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Cover photograph Portrait of Hedda Morrison by Adolph Lazi, Stuttgart, 1931–32  
(reproduced courtesy of Franz Lazi)

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# HUMAN CONSCIENCE AND RESPONSIBILITY IN MING-QING CHINA

卩 Paolo Santangelo

La preuve de ta faute n'est-elle pas dans ton châtime<sup>nt</sup>? Il t'appartient de reconnaître ton erreur: *on me châtie, donc je suis coupable*.

—André Gide<sup>1</sup>

The problem of the 'punishment' that an individual perceives in his or her own mind after committing a violation of the norms, and which has in some way been internalized in the course of the process of socialization, does not pertain solely to ethics but also touches upon the fields of psychology, anthropology, sociology, and the history of religions. It is well-known that every society develops its own specific way of perceiving such sentiments, within the framework of the culture that it produces and by which it is in turn influenced. Chinese civilization provides an example of this, having created refined systems of ethics, and the related punishments, in a fashion different from those of Western civilization. These systems have been the object of much interest and curiosity ever since China's first contact with the modern world, which was through the Jesuits. Modern social psychology has further introduced the ideal-types of the 'guilt society' (*zuigan shehui* 罪感社會), and the 'shame society' (*chigan shehui* 恥感社會), and the related guilt-orientated and shame-orientated personalities.<sup>2</sup> Chinese society has been characteristically associated with the shame-pattern.

## 1. *Guilt and Shame*

On the outside he is a gentleman, but on the inside a mean person.<sup>3</sup>

A preliminary concern has to be the sense and the validity of the terms most frequently met with in the literature on this subject, namely 'sin', 'guilt', and 'shame'. No examination in depth of such concepts is possible here, and I

This article has been produced as part of my research on the perception of emotions in China, and of the project on Chinese aesthetic and moral thought directed by Professor Lionello Lanciotti, with the support of a grant from the Italian Ministry for Scientific and Technological Research. It is an elaboration of chap. 4, "The Human Conscience and Responsibility" in Paolo Santangelo, *Il "peccato" in Cina* ["Sin" in China] (Bari: Laterza, 1991).

<sup>1</sup> "Is not the proof of your fault in your punishment? You must recognize your wrong-doing: *I am being punished, therefore I am guilty*."

<sup>2</sup> Zhu Zhenlou, "Cong shehui geren yu wenhuade guanxi lun Zhongguoren xingge de chigan 耻感" [A discussion of shame orientation in the Chinese character from the point of view of the relationship between society, the individual, and culture], in Li Yiyuan and Yang Guoshu, ed., *Zhongguoren de xingge* [The character of the Chinese] (Taipei: Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica, 1973), pp.95–6.

<sup>3</sup> *Sanguo yanyi* [The romance of the three kingdoms] (c.1664; reprint ed., Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1972), 36: 289.

<sup>4</sup> Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius—the secular as sacred* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), p.18. Recently the question has been tackled again by Rosemont (Henry Rosemont, Jr., “Rights-bearing individuals and role-bearing persons,” in Mary Bockover, ed., *Rules, rituals, and responsibility. Essays dedicated to Herbert Fingarette* [La Salle: Open Court, 1991], pp.71–101).

<sup>5</sup> Fingarette, *Confucius*, p.34. This distinction recalls Ruth Benedict’s contrast between ‘shame’ and ‘guilt’ cultures, the former being based on external sanctions, and the later on sin. See Ruth Benedict, *The chrysanthemum and the sword* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1946), p.223; and Hu Hsien-chin, “The Chinese concepts of ‘face’,” *American Anthropologist* 46 (1944): 223–42.

<sup>6</sup> Rosemont, “Rights-bearing individuals,” p.89.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.89–90.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.81.

<sup>9</sup> B. Schwartz, *The world of thought in ancient China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p.79.

<sup>10</sup> Michael Foucault, *L’usage des plaisirs* [The use of pleasures] (Paris, 1984), provides a short critical examination of this question. See Italian edition: *L’uso dei piaceri. Storia della sessualità* [The use of pleasures. A history of sexuality] (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1984), vol.2, p.28.

will confine myself to laying out certain concrete considerations related to the central theme of how ‘moral responsibility’ has been understood. In contrast to what took place in Europe, no great debates developed in China as to how far a person could be considered responsible for his or her behaviour, and to what degree his or her moral liberty might be influenced by external or internal forces. Fingarette has observed in a provocative study of the *Analects* that Confucian morality is centred on social behaviour and social relations, and that it neglects those psychological aspects relating to “the ultimate power of the individual to select from genuine alternatives to create his own spiritual destiny, ... guilt, and repentance and retribution for such guilt.”<sup>4</sup>

Thus the Western concept of choice/responsibility/guilt is contrasted with the Chinese concept of shame “associated with specific external possessions, conduct or status, ... [and] focussed upon one’s status or conduct in relation to the world rather than an inward charge against one’s stained, corrupt self.”<sup>5</sup> Recently the matter has been raised again by Rosemont from a different provocative angle. Rosemont compares our ethical-political conception based on the abstract individual who has a series of rights and who takes on the responsibility of the choice of his own actions (“the model of human beings as purely rational, self-seeking, autonomous individuals”)<sup>6</sup> with the classical Confucian conception based on the concept of interpersonal roles:

The Chinese philosophical terms focus attention on qualities of human beings, as a natural species, and on the kinds of persons who exemplify (or do not exemplify) these qualities to a high degree. Where we would speak of choice, they speak of will, resolve; where we invoke abstract principles, they invoke concrete human relations, and attitudes towards those relations. Moreover, if the early Confucian writings are to be interpreted consistently, they must be read as insisting on the *altogether* social nature of human life, for the qualities of persons, the kinds of persons they are, and the knowledge and attitudes they have are not exhibited in actions, but only in *inter* actions, human interactions. While reflection and solitude are necessary ingredients of our human life, we are never alone ... But note how different it is from focussing on me as an autonomous, freely choosing individual self, which for many people is the *raison d’être* of contemporary philosophy, especially rights-based moral philosophy. But for the early Confucians there can be no me in isolation, to be considered abstractly: I am the totality of roles I live in relation to specific others ... For Confucius I am my roles. Taken collectively, they weave, for each of us, a unique pattern of personal identity, such that if some of my roles change, others will of necessity change also, literally making me a different person.<sup>7</sup>

