in such a way as to accommodate Chinese sensibilities. Notably, Ruggieri emphasizes that the Fourth Commandment, on honouring one's parents, begins the seven commandments that deal with human relationships.³⁰ He writes: 中之第四條者，當愛親敬長。此事甚重，是以占乎六條之先。蓋天主令世人和睦，況人倫之至親者，莫過於父母，是以當孝順也。 “The fourth commandment teaches that you must love and revere your parents. Since this commandment is extremely important, it goes before the other six. Since the Lord of Heaven orders people to be in harmony and no human relation is more important than that which we have with our parents, we must practice filial piety” (14.2).³¹ Ruggieri also makes clear that the scope of the

²⁷ See further Canaris, *Michele Ruggieri's Tianzhu Shilu*, ad 10.2, who notes the unusual division into 11 articles and the omission of references to the Holy Spirit and the Catholic Church. Reference to the Holy Spirit would only further raise the Trinitarian question, a topic whose complexities we have already seen Ruggieri try to avoid.

²⁸ See the very brief and selective account of Christ's incarnation and life in *Tianzhu shiyi*, §580. Ricci omits, for instance, Ruggieri's defence of Mary's *virginitas in partu* and, more importantly, the reference to the crucifixion, stating only that Christ re-ascended to heaven after his sojourn on earth.

²⁹ The distinction between the ceremonial, judicial, and moral precepts of the Old Law is also expressed in *Tianzhu shilu* 8.5.

³⁰ On the division of the Ten Commandments, see *Tianzhu shilu* 12.1: 天主因欲教人，故立碑二面。第一面之碑文有三條之事，惟奉敬天主而已。第二面之碑文，有七條之事，惟在和睦世人而已。 “Since the Lord of the Heaven wishes to teach people, He set down a two-sided tablet. On the first side of the tablet are inscribed three commandments about how we should worship the Lord of Heaven alone. On the other side of the tablet are written seven commandments which are only about how we should live in harmony with people”.

³¹ The strategic nature of this accommodation is noted by Canaris, *Michele Ruggieri's Tianzhu Shilu*, 168. It is worth saying that this point would be reprised by later Chinese Christians and Jesuit missionaries. In his short text *Xiaoluan bu bingming shuo* 鴞鸞不並鳴說 (The Owl and Phoenix Do Not Sing a Duet, 1622), Yang Tingyun argued that Catholicism was utterly unlike the native Chinese heterodox religious movements, such as the White Lotus Teaching (白蓮教) or the Non-Action Teaching (無為教). He lists 14 differences between Catholicism and the heterodox sects, the last of these points including the following statement: 邪教始於煽惑聚眾，究竟圖為不軌。西教十誡中，以孝順為人道第一。 “Heterodox sects begin by agitating the masses, and in the end what they devise violates the norms. Within the Ten Commandments of the Western religion, one considers filial piety to be the first of the human hierarchical relationships” (translation ours). Yang, like Ruggieri, sees the placement of the Fourth Commandment as emphasizing the importance of filial piety in a manner consonant with traditional and orthodox Chinese moral values. This idea can also be found in Alfonso Vagnone's *Jiaoyao jielie* and later *Tongyou jiaoyu* 童幼教育 (On the Education of Children), sect. 305. See Nicolas Standaert and Adrian Dudink (ed.), *Chinese Christian Texts from the Roman Archives of the Society of Jesus*, Vol. 1 (Rome: Procura Generalizia della Compagnia di Gesù, 2002), 160 and Giulia Falato, *Alfonso Vagnone's Tongyou Jiaoyu (On the Education of Children, c. 1632): The Earliest Encounter between Chinese and European Pedagogy* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 188.

fourth commandment is not limited strictly to children, but also includes the relationship between a student and teacher, or between a servant and master (14.3). Later texts of missionaries and converts, however, will emphasize further the political dimension of the fourth commandment as requiring obedience from subjects to government officials and the sovereign.³²

Similarly, in the discussion of the fifth commandment we find Ruggieri adapting his presentation to Chinese philosophy, although in this attempt, unlike in his treatment of the fourth commandment, his approach would turn out to be much less widely followed, indeed, it would be contradicted outright by later missionaries.

Ruggieri writes in *Tianzhu shilu* 14.4:

第五戒亂法殺人。古者天主做成世人，有如兄弟之親，故不付之利器；作之禽獸，固有長牙利爪。然人之所以異於禽獸者幾希，所以當和順也。

The fifth commandment is that you shall not kill unlawfully. In antiquity, the Lord of Heaven made people like brothers to each other. For this reason, He did not bestow upon them sharp weapons, but when He made the birds and beasts, He gave them long teeth and sharp claws. But the way in which humans differ from birds and beasts is slight, and thus they ought to be gentle and amiable.

In claiming that the difference between humans and animals is “slight”, Ruggieri is clearly alluding to Mencius:

孟子曰：「人之所以異於禽獸者幾希，庶民去之，君子存之。舜明於庶物，察於人倫，由仁義行，非行仁義也。」

Mencius said, “That wherein human beings differ from the birds and beasts is but slight. The majority of people relinquish this, while the noble person retains it. Shun was clear about the multitude of things and observant of human relationships. Humaneness and rightness were the source of his actions; he did not just perform acts of humaneness and rightness.” (Mengzi 4B19, trans. Bloom).

Ruggieri evidently includes a reference to this passage in the present context insofar as Mencius speaks of 人倫 “human relationships” as being one of the main differences between humans and animals (cf. 舜明於庶物，察於人倫 “Shun was clear about the multitude of things and observant of human relationships”). Ruggieri sees the aim of the second table of the Decalogue – to promote a functional and harmonious society – as consonant with Mencius’ idea of upholding normative human relationships, and thus he alludes to this overlapping concern in his discussion of the second section of the Decalogue.³³ The problem, however, is that Mencius’ own words, namely that the difference between humans and animals is “slight”, seem to contradict plainly what Ruggieri had argued beforehand in the discussion on human versus animal souls: 故僧言人之魂靈，大異乎禽獸者如此。 “Therefore, I say that human souls are very different from those of animals”. In Ricci’s

³² These works include Vagnone’s *Jiaoyao jielüe* and Yang Tingyun’s aforementioned *Xiaoluan bu bingming shuo*. While this was used to appease those Chinese who were sceptical of Christianity as being potentially politically subversive (as in Yang’s case, writing in the year of an anti-Christian persecution), the expansion of the fourth commandment to the political sphere is also firmly based in Aquinas: see *De duobus praeceptis caritatis et decem legis praeceptis* “On the Two Commandments of Charity and on the Ten Commandments of the Law”, II. cap 4. And see further the Roman Catechism on the topic of the Fourth Commandment.

³³ For what it is worth, this allusion to Mencius is absent from the corresponding passage (14.4, cf. Canaris 2023, 255) in *Vera et brevis divinarum rerum expositio*.

Tianzhu shiyi, the Chinese scholar is persuaded by the Christian to reject Mencius' claim, saying: 吁! 今吾方知, 人所異於禽獸者, 非幾希也。靈魂不滅之理, 甚正也, 甚明也。"Well! Now I know for the first time that the ways in which man differs from the birds and beasts is not slight. The teaching concerning the indestructibility of the soul is very just and very clear." (§ 168).³⁴ Implicit here is also a tacit correction of Ruggieri.³⁵ In the revised edition of the *Tianzhu shilu*, the *Tianzhu shengjiao shilu* 天主聖教實錄 "The True Record of the Holy Religion of the Lord of Heaven", revised by Manuel Dias, Jr., Gaspar Ferreira and João Monteiro and published around 1640, the characters 幾希 "slight" are changed to 極甚 "exceedingly great".³⁶

The two case studies above show that Ruggieri's attempts to accommodate Chinese values and philosophical perspectives in his discussion of the Decalogue did not meet with uniform success. There is a further complexity of a more general nature to note. It seems likely that the Chinese would find it counterintuitive to reduce all the ethical commandments of the Decalogue merely to divine instruction. Aquinas himself acknowledges that most of the precepts of the Decalogue belong already to natural law (such as "Honour your father and your mother", "You shall not kill"), while others (such as "You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain") require additional divine instruction (ST I-II, q. 100, a. 1, resp.). Ruggieri's earlier comments on innate filial piety discussed above can be taken to imply that at least the fourth commandment is reducible to the natural law. However, this wider issue is unfortunately not discussed by Ruggieri.