This different approach, according to Rosemont, hinders any comparison between the two ethical systems. Indeed our concept of morals is far different from the Chinese one. Confucius and his contemporaries understand their behaviour, motivations, and the consequences in terms completely different from ours. Therefore, it is not only a matter of distinct contents for a lack of common ground; in fact the Confucianists cannot even be considered moral philosophers in the modern sense of the word:

The ethnographic argument for moral relativism gains force only if it can be shown that two different people(s) evaluated human conduct in the same way—invoking similar criteria grounded and exhibited in the same or very similar concept-cluster—and that one approved the action, and the other disapproved. ... But now consider specifically the classical Chinese language in which the early Confucians wrote their philosophical views. Not merely does the language contain no lexical item for “moral,” it also does not have terms, for example, corresponding to “freedom,” “liberty,” “autonomy,” “individual,” “utility,” “principles,” “rationality,” “rational agent,” “action,” “objective,” “subjective,” “choice,” “dilemma,” “duty,” “rights,” and probably most eerie of all for a moralist, classical Chinese has no lexical item corresponding to “ought”—prudential or obligatory.<sup>8</sup>

On the other side there are those like Schwartz who distinguish between the different meanings that can be given to the term ‘choice’, and object that free choice between what is thought to be good and what bad seems to be common both to the Judaeo-Christian tradition and to the ancient Confucian tradition, while neither contains the idea of “choice between systems of different values” or the “creation of one’s own system.”<sup>9</sup> In general, the tendency to attribute a more strongly interiorized quality to Christian morality as contrasted with others is also apparent in the case of pagan morality, which has been considered more “external.”<sup>10</sup> Others, such as Chad Hansen, contrast the prescriptive character of Western ethical systems with the descriptive character of the Confucian system, founded on the teaching of moral examples which become objects of identification and emulation. Since models rather than norms are interiorized, doctrines of moral responsibility, and theories of justification with respect to liberty and conscious awareness, become superfluous, and in their place is developed the conception of the ‘rectification of names’. From this point of view an individual will not be charged with the commission of individual offences so much as with a lack of self-cultivation and a failure to educate those persons who are dependent upon him. Thus a question related to the contrast between shame and guilt is that of the

**Figure 1**

*The picture represents the dead at the presence of the judge Chujiang who rules the second court of the underworld, that is, the so-called second hell. After passing the first bell (ruled by the judge Qinguang, who keeps the registers of life and death), and being weighed in the balance and reflected in the mirror of sin, they start their punishments in the second court. This court is divided into sixteen subdivisions. The illustration shows a few (cangue and trident) of the several tortures inflicted there (such as frozen lake, hunger, blood and pus, boiling cauldrons). The animal to the right of the victim on the vertical board may be a wolf, because one of the torments of the second bell is to be pursued by wolves. (from a copy of the Yuli baochao [Taizhong: Ruicheng Press, 1963])*



<sup>11</sup> Wolfram Eberhard, *Guilt and sin in traditional China* (Berkeley & Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1967). It would be valuable to look more deeply into the plurality of aspects to be found in the dominant disposition towards retribution that we see in Chinese thought since antiquity. This disposition at some times presupposes the judgement of a Heaven that is ethically aware, at other times a group of divinities performing judicial functions, and at other times again an 'automatic' response from the universe. Furthermore, the effects may apply to the individual as such and within the context of his life, or prolong themselves after his death, or or else again extend to his family, or, finally, reach down through the sequence of his reincarnations.

<sup>12</sup> Herbert Fingarette, "The problem of the self in the Analects," *Philosophy East and West* 29.2 (1979): 132. In analogous fashion Xu Jiling speaks of the "personality of the collective consciousness" (*qunti yishi renge* 群體意識人格) as opposed to "the autonomous personality in the modern sense" (*jindai yiyishang deduhirenge* 近代意義上的獨立人格) in his "Zhongguo zhishifenzi qunti renge de lishi tansuo" [An historical inquiry into the collective personality of the Chinese intellectual], *Xinhua wenzhai* 2 (1987): 10–16, while Yang Guoshu develops the idea of "heteronomous orientation" (*taren quxiang* 他人趨向) in his "Zhongguoren de taibian" [The metamorphosis of the Chinese] (Taipei: Guiguan Tushu Gufen, 1988), p.391, and Richard Solomon that of "dependent orientation" in his *Mao's revolution and the Chinese political culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1971), pp.4, 75–9, 128–9, 210. Similar concepts have been expressed by Wolfgang Kubin in his "The inconstant monkey on the problem of the self in Confucianism," paper presented at the *International Confucius-Symposium* organized by the Konrad-Adenauer-Foundation (Bonn, St. Augustin, 21 Oct.–2 Nov. 1988), p.7, who takes as his point of departure a critique of the these supporting the development of an autonomous conscience in China, such as those of Thomas Metzger in his *Escape from predicament. Neo-Confucianism and China's evolving political culture* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), and Tu Wei-ming in his "On the Mencian perception of moral self-development," *The Monist* 6 (1978). Kubin argues

type of morality, and hence a way of conceiving ethical norms that is different from that of the West.