The promotion of the path of religious life as the surest way to heaven does not deny the moral respectability and legitimacy of married life in the secular world, but the Christian is also unambiguous concerning the former's superiority over the latter: 人若棄其財色, 專一奉事天主者, 尤勝乎娶妻求財之輩矣。"Those who renounce wealth and sexual desire and dedicate themselves to serving the Lord of Heaven are greatly superior to those who marry and seek wealth" (15.5). The self-authorizing nature of the claim is unmistakable. When the Chinese continues to ask about the sacraments, the Christian responds that it is difficult to explain them in a few words, and so he mentions only baptism. In the Latin text, all seven sacraments are enumerated and each briefly described, but already the worry is expressed that one who has not yet converted will have difficulties understanding them. Ruggieri evidently determined, again in the spirit of accommodation, that a fuller treatment would go beyond what his readers were equipped to receive.

To summarize, we can observe the many subtle attempts that Ruggieri has made to render his account of the natural and divine laws as accessible as possible to the Chinese. While carefully omitting a number of details found in Aquinas – the reasons for which we have considered in detail – he still offers a robust and substantial account of this doctrine. We should also add that Ruggieri does not use the familiar terms of subsequent Christian writings to refer to these laws. But the depth of his analysis and presentation surpasses many other later discussions. To these we now turn.

³⁴ Translation from Matteo Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu Shiyi* 天主實義), trans. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Hu Kuo-chen, S.J.; revised edition Thierry Meynard, S.J. (Chestnut Hill, MA: Institute of Jesuit Sources, 2016).

³⁵ For another example of Ricci tacitly correcting details of Ruggieri's text, see Paul K. Hosle, "A cross-cultural archery analogy in Matteo Ricci's *Tianzhu shiyi*", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 87, 2024, 201–07, at 201–02.

³⁶ The variant is noted in Canaris 2023: 169. It would take us too far from the primary focus on natural and divine law to examine how some tried to find greater common ground between Mencius' and the Catholic view on the difference between humans and animals. A notable example is Giulio Aleni in his *Xingxue cushu*. See the discussion in Dawei Pan, "One hundred years of echoes: the influence of the Jesuit Aleni on the spiritual life of the Manchu prince Depei", *Religions* 15, 2024, 138. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel15010138>.

Yang Tingyun

Born in Hangzhou to a well-to-do and educated family, Yang Tingyun was a life-long Confucian in terms of most of his basic *mores*, but this does not mean that he did not feel the need to turn to other religious sources of meaning. His retirement from his official career in 1609 was followed by two years of intense devotion to Buddhism. In 1611, however, an impactful encounter and debate with Jesuits invited by leading convert Li Zhizao (李之藻) convinced him of the truth of Catholicism. (Yang had met Ricci in Beijing close to a decade before, and while he would later describe the encounter as positive and inspiring, he did not convert at that time.) He converted in 1612 after taking the painful step, demanded by the missionaries, of parting with his cherished concubine.³⁷ Yang proved to be a most reliable convert. During the anti-Christian persecutions of 1616–17, which were instigated by the Nanjing Ministry of Rites Shen Que 沈淮 and led to the arrest and returning to Macao of many missionaries, Yang personally sheltered several Jesuits including Aleni, with whom he developed a close friendship and collaboration. In 1621 he published his first major work defending Christianity, the *Daiyi pian* 代疑篇 (“Resolving Doubts”), which was followed in the same year by the *Tianshi mingbian* 天釋明辨 (“Distinguishing Clearly Between Christianity and Buddhism”).³⁸ Yang subsequently wrote *Daiyi xupian* 代疑續篇 “Supplement to *Resolving Doubts*” shortly before his death in 1627, and the work was published posthumously in 1635.

Our analysis of Yang’s thoughts on the Three Teachings will be rather selective. In the *Daiyi pian*, towards the beginning of the second of two *juan*, Yang writes:

上古之時，性教在人心，依其良知良能，可不為惡，只以行與事示之，聖賢名教迪之，人人自畏主命，不須降生 ... 三代而後，聖賢既遠，奸偽愈滋，性教之在人心者日漓。詩書之示“監戒者日玩”，則又大發仁愛，以無限慈悲，為絕世希，有自天而降，具有人身，號曰耶穌，此云救世者。

In ancient times, the “natural teaching” was in man’s heart. Through one’s innate knowledge (*liangzhi*) and innate ability (*liangneng*), one was able to avoid being bad. This was only indicated by deeds and facts and directed by the famous teachings of sages and saints. Everybody, by nature, stood in awe of the Lord’s decree. Therefore, it was not necessary for [Christ] to be born. After the Three Dynasties, the sages and saints were remote, wickedness and falsehood increased more and more, the “natural teaching” in man’s heart dripped away day after day. As the *Book of Odes* and *Book of Documents* express it: “The control over the commandments became more careless every day”. And then the utmost benevolent love happened: with His unlimited pity, which nobody can estimate, He descended from Heaven and adopted a human body. He was called *Yesu*, which means “Savior of the World”.³⁹

³⁷ For a discussion of Yang’s life and conversion, see Nicolas Standaert, *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China: His Life and Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1988) and Yu Liu, “The religiosity of a former Confucian-Buddhist: the Catholic faith of Yang Tingyun”, *Journal of the History of Ideas* 73, 2012, 25–46.