Eberhard's contribution remains fundamental in this respect. Starting from the Freudian development of the 'sense of guilt' and its influence on anthropological research, and the contrast drawn between "a society ruled by a sense of guilt" and "a society ruled by a sense of shame," he set himself the task of determining how far it was justified to include Chinese society under the latter heading. Through an examination of the various types of after-death punishment in the numerous hells of Buddhism, and of the diverse categories of 'sin' in the books of popular morality (*shanshu* 善書), not to mention the reliance on the principle of retribution to be found in popular tales, he showed that, to the contrary, in texts of a popular character the sense of sin dominated that of shame.<sup>11</sup>

A number of studies during the last few years have made clear the dependent, heteronomous, and conformist orientation of the Chinese.<sup>12</sup> In a controversial essay, Sun Longji throws into relief the social and external aspects of emotional reactions that follow a breach of the moral rules, and, further, while acknowledging that no culture can exist that is exclusively based on the sense of shame (*xiuchigan de wenhua* 羞恥感的文化), still considers that this latter is far stronger in Chinese civilization than that of guilt (*zui'egan* 罪惡感).<sup>13</sup> According to this line of argument, the effect of the absence of the idea of transcendence is that the only supramundane concept, which is that of 'the principles of Heaven', is simply the conceptualization of 'mind', and hence of secular relationships. Thus, too, the expression 'to

/that "the I is not the expression of the I of an individual but of the manifestation of that which is universally true. Hence the history of the 'I' in China is that of increasing [self-] control and not of [its] liberation." In a more general fashion see the tripartite division made by David Riesman between the "tradition-based" personality, on which sanctions operate through shame, the "inner-directed" which is subjected to sanctions through the sense of guilt, and the "other-directed" which is subjected to sanctions through the sense of anxiety (D. Riesman, N. Glazer, and R. Denney, eds, *The lonely crowd: a study of the changing American character* [New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1950], pp.1–25).

<sup>13</sup> Sun Longji, *Zhongguo wenhuade shenceng jigou* [The 'deep structure' of Chinese culture] (Hong Kong: Yishan, 1983), p.206. Sun is inclined to deny in polemical fashion the existence of any autonomy or individual conscience in Chinese civilization, linking this to the 'oral' character of the culture (pp.203–28). See also Werner Muensterberger, "Orality

/and dependence: characteristic of southern Chinese," *Psychoanalysis and the Social Sciences* 3 (1951): 37–69. Sun maintains that under all circumstances the individual considers of more relevance the evaluation accorded to him by society than the manner in which he or she sees him- or herself. He stresses the predominantly physical perception of the 'I', the part played by interpersonal interaction in moral sentiment (*eren* 二人), on its foundation in an education understood as obedience (*tinghua* 聽話), and on the etymology of *kou* 口 ('mouth') and *mu* 目 ('eye'), which in his view express the importance of "social presence," of a "listener," and a fear of what may be said (*ren yan ke wei* 人言可畏).

<sup>14</sup> See Confucius' recommendations in the *Analects*, *Shisan jing yinde* [Index of the thirteen classics], *Lunyu yinde* [Index of the *Analects*] (Taipei: Zongqing Tushu, 1989), 26/13/23–5, or the analysis of the heart-mind in the *Mencius* where it is described as the principle behind all human activities and the source of the conscience, *ibid.*, 12–13/2a/6;



feel guilty' (*xinzhong gandao zuiguo* 心中感到罪過) would reflect discomfort at having done violence to social relations. Although this approach unquestionably throws light on important elements of the truth, it is likewise just as evident that individual moral autonomy has existed since antiquity as it is that an emphasis has been placed on social reality.<sup>14</sup> Other authors, *per contra*, make clear the internal nature of Chinese morality and the autonomy of conscience. Yu Yingshi singles out certain concepts that he sees as showing the moral autonomy not only of Confucianism, but also of Buddhism and Daoism.<sup>15</sup> T'ang Chün-i has discussed the transcendental afflatus in Chinese philosophy.<sup>16</sup> Jin Yaoji has emphasized the guilt-laden inner character of Chinese moral conscience.<sup>17</sup>

Shame, guilt, and the sense of sin are all emotional reactions to the violation of moral, social, and religious norms, and constitute forms of 'internal control'. While the first of these is essentially directed towards society, in the sense of being understood in relation to the other members of a social group, and is intrinsically outside the sphere of religion, the second is an internal sanction that functions automatically—as the awareness of the critical judgement exercised by the superego, according to Freud—and that predominantly relates to the individual as such, but can be transcendental, often through the presupposition of a relationship with a deity. The notion of sin has a specifically religious character in that it derives from a divinely ordained set of standards. It is clearly an oversimplification to draw such distinctions since all three sentiments result from a coercion externally imposed during the process of socialization that induces the subject to learn that *no transgression goes unpunished*.<sup>18</sup> Eberhard himself points out at the end of his essay that there is no clear-cut boundary between the Confucian sense of shame and the feeling of guilt.

In recent years certain scholars have tried to make a critical analysis of this polarization of guilt and shame, and of the opposition posited between them. They have introduced intermediate concepts such as the external and internal level of shame. External shame is what we commonly understand as 'shame', namely, a moral sanction called into existence by external criticism, by ridicule, or by social attitudes. Internal shame is close to guilt, however, in that it does not operate exclusively when the offence has been discovered by others. Since the most recent studies, the dimensions of the opposition between 'guilt' and 'shame' have been recast in striking fashion.

/others' (*yi shen bu yi ta* 依身不依他, and 'self-sufficiency' (*zizu* 自足). See *Analects*, 32/15/21; cf. also Yu Yingshi, *Cong jiazhi xitong kan Zhongguo wenhua de xiandai yiyi* [The present-day meaning of Chinese culture seen from the standpoint of value-systems] (Taipei: Shibao Wenhua Gongsi, 1984), pp.47–8.

<sup>16</sup> T'ang Chün-i, "The development of ideas of spiritual value in Chinese philosophy," in *The Chinese mind. Essentials of Chinese philosophy and culture*, ed. Charles Moore (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1967), pp.188–212.

<sup>17</sup> See, in addition to the works cited by Metzger, Tu Wei-ming, T'ang Chün-i, and Yu Yingshi, the recent intervention by Jing Yaoji, "Mianchi yu Zhongguoren xingwei zhi fenxi" [An analysis of 'face' and behaviour among the Chinese], *Di'erjie guoji Hanxue huiyi lunwenji* [Proceedings of the Second International Conference on Sinology] (Taipei: Academia Sinica, 1989), pp.39–53, esp. pp.47–53. He uses such phrases as "internalized sanction," "belonging to the world of inner mind," "related to guilt," "a need emanating from personal conscience and not [induced] by others' judgments."