³⁸ In fact, the original 1621 title of this latter text was *Xishi mingbian* 西釋明辨 (Distinguishing Clearly between Western Religion and Buddhism), but in 1624 it was renamed *Tianshi mingbian*. For further discussion of the publication of these works, see Yu-Yin Cheng, “Changing cosmology, changing perspectives on history and politics: Christianity and Yang Tingyun’s 楊庭筠 (1562–1627) reflections on China”, *Journal of World History* 24, 2013, 499–537, at 510–12.

³⁹ Xiping Zhang (ed.), *Fandigang tu shu guan cang Ming Qing Zhong Xi wen hua jiao liu shi wen xian cong kan: Di yi ji* 梵蒂岡圖書館藏明清中西文化交流史文獻叢刊: 第一輯, Vol. 23 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe 大象出版社, 2014), 121. We quote (with slight adaptations) the translation of this passage provided in Standaert, *Yang Tingyun*, 129. The interpretation of the name of Jesus that Yang gives is consistent with Ricci, *Tianzhu shiyi*, §580, although the addition of “the world” is imprecise from an etymological point of view.

Yang describes the transition from the period of harmony with the natural law to the era of moral decay which called for the coming of Christ. While in missionary texts such as those by Ruggieri, Vagnone, Aleni, and others, this story of the gradual forgetting of the natural law is recounted according to biblical chronology, here Yang uses the Chinese chronological framework of the Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang, Zhou) representing moral uprightness, followed by moral decadence. Here also, Yang does not mention the Teaching by the Book, although he does in the *Tianshi mingbian*, where he mentions all three of the teachings (the last under the name 恩教). In the *Daiyi xupian*, he explicitly acknowledges that the Catholic doctrine of the three stages of moral teaching culminating in the Incarnation represents an important difference from traditional Confucianism.⁴⁰ In the *Tianshi mingbian* he elaborates further on the natural law, writing: 天教以賦畀之良知, 良能爲性, 教人類受衷。原有明德, 不教而知趨避, 上古之人皆有之。 “The Teaching of Heaven [i.e. Catholicism] considers the bestowed innate knowledge and innate ability to be our nature, teaching humankind to receive their moral sense. Originally there was illustrious virtue; without instruction people knew what to pursue and what to avoid; the people of high antiquity all possessed it”.⁴¹

What is important about these two extended passages is the direct association of the natural teaching with the Chinese notions of *liangzhi* and *liangneng*, which as discussed above was only hinted at in Ruggieri’s *Tianzhu shilu*. We find this link made explicit also in the *Dake wen* 答客問 (“Answering the Guest’s Questions”), published ten years after Yang’s work in 1631 by the then 23-year-old Chinese convert Zhu Zongyuan 朱宗元 (1609–60).⁴² This work attempts to demonstrate the fundamental unity of early Confucianism and Catholicism, and the 性教 *xingjiao* is directly equated, albeit without more than minimal elaboration, with *liangzhi* and *liangneng*.⁴³ In none of these writings do we find – indeed, we should not realistically expect to find – any reflection on the potentially significant differences between Aquinas’ notion of natural law and these Chinese concepts. We find here an interesting case where Western and Chinese concepts are associated, but we ourselves should be cautious before following them wholesale. In this context, we may also observe that other Chinese, instead of trying to fit the Catholic doctrine of natural law with Chinese concepts, attacked it as incoherent. For example, the Buddhist master Ouyi Zhixu 藕益智旭 criticized the aspect of the theory whereby the original good nature comes from an external source, namely God, on the grounds that this deprived morality of its true inner source, and he further deemed it inexplicable that the Lord of Heaven would then allow this supposedly perfect nature to degenerate or fall into temptation by the devil.⁴⁴

Another aspect of Yang’s exposition that deserves special comment is his application of the framework of the Christian theology of history to the world of ancient China. As the *Daiyi pian* says, because the natural teaching was in full force during the period of remote antiquity, people all revered Heaven and had no need of the Incarnation. Erik Zürcher remarks as follows on Yang’s motives for making this argument: “Thus by this mixture of

⁴⁰ See Zürcher, “Jesuit accommodation and the Chinese cultural imperative”, 44.

⁴¹ Xiping Zhang (ed.), *Fandigang tu shu guan cang Ming Qing Zhong Xi wen hua jiao liu shi wen xian cong kan: Di yi ji* 梵蒂岡圖書館藏明清中西文化交流史文獻叢刊: 第一輯, Vol. 24 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe 大象出版社, 2014), 223. The translation is ours.

⁴² See Archie C.C. Lee, “Cross-textual reading strategy: a study of late Ming and early Qing Chinese Christian writings”, *Ching Feng* 4, 2003, 1–27, at 19.

⁴³ Xiping Zhang (ed.), *Fandigang tu shu guan cang Ming Qing Zhong Xi wen hua jiao liu shi wen xian cong kan: Di yi ji* 梵蒂岡圖書館藏明清中西文化交流史文獻叢刊: 第一輯, Vol. 25 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe 大象出版社, 2014), 530.

⁴⁴ See Beverley Foulks, “Duplicitous thieves: Ouyi Zhixu’s criticism of Jesuit missionaries in Late Imperial China”, *Chung-Hwa Buddhist Journal* 21, 2008, 55–75, at 69.

Confucian positivism and Christian ideas about natural theology, China's unbaptized but virtuous souls were saved, as was her face".⁴⁵ Yang had a strong interest in deploying the theology of natural law to allow for the salvation of the early Chinese sages. Moreover, in the passage cited from the *Tianshi mingbian*, we should appreciate the additional reference to 衷 *zhong*. Yang alludes to the *Book of Documents*, "Announcement of Tang" (湯誥): 惟皇上帝, 降衷于下民。 "The august high God has conferred (even) on the common people a moral sense (*zhong* 衷)". By the reference to 明德 *mingde* "illustrious virtue", Yang also clearly alludes to the *Great Learning*, here expressing the idea that at this time all under Heaven was in a state of peace and harmony (天下平 *tianxia ping*). A society governed by the natural law is thus, in Yang's eyes, a society in conformity with the Confucian moral ideal. Yang's evoking of *mingde* in this context can also recall Wang Yangming, who used *mingde* to explain the intertwined concepts of *liangzhi* and "nature endowed by Heaven" (天命之性).⁴⁶

It is fitting that Yang as a Chinese would not only make more direct connections between natural law and the Chinese notions of *liangzhi* and *liangneng*, but would also apply this idea to ancient Chinese history. Yang too aims to demonstrate the deep commonalities between Confucianism and Catholicism, and for him emphasizing natural law is a most effective way to highlight the common moral source of these two traditions.

Giulio Aleni

We will end our discussion with Giulio Aleni, whom we have already addressed in part above. One of the most respected missionaries in China, he was called "Confucius from the West" (西來孔子 *Xilai Kongzi*) even during his lifetime. He first entered China in 1613 and went on to write over 20 Chinese works.⁴⁷ We will here focus on the presentation of the Three Teachings in Aleni's 1635 *Tianzhu jiangsheng yinyi* 天主降生引義 ("Introduction to the Incarnation of the Lord of Heaven") and 1642 *Tianzhu shengjiao sizijingwen* 天主聖教四字經文 ("Four Character Classic of the Sacred Teaching of the Lord of Heaven"), *Sizijingwen* for short.⁴⁸ The former text forms one of a three-part instalment of works by Aleni on Christ and the incarnation, the other two being *Tianzhu jiangsheng yanxing jilüe* 天主降生言行紀畧 ("Brief Record on the Speeches and Conducts of the Incarnated Lord of Heaven", 1635) and *Tianzhu jiangsheng chuxiang jingjie* 天主降生出像經解 ("Illustrated Explanations on the Incarnation of the Lord of Heaven", 1637).⁴⁹ The title of the *Sizijingwen* of course nods to the *Sanzijing* 三字經 ("Three Character Classic"), the famous Confucian children's primer putatively composed by Wang Yinglin 王應麟 of the late Song dynasty. Aleni's Catholic catechism for children continues, with reduced complexity, the basic framework found already in Ruggieri's work. The *Sizijingwen* was published in the later stage of Aleni's Fujian mission and seven years before his death.