<sup>18</sup> Thus Leo Madow writes in *Guilt: how to recognize and cope with it* (Northvale: Aronson, 1988), p.11, that "children develop a sense of guilty fear first, and then later, after acquiring a conscience, they develop true guilt." Susan Miller, *The shame experience* (Hillsdale: Analytic Press [distr. Erlbaum], 1985), pp.31–49, distinguishes 'shame', in the sense of feeling inferior, from 'embarrassment', in the sense of feeling 'undone', and further from 'humiliation', in the sense of feeling forced down into a debased position, and from 'guilt' in the sense that one has violated a standard. Agnes Heller, in *Il potere della vergogna* [The power of shame] (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1985), p.9, distinguishes conscience from shame according to the *authority* in which they are embodied. In the case of shame, the authority is *social custom* (rituals, habits, codes, and accustomed patterns of behaviour), represented in the "eyes of others." In the case of conscience, the authority is represented by *practical reason*, which can manifest itself as an "inner voice."

/43/6a/6: 50/7a/1. Lin Yü-sheng, "The evolution of the pre-Confucian meaning of *jen* and the Confucian concept of moral autonomy," *Monumenta Serica* 31 (1974–75): 172–98, presents Confucian moral autonomy as based on the virtue of 'humanity', which nonetheless shows a close link between it and the social and ritual norms (*li* 理). See also the objections raised against Solomon's theories by T. Wong,

/"Aggression, personality and political culture," *Bulletin of the Hong Kong Psychological Society* 9 (1982): 3–17, and by Michael Bond and Hwang Kwong-kuo, "The social psychology of Chinese people," in *The psychology of the Chinese people*, ed. M. Bond (Hong Kong: Oxford University Press, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> For instance, 'to look within oneself' (*qiu zhu ji* 求諸己), 'to rely on oneself and not on

<sup>19</sup> According to Erik Erikson, *Identity, youth and crisis* (New York: Norton, 1968), p.10, inadequate attention has been paid to shame by Western scholars because of the prevalence of guilt in the West. Gershen Kaufman, *The psychology of shame* (New York: Springer, 1989), pp.6, 17, rejects the assumption that we feel guilty about deeds but feel shame about self, as well as the belief that shame is a more 'primitive' state than guilt. According to him, shame is the affect of inferiority and no other affect is more central to the development of identity, none is closer to the experienced self, nor more disturbing. Shame is felt as an inner torment. "It is the most poignant experience of the self by the self."

<sup>20</sup> For example, Silvan Tompkins, *Affect imagery consciousness*, vol.2, *The negative affects* (New York: Springer, 1963), pp.138, 151–2 (cited in Richard Wilson, "Shame and behaviour in Chinese society," *Asian Profile* 1.3 [1973]: 431). Helen Lynd, *On shame and the search for identity* (New York: Science Editions, 1961), pp.18, 23–4, 208, has noted the personal aspects intrinsic to the sense of shame, which is first of all a crisis in one's estimation of oneself for having failed to live up to one's own ideal model, and only secondly the discomfort of encountering the contempt of others. In his preface to H. B. Lewis, *Shame and guilt in neurosis* (New York: International University Press, 1971), p.2, Herman Witkin notes the subjectivity displayed by scholars regarding the notions of shame and guilt.

<sup>21</sup> According to Gerhart Piers and Milton Singer, *Shame and guilt: a psychoanalytical and cultural study* (Springfield: Charles Thomas, 1953), shame is a response to external criticism and guilt to internal criticism. Margaret Ng, "Internal shame as a moral sanction," *Journal of Chinese Philosophy* 8 (1981), and Wilson, "Shame and behaviour," have applied these theories to Confucianism. Writing from a medical point of view, P. M. Yap, in his "Phenomenology of affective disorder in Chinese and other cultures" (in *Transcultural psychiatry* [London: CIBA, 1965], ed. De Reuck and R. Porter, pp.84–114), has asserted the uselessness of the dichotomy between guilt and shame, and criticized its scientific and theoretical foundations. It is also necessary to take into account the differing perceptions



The objection has been raised that the emotion of shame has been studied in a reductive fashion,<sup>19</sup> and guilt has now come to be thought of as a subcategory of shame.<sup>20</sup>

While Gerhart Piers accepts the traditional distinction between guilt and shame, he sees no clear dividing-line between them. Both states of tension derive from frustrations: from inadequacy with respect to an ideal, in the case of shame, and, in the case of guilt, from a transgression of the norms imposed by the superego.<sup>21</sup> I would maintain that some distinction of this sort still remains valid from a theoretical-instrumental point of view, so long as it is utilized with suitable caution, and that it has a definite usefulness for the comprehension of intellectual history and of psychological and moral attitudes in traditional China.

It is not possible to deny that when Chinese society is compared with that of the West, the part played by 'shame'—always provided that the term is



**Figure 2**

Among the illustrations published by the Dianshizai Pictorial at the end of the nineteenth century may be found one depicting the punishment of the butcher, boiling in the same cauldron as the ox he had slaughtered, before the eyes of his heavenly judges. As is known, Buddhist ethics prohibit the killing of living things and accord bovines particular respect among animals. It is, in fact, no coincidence that the status of the butcher in China was among the most humble in the category of the 'lowly'—the *jianmin*. Entitled "Retribution falls on the lover of killing (Hao sha zhi bao), the tale goes as follows: "... The butcher killed the ox and, as was his custom, cooked its flesh in a cauldron in his courtyard. The butcher would normally get up at the fifth watch to inspect the cauldron, but on that particular evening, not a single sound could be heard in the courtyard after the fifth watch had passed. The butcher's wife thought this strange, and went with candle in hand to take a look at the cauldron. She was horrified to discover her husband being stewed inside the cauldron, with his legs sticking out in the air and his head and torso cooked to a pulp along with the ox he had slaughtered. People said that considering the butcher's taste for slaughter, this was a just form of punishment."

(D. J. Cohn, Vignettes from the Chinese [*Hong Kong: Renditions Paperbacks*, 1987], pp.26–7, cit. in P. Santangelo, "Destiny and retribution in late imperial China," *East and West* 42 [1992], pp. 391–2; *idem*, "Sin" in China, p.98)

used with caution—is indubitably more important than that of guilt, as may be seen through a series of different conceptions, such as those relating to the self,<sup>22</sup> to divinity,<sup>23</sup> to the state, to sin, or those concerning punishment after death, eternity, and salvation. Even if the gods may play the role of

judges, in general the entities affected by human misbehaviour are not God or the spirits. Confucian philosophy developed its concept of moral evil relative to society, instead of in terms of sin and offences against God.<sup>24</sup> Aleni, arguing for the existence of differences between the examination of sins and repentance in Chinese religious associations, and the corresponding phenomena among Christians, drew attention to the question of towards whom the fault was committed.<sup>25</sup> It was not only the lack of a personal god and of monotheism, however, that influenced the approach to sin. Chinese thought does not envisage a dualism between spirit and matter, nor the opposition between the soul and the body that is of such relevance to the Western tradition, with its consequent distinction between the rational and the sensible. The *xin* 心 is 'mind', but also 'heart'. It is the seat of thinking, but also of emotions and of sensory reactions. The rational function is not perceived as the highest one in the human being, taken as a pure *res cogitans*

/of feelings of this sort in different cultures. Weston La Barre, in *The ghost dance: origins of religion* (New York: Dell, 1972), p.448, says, for example, that "Greek guilt was not an organizing consciousness of sin and not necessarily earned by conscious moral choice after a wrangle with conscience, but rather a quasi-material contamination as a result of sometimes innocently blind acts as in the case of Oedipus." On the other hand, the morality of the Homeric world, at least within aristocratic circles, was rather characterized by the sense of shame. See Eric Dodds, *I Greci e l'irrazionale* [The Greeks and the irrational] (Firenze: La Nuova Italia, 1959).

<sup>22</sup> The concept of self did, however, change in China during the classical period and as a result of Buddhist influence. Fingarette, in "Comments and response" (Bockover, *Rules, rituals, and responsibility*, p.199), notes: "The latter commentaries and Western translations that render these remarks of Confucius in terms of 'the self'—e.g., 'cultivate the self' have been tacitly putting into Confucius's mouth a notion that he never had but that derives from their own Indian, Buddhist, or Christian intellectual backgrounds."

<sup>23</sup> It has been thought by some that in China society held the place that would be held by the deity, or deities, in other systems of ideas. According to Zhu Zhenlou, "Shame orientation," pp.85–117, the fundamental shame orientation of Chinese culture derives from the dominance of the Confucian and humanist components, with their emphasis on social norms and harmony in interpersonal relations, while the elements orientated towards guilt, of Buddhist and Christian derivation, were recessive.

<sup>24</sup> Julia Ching, *Confucianism and Christianity: a comparative study* (Tokyo & New York: Kodansha International, 1977), pp.73–9.

<sup>25</sup> Erik Zürcher, "Giulio Aleni et ses relations avec les milieux des lettres chinois au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle" [Giulio Aleni and his relations with Chinese literary circles], in *Venezia e l'Oriente* [Venice and the Orient], ed. Lionello Lanciotti (Firenze: Leo Olschki, 1987), p.121.

<sup>26</sup> Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian impact. A conflict of cultures* (Cambridge & Paris: Cambridge University Press & Maison des Sciences de l'Homme, 1985), pp.146-50.

<sup>27</sup> Sun Longji, *Deep structure*, p.226.

<sup>28</sup> Sun Longji testifies that Chinese behave in the same way towards each other (*ibid.*, p.218).

<sup>29</sup> The close linkage between the individual and the group in the moral domain is also the result of the practice of mutual denunciation, and the public examination of sins, not only in Daoist circles but also in Neo-Confucian ones as well. See Wu Pei-yi, "Self-examination and confession of sins in traditional China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 39.1 (1979): 5-38, and Johanna Handlin, *Action in late Ming thought* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), p.197. Handlin also cites the rules established by the Yuan, according to which wicked actions were noted on the door of the house of the 'sinner'. If he had mended his ways by the end of the year, this inscription could be removed, but if not he would be punished by having to perform labour-services owed by the village. (See Handlin, *Late Ming thought*, p.193.) As Lucian Pye has observed, "it would be wrong to believe that the Chinese psychic reaction to shame is somehow more superficial and less deeply felt than what is usually meant by guilt." See his *The spirit of Chinese politics. A psycho-cultural study of the authority crisis in political development* (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1968), p.96.

<sup>30</sup> See Weston La Barre, "Some observations on character structure in the Orient: II - The Chinese," *Psychiatry* 9 (1946): 215-37; John Weakland, "The organization of action in Chinese culture," *Psychiatry* 13 (1950): 361-70; Martha Wolfenstein, "Some variants in moral training of children," in *Childhood in contemporary cultures*, ed. M. Mead and M. Wolfenstein (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1955), quoted by Pye, *Chinese politics*, p.95; Wilson, "Shame and behaviour," pp. 438-40.

<sup>31</sup> Zhu Zhenlou, "Shame orientation," pp.85-117, and esp. pp.95-6.

<sup>32</sup> Pye, *Chinese politics*, p.96, observes *inter alia* that "when the Chinese child experiences shame and humiliation he wants to disappear from sight, to fall through the

and as such to be contrasted with the passions and instincts. Nor is reason, in the Chinese view, the prerogative of the soul, which, in Christian doctrine, has the capacity to distinguish between good and evil, and to act freely either for good or for evil.<sup>26</sup> In its place Neo-Confucianism created the metaphysical notions of 'human nature' and of 'principle' which together correspond to the moral imperative. For this reason, those problems relative to the freedom of the will with respect to the foreknowledge of God, or to destiny, and those relative to the internal and external limits of the moral liberty of the individual, to determinism, and so on, which have aroused so much interest among European intellectuals since the time of the Greek sophists, were all but unknown in China. Sun Longji mentions the impressions of a Norwegian stock-exchange operator, who had been brought up as a Protestant, regarding Chinese ethics. "Everyone is accustomed to assert that the people of China hold morality in high regard. But to my way of seeing things, ethics implies making personal choices. A situation in which no personal choice ever emerges cannot be considered one in which morality is at work."<sup>27</sup> Nor is it possible to ignore the weight of the Buddhist doctrine of *karma*, and its complex influence—in terms of both its sense as predetermination, and its sense as retribution—on traditional ethical ideas.