⁴⁵ Erik Zürcher, "Confucian and Christian religiosity in late Ming China", *The Catholic Historical Review* 83, 1997, 614–53, at 629.

⁴⁶ Cf. *Daxue wen*.

⁴⁷ For an excellent discussion of Aleni's life and writings, see Gang Song, *Giulio Aleni, Kouduo richao, and Christian-Confucian Dialogism in Late Ming Fujian* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

⁴⁸ A recent edition and translation of this latter text is available: Anthony E. Clark, *A Chinese Jesuit Catechism: Giulio Aleni's Four Character Classic* 四字經文 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021). Unless otherwise stated we will follow this translation. It should be noted, however, that it contains several errors, some of which we point out in this article.

⁴⁹ This last text has been the object of a thorough study by Junhyoung Michael Shin, "The supernatural in the Jesuit accommodation to Confucianism: Giulio Aleni's *Tianzhu jiangsheng chuxiang jingjie* 天主降生出像經解 (Fuzhou, 1637)", *History of Religions* 50, 2011, 329–361.

Its intended audience is certainly one factor that contributes to the simplification and condensation of this rich teaching, which is found in more detail in the *Tianzhu jiangsheng yinyi*. Both texts, however, share the commonality of introducing the doctrines of natural and divine law in the context of broader discussions of Sacred History.⁵⁰ We should also note that these are the not only places that Aleni discusses this theory. For instance, in the second *juan* of the *Kouduo richao* 口鐸日抄 (“Diary of Oral Admonitions”), a series of notes chiefly compiled by convert Li Jiubiao 李九標 which records conversations between Chinese converts and Aleni (and other missionaries) between 1630 and 1640, Aleni explains very succinctly the doctrine of the Three Teachings, referring to them as the 性教 *xingjiao*, 書教 *shujiao*, and 寵教 *chongjiao* respectively.⁵¹

In the *Tianzhu jiangsheng yinyi*, Aleni speaks of the original unblemished goodness of human nature before the Fall: 人性初界，極為純善，備有原義諸德。規誡之條，銘在人心，不待人教，自明趨避，謂之性教。 “When human nature was first bestowed, it was moral to the utmost, furnished with original righteousness and all the virtues. The instructions of the commandments were inscribed on the human hearts, and not requiring external human teaching people spontaneously knew what to pursue and what to avoid. This is called the natural law (*xingjiao*)” (p. 4).⁵² The language of pursuing (趨) and avoiding (避) recalls the earlier-cited first precept of the natural law, *bonum est faciendum et prosequendum, et malum vitandum* “the good must be done and pursued, and evil must be avoided”, but like Ruggieri, Aleni does not dwell explicitly on the function of reason in coming to this knowledge. In the *Sizijingwen*, mentioning the creation of Adam and Eve, Aleni similarly but more simply writes: 命以性教，為善避惡。 “God provided commandments by means of the Teaching by Nature (i.e. the natural law)”.⁵³ The content of this law is expressed as 上愛天主，下愛世人。 “Above, [one must] love the Lord of Heaven – and below, [one must] love mankind”,⁵⁴ which corresponds to the summary of natural law provided by Ruggieri. The natural law did not prevent men from sin, and once the accumulation of sin had reached an unbearable level, God was compelled to send the Flood. 2,512 years after the Deluge, humanity forgot the natural law,⁵⁵ requiring God to commission Moses with the first of the divine laws.

⁵⁰ This is self-evident from the very title of the *Tianzhu jiangsheng yinyi*. The *Sizijingwen* opens with comments on the nature of God, but the majority of the text is concerned with Sacred History, including the story of the Incarnation and Resurrection, and then also eschatology. Thus, it is rather puzzling that Clark, *A Chinese Jesuit Catechism*, 17, mentioning that catechetical writings were divided into either the categories of supernatural/revealed theology or natural theology, writes, “Aleni’s four character primer more properly fits into the second of these categories”. Aleni’s *Wanwu Zhenyuan* 萬物真原 (The True Source of the Myriad Things, 1628), recently translated by Paul K. Hosle and Biyun Dai, *Scholastic Metaphysics in Late Ming China: Giulio Aleni’s “The True Source of the Myriad Things”* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2024) indeed consists in large part of natural theology.

⁵¹ Xiping Zhang (ed.), *Fandigang tu shu guan cang Ming Qing Zhong Xi wen hua jiao liu shi wen xian cong kan: Di yi ji* 梵蒂岡圖書館藏明清中西文化交流史文獻叢刊：第一輯, Vol. 26 (Zhengzhou: Daxiang chubanshe 大象出版社, 2014), 522–3. For the English translation of this passage with some discussion, see Zürcher, *Kouduo richao*. Vol. 1, 261–2.

⁵² For the *Tianzhu jiangsheng yinyi*, *juan* 1, we cite the facsimile of manuscript Chinois 6894 available at Bibliothèque nationale de France, Département des Manuscrits and viewable online: <https://gallica.bnf.fr/ark:/12148/btv1b9006336t/f4.image#> (last accessed 3 November 2024). We cite the page numbering internal to the manuscript.

⁵³ Clark, *A Chinese Jesuit Catechism*, 67, provides a less suitable rendering: “[God provided commandments] so that nature may be instructed – to be good and avoid evil”.

⁵⁴ Unless otherwise stated, we follow the translations of Clark, *A Chinese Jesuit Catechism*.

⁵⁵ Clark, *A Chinese Jesuit Catechism*, 70 renders 世忘性教，無行善心 as “That generation forgot moral teachings – and did not behave with virtuous hearts”, again obscuring the precise meaning of 性教 *xingjiao*.

Several points in Aleni's account of Moses' giving of the law deserve mention. First, in the *Sizijingwen*, Aleni, analogous to Ruggieri in the *Tianzhu shilu*, speaks of Moses "notifying all people" (出示普世) of this law.⁵⁶ In order not to offend Chinese sensibilities or raise questions that would be too complicated to answer, Aleni has altered the biblical text and avoided mentioning the privileged status of the Jewish people. Tangentially, we find that this alteration of the biblical story is also reflected in the writings of converts. For example, Wang Zheng 王徵 (1571–1644) reports in his 1628 *Weitian airen jilun* 畏天愛人極論 ("Ultimate Discussion on Fearing Heaven and Loving Human Beings") that the Jesuit Diego de Pantoja (Chinese name: Pang Diwo 龐迪我) explained to him about the Ten Commandments, 令普世遵守 "[The Lord of Heaven] enjoined all people of the world to abide by them".⁵⁷ In the aforementioned *Dake wen* of Zhu Zongyuan we find the same expression regarding the giving of the Decalogue.⁵⁸ Noteworthy, however, is that in the *Tianzhu jiangsheng yinyi*, Aleni more elaborately mediates this reductive simplification with acknowledgement of the special status of the Jewish people in a way that does not risk offending Chinese readers. Presenting the Mosaic law (which here, unlike in the *Sizijingwen*, he calls 經教, p. 5) as being given to all people such that everyone was restored to moral sense and only considered serving the Lord of Heaven and Earth as the consummate teaching (皆惟以奉天地之主為至教, p. 5), Aleni describes how the true transmission of this teaching was subsequently lost through the increase of languages and heresies (異端). Only the country of Judea (如德亞國) preserved the "true tradition of Heavenly Learning" (天學真傳). The special status of the Jewish people is thus delicately presented as the result of their effort in preserving a universal teaching, not as something determined from the outset by God to the exclusion of other nations.

On the substance of the Mosaic law, Aleni speaks in the *Sizijingwen* of its threefold division into commands involving serving God (事主), loving humans (愛人) and governing the country well (善政治國). Clark comments that "Aleni has condensed the Ten Commandments from ten to three".⁵⁹ Eugenio Menegon writes: "This somewhat modified form of the Commandments is interesting especially in its third point: it sounds more like a Confucian preoccupation, than a Christian one!".⁶⁰ One should surely not exclude the Confucian resonance here, but more precisely, Aleni alludes to the division of the Old Law (including but not limited to the Ten Commandments) into ceremonial, moral, and judicial precepts (cf. *ST* I-II, q. 99). In the *Tianzhu shilu*, Ruggieri similarly refers to this tripartite division (8.5):

此誠中有三事：一者教人祭拜天主禮儀，二者以十誠教人行善，三者教人以善政治國。

There are three types of commandments in this law: firstly, there are those that teach people to perform the sacrificial rituals in honour of the Lord of Heaven; secondly, there are Ten Commandments to teach people how to behave virtuously; thirdly, there are those which teach people how to rule a kingdom with good governance.

⁵⁶ Clark, *A Chinese Jesuit Catechism*, 70.