Nor is it possible to underestimate the centrality of society, from membership of which the personality and the dignity of the individual seem to have been derived. This is illustrated by the experience of every Westerner who visits not only China but any country with a culture influenced by that of China. Whenever he or she starts a conversation with someone whom he or she is meeting for the first time, questions are raised about his or her profession, about what group he or she belongs to (from his or her nationality to the organization in which he or she works), and about his or her age and matrimonial status, data that enable the interlocutor to 'place' the stranger and to assign him or her to a social context, and to be able to behave appropriately in future encounters.<sup>28</sup> The process whereby the sense of responsibility is internalized does not eliminate but, on the contrary, reinforces the social implications of morality,<sup>29</sup> thanks to the use of shaming techniques during the child's education.<sup>30</sup>

Generally speaking, scholars have tended to emphasize the dual character of the traditional Chinese system: shame and propriety—i.e. *li* 禮 or 'rites' for the literati, and punishment—i.e. *fa* 法, penal law, and *xing* 刑, punishments, and, to some degree, guilt for the populace.<sup>31</sup> This, too, is evidently a simplification, but it aids in the understanding of intellectual history in China, and Chinese psychological and moral attitudes.

Scholars for the most part identify the concept of shame with that of 'face'.<sup>32</sup> In every culture the countenance expresses both a person's physiognomy, and the direction of his or her emotional and intellectual forces. It permits the identification of a particular subject and, at the same time, presents this subject's personality to others. Hence we have such Italian expressions as 'lose face', 'save face', 'face of bronze' (i.e. effrontery), 'show

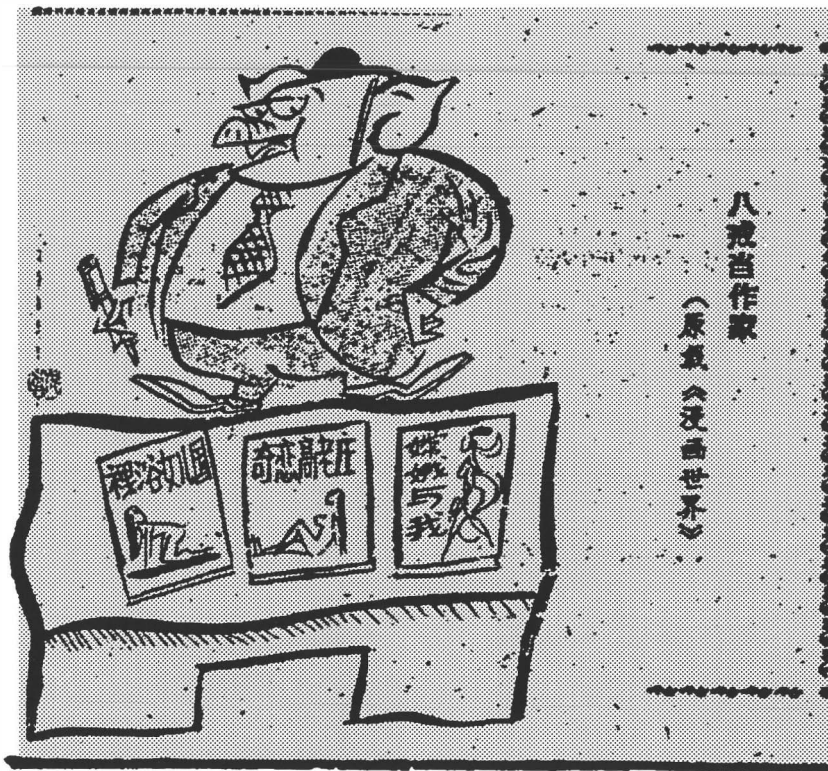


Figure 3

The 'modernization' of Pigsy, the lewd and gluttonous character from the novel *Monkey (Journey to the west)*. From the recent campaign against pornography. The inscription says "Pigsy turns writer." The title on the covers of the books on Pigsy's desk read *The Country of Nude Women Bathers*, *Gaolao Village of Strange Loves*, and *The Moon Goddess and I*. (World of Comics, reprinted in the *Guangzhou Daily*, 18.12.1989)

one's face', 'a two-faced man', and the like.<sup>33</sup> All societies, whatever their cultural differences, have, in order to maintain themselves, to mobilize their own members in such a fashion that they interact with each other in an internally controlled manner. Thus everyday life is codified in such a way that as far as is possible everyone protects his or her own ideal image through a series of negotiations and rituals that are rich in social significance (such as greetings, excuses, compliments, good manners, and tact). 'Face' is therefore this image, understood as something of positive social value that each person lays claim to through his or her reflection projected on others. Analogous expressions exist in Chinese, which imply an implicit value-judgement, namely *mianzi* 面子 or *lian* 臉. According to Arthur Smith, "'face' is the first characteristic of the Chinese, who have a strongly dramatic instinct."<sup>34</sup> The above-mentioned traits are commonly translated by the term 'face', and they perform a role of some significance in the moral domain because they express and develop the awareness of an assumed or ideal social control that can condemn every error or transgression with ridicule.<sup>35</sup>

The character *mian* may be used either as a substantive or a predicate, and besides the visage it can also indicate the area of an object, or an aspect of an abstract conception. *Lian*, on the other hand is always a substantive, and always means the human face. *Mianzi*, unlike *lian*, also implies the

/floor, to shrivel up and be inconspicuous, to hide his face, indeed, to feel the loss of his face." See also Richard Wilson, *Learning to be Chinese: the political socialization of children in Taiwan* (Cambridge, Mass.: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1970).

<sup>33</sup> Heller, *Vergogna*, p.12, notes that the "eyes of others" are what unleash the feeling of shame, and its manifestation: the person's face is made to go red, and he or she hides it.

<sup>34</sup> Arthur Smith, *Chinese characteristics* (1900; reprint ed., Singapore: Graham Brash, 1986), pp.16–17.

<sup>35</sup> Hu Hsien-chin, "The Chinese concept of face," *American Anthropologist* 46 (1944): 45–6, quoted in Sybille van der Sprenkel, *Legal institutions in Manchu China. A sociological analysis* (London: Athlone Press, 1962), p.99, and in Jin Yaoji, "Face," pp.42–3. Jin criticizes the translation of 'face' by *mian* and *lian* insofar as it has been customary in the southern dialects to use only the first of these, and for it to carry both meanings.



<sup>36</sup> For critiques, see Lu Xun, *Lu Xun quanji* [Complete works of Lu Xun], 16 vols (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue, 1981), 4: 431; 6: 98–100, on the Republic; and A. S. Chen, “The head local Party Secretary and the ‘model’ man,” *China Quarterly* 19 (1964): 229–40, on the People’s Republic. On the present-day situation, see Sun Longji, *Deep structure*, pp.199–228.

<sup>37</sup> A. Y. C. King and J. T. Myers, “Shame as an incomplete conception of Chinese culture,” unpublished MS cited in Bond and Hwang, “Social psychology of Chinese,” p.247. See also van der Sprenkel, *Legal institutions*, pp.50, 100. The loss of ‘face’ or ‘moral worth’ may also be used in situations other than ethical ones where the person concerned has failed to measure up to a situation, and to the members of his or her social group. (A classical example of the loss of face of this sort is the suicide of the hegemon Xiang Yu 項羽 after being defeated by the future founder of the Han dynasty, formerly his subordinate.) Thus, while it is generally possible to risk endangering one’s face as ‘prestige’, in that a lack of recognition can be attributed to others’ lack of awareness, one cannot allow the loss of face as ‘moral worth’, for as regards this everyone is responsible for him- or herself, and its preservation is the minimum requirement demanded by society. Analogous conceptions, while of differing intensity, are contained in the expressions *wuchi* 無恥 – ‘unreservedly shameless’, and *cankui* 慚愧 and *xiucan* 羞慚 – ‘be exceedingly ashamed.’

<sup>38</sup> G. H. Mead, *Mind, self and society* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1934); Mente, *Sé e società* [Self and society] (Firenze: Giunti Barbera, 1966). See parts 2 and 3 on the interaction between individual and society.

<sup>39</sup> Jean-Jacques Matignon, *Superstition, crime et misère en Chine* [Superstition, crime and misery in China] (Lyon: Paul Geuthner, 1902), p.97, had already identified this ‘internal’ aspect, and stated *inter alia* that “one ‘loses face’ not only in the eyes of others but also one’s own eyes, and such ‘losses of face of an intimate nature’ can also give rise to suicide by hanging or drowning.”

<sup>40</sup> *Analects*, 2/2/3, and also the translations of James Legge (*The Chinese classics*, reprint ed. in 5 vols [Taipei: Southern Materials Center, 1985], vol.1, “Confucian *Analects*,” p.146) and D. C. Lau (*Confucius, the *Analects**

presentation of a person in his or her social dimension, his or her prestige and reputation: that is, his or her importance and social standing, influence and authority, as understood both subjectively and by the other members of the community. In contemporary China the notion of *mianzi* has been criticized as a left-over from the past, or as a form of merely external moralism; but nonetheless it has remained entrenched in the Chinese mind.<sup>36</sup>

*Lian*, whose basic sense is the physiognomy of the face, means in metaphorical terms dignity, respectability, and integrity. Fear of ‘losing face’ *diulian* 丟臉 is likewise so linked to the ethical sense that to say that someone is ‘unconcerned about face’ *buyaolian* 不要臉 expresses the idea of an immorality connected with an indifference that the individual concerned is thought to feel towards the judgement of society. It thereby indicates that he, or she, would be inclined to do anything to attain a personal objective, without taking into account the dictates of morality.<sup>37</sup>

Scholars generally agree that in Confucian morality shame dominated guilt insofar as the sanction imposed, to the extent that it was internalized, affected the inner being, the person’s image of himself or herself as belonging to a morally elevated category, and did not apply to an isolated act. A sanction of this sort presupposes a kind of imaginary audience to whom moral accounts are rendered, ‘the generalized other’ in the definition of G. H. Mead.<sup>38</sup> Some scholars think that we are dealing here with an ‘internal’ level of shame to the extent that at its base there is the internalization of an ideal, which thereafter constitutes the yardstick for evaluating the individual.<sup>39</sup> It is clearly stated in the *Analects* that what distinguishes Confucian morality from Legalist doctrines is the sense of shame, even in the case of politics, because it is the foundation of a well-ordered state. “If the people be led by laws, and uniformity sought to be given to them by punishments, they will try to avoid [punishment], but have no sense of shame. If they be led by virtue, and uniformity sought to be given by the rules of propriety, they will have the sense of shame, and moreover will become good.”<sup>40</sup> This affirmation is interesting because while, on the one hand, it confirms the typology of the model that assigns traditional Chinese society to an orientation towards shame, on the other it makes clear the development of an internal conception of moral worth and of conscience. This finds its fullest expression in the figure of the ‘gentleman’, or the ‘superior man’, the *junzi* 君子, and explains the Confucian insistence on self-cultivation.<sup>41</sup> The superior and enlightened man is—according to Xunzi 荀子 (298–238 BC)—he who “knows himself” (*zizhi* 自知) and “respects himself” (*zi'ai* 自愛).<sup>42</sup> The sense of moral worth that may be extracted from numerous passages in the classics, and even from an author with such notoriously authoritarian tendencies as Xunzi, makes clear that a deep-rooted moral autonomy existed since classical times. Nor can we pass over the fact that the social harmony which was the foundation of all morality was grounded in respect for oneself and for others, and was reflected in the virtue of reciprocity. The same sensibility may be met with

in the concern not to put one's interlocutor in a difficult position, and also in the proverbial difficulty found by the Chinese and other East Asian peoples to disagree or oppose in direct fashion. Furthermore, Xun Yue 荀彧 (AD 148–209) distinguishes three types of 'shame', but only esteems that which is internal and directed towards oneself as fundamental (*ben* 本). In second place is that which a person experiences when face to face with gods or spirits; and in last place he puts that which one experiences with respect to one's neighbours, and judges it negatively to the extent that it is "external," inasmuch as if one limits oneself to this last type—he observes—"the evil accumulates within."<sup>43</sup>