⁵⁷ Ruifang Mao (ed.), *Weitian airen jilun: Wang Zheng tianzhujiao wenxianji* (Taipei: Ganlan huaxuan chubanshe, 2014), at 17. The point is made by Wang Zheng again on p. 55. For a detailed holistic analysis of the content and literary structure of the *Weitian airen jilun*, see Paul K. Hosle, "Identifying with Confucius as a Catholic in late Ming China: the case of Wang Zheng's *Weitian airen jilun* (1628)", *Monumenta Serica* (forthcoming), which includes further discussion and contextualization of Wang Zheng's views on the Decalogue.

⁵⁸ Zhang (ed.), *Fandigang tu shu guan cang Ming Qing Zhong Xi wen hua jiao liu shi wen xian cong kan: Di yi ji*, Vol. 25, 530.

⁵⁹ Clark, *A Chinese Jesuit Catechism*, 70.

⁶⁰ Eugenio Menegon, "The Catholic four-character classic (*Tianzhu shengjiao sizi jingwen* 天主聖教四字經文): a Confucian pattern to spread a foreign faith in late Ming China", *Idomeneo* 30, 2020, 157–70, at 164–5.

In having the Ten Commandments stand in for the moral precepts, Ruggieri accords with Aquinas' claim that all the moral precepts of the law are reducible to the Ten Commandments (ST I-II, q. 100, a. 3).

We are told that after another 1,550 years, 世違書教, 皆相從惡 “That generation turned against the Teaching by the Book – and everyone followed evil”.⁶¹ This prepares the transition to the Incarnation, interpreted in the *Tianzhu jiangsheng yinyi* as God using the wickedness of humans as an occasion for utmost goodness (pp. 16–17). At the age of 31, Jesus went out into the world and spread his teaching (出世敷教), and we are informed that between his Resurrection and Ascension he laid down “the bureaucracy of Holy Church – and the moral laws of God's kingdom” (聖教政治, 神國法度), including the position of the pope and the line of priests, and established the seven sacraments. At this point in the *Sizijingwen* Aleni does not go into much detail, although it should be noted that he actually mentions all the sacraments by name, which Ruggieri had abstained from doing in his Chinese text. After a discussion of eschatology, however, Aleni then ends with the moral duties that we can learn from the sacred writings (神書 *shenshu*). Here we come closest to an elaboration of the New Law. Like Ruggieri, the content of this law is moral and sacramental, baptism and Eucharist playing a prominent role on the latter front. Consistent with Aquinas, following Christ's teaching includes, on the moral level, living in accordance with the basic principles of the natural law (愛主愛人 “love the Lord and love persons”) and observing the Ten Commandments (守十誡命). We are also told to overcome the Seven Deadly Sins (克罪七宗).⁶² Other lesser admonitions, for example, to attend daily mass and pay attention to the sermon, are included in this concluding section.

Aleni's *Tianzhu jiangsheng yinyi* and *Sizijingwen* are fine examples of the further exposition of this doctrine to broader Chinese audiences. We have noted substantial continuity with earlier such attempts, and also some additional forms of subtle accommodation.

Conclusion

In this paper we have analysed how the theology of natural and divine laws was articulated in works composed in Chinese during the late sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth centuries, texts written by both European missionaries and Chinese converts. We have thus focused on both the transmission of Western concepts into China, and their reception in turn by the native Chinese. Different works treat this issue with varying levels of thoroughness. One can observe, however, that one commonality of the authors discussed here is that they all demonstrate a significant degree of creativity in selecting and emphasizing the specific aspects of this doctrine that suit their audiences and broader proselytizing requirements. Instead of a rigid reproduction of scholastic doctrine we find a dynamic mediation of the core insights of this theory with the concerns, moral values and philosophical speculations of the Chinese themselves. While this basic point has of course been noted in various forms, our article has illuminated several noteworthy and subtle cases of this process that have up to now not been analysed. Most notably, we have not only traced historically but also elaborated further on the connection drawn by Jesuits and Chinese converts between the natural law and *liangzhi*. While recognizing the reasons which motivated this interesting connection, we draw attention to significant differences in the philosophical premises behind each respective concept.

⁶¹ Clark, *A Chinese Jesuit Catechism*, 70 incorrectly translates 復至一千, 五百五十 as “[Moses] reappeared [or “resurrected”] one thousand-five hundred and fifty [years later]”. Also, Clark renders 書教 *shujiao* vaguely as “the instructions of [God's] decree”.

⁶² It may be noted that Diego de Pantoja's *Qike* 七克 “Seven Victories”, an influential ethical treatise on overcoming the Seven Cardinal Sins, was published in 1614.

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