We may therefore affirm that the term commonly used in the classics for 'shame' (*chi* 恥) does not necessarily correspond to our current definition, which contrasts it with 'guilt', but in various cases may occupy an intermediate position between the two concepts, and could be assimilated to the internal level of shame. It is in fact linked to our respect for ourselves, to self-cultivation, and to the internalization of certain values. It is closely connected in China with the five fundamental relationships of Confucianism, and with the principle that the name should correspond to the function. A series of concepts that the Neo-Confucians took up again from the classics, such as 'self-cultivation' (*xiushen* 修身), 'the rectification of the mind' (*zhengxin* 正心, *gexin* 格心), 'the sincerity of the intentions' (*chengyi* 誠意), 'self-control' (*keji* 克己), 'inquiry into things' (*gewu* 格物), 'the extension of knowledge' (*zhizhi* 至知), demonstrate the internal dimension attained by Neo-Confucianism.

The sense of shame (*chixin* 恥心) played an important role in the process of self-cultivation. According to the essays of Yuan Huang 袁黃 (1533–1606) on the correction of faults and the accumulation of merits, the first stage is defined precisely as the development of a sense of shame. Shame, for him, was the feeling that tells a person that he or she has done wrong, and leads them to acknowledge their faults. In other words, it was a moral conscience, and more than a reaction for having failed to come up to social expectations.<sup>44</sup> From another perspective it must be asked how it happened that many Chinese intellectuals of the seventeenth century were induced to confess in their writings a whole series of actions and forms of behaviour that were considered shameful, when they were well aware that this would leave an indelible negative mark against their names. What was it that drove these literati to overcome not only traditional modesty and reserve, but also the sense of shame, which would have been rendered even more stinging by the publication of matter that they considered as disgraceful? Their choice can only be explained by the crushing weight of guilt, accompanied by a desire for redemption, which found external expression in their own writings. Thus Zhang Dai 張岱 (1597–?1666) made a record of his past in order "to make confession before Buddha" of his sins; and Wei Xi 魏禧 (1624–81) confessed to his most deeply hidden desires as a warning both to himself and to the younger generations of his family.<sup>45</sup>

[New York: Penguin, 1979], p.63). The *Guanzi* [Master Guan], a composite text with a Legalist orientation, considers shame the most important of the four basic virtues, or 'four principles' (*siwei* 四維) that the government was obliged to promote. (The others were 'correct behaviour' *li* 禮, 'justice' *yi* 義 and 'honesty' *lian* 廉.) See *Guanzi*, "Mumin," 1: 92, in *Ersi'er zhi* [Twenty-four philosophers] (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1986). This text stimulated critical reflections on the part of many subsequent thinkers, such as Liu Zongyuan (773–819) and Ouyang Xiu (1007–72), about the part played by the sense of moral worth and by shame in political life. See the *Gujin tushu jicheng* [Collection of works ancient and modern] (Chengdu: Bashu Shushe, 1985), *Lixue huibian* 82: 73797–8, and also *Xin Wudai shi* [A new history of the Five Dynasties] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1974), 54: 611–12.

<sup>41</sup> *Analects*, 1/1/4, 6/4/7, 13/7/28, 25/13/13, 29/14/24, 31/15/5, 38/18/7. See also Fingarette, *Confucius*, p.133. The same Mencian sensibility of *bu ren* 不忍 could not endure to witness suffering, let alone dishonesty and opportunism. See *Mengzi* [Master Meng], *Duanju shisan jing jingwen* [Punctuated text of the thirteen classics] (Taipei: Taiwan Kaiming Shudian, 1984), 5. b.1.

<sup>42</sup> *Xunzi* [Master Xun], *Xunzi yinde* [Index of Master Xun] (Taipei: Chongqing Tushu, 1986), 105/29/31.

<sup>43</sup> Xun Yue, *Shenjiang* [The proffered mirror], *Sibu congkan* 5: 34b.

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Cynthia Brokaw, "Yüan Huang (1533–1606) and the ledgers of merit and demerit," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47.1 (1987): 177. Yüan Huang supported a subjective criterion in moral evaluation of human actions. Brokaw, in her recent volume *The ledgers of merit and demerit. Social change and moral order in late imperial China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1991), p.101: "He who wishes to accumulate merit, Yüan warned, cannot rely on popular judgment, on the 'ears and eyes of the world'. He must depend rather on his own inner moral sense: He can only follow the hidden tendencies to good at the source of the mind ..."

<sup>45</sup> Cf. respectively Zhang Dai, *Tao'an mengyi* [Tao'an's dream-memories] (1794; reprint ed., Taipei: Kaiming Shudian, 1978), preface, p.1, and Wei Xi, *Shuzi wenji* /OVER

[Collected works of Wei Xi] (seventeenth century), (reprint ed., Taipei: Shangwu Yinshu-guan, 1973), 6: 2820.

<sup>46</sup> Cf. Eberhard, *Guilt and sin*, p.12. *Ru* recalls the Greek term *aischunē*, shame for ugliness. See also Zhu Zhenlou, "Shame orientation," p.98.

<sup>47</sup> It has been calculated that 58 of the 498 paragraphs of *Analects* refer to shame. Besides *chi* 恥, other characters are used for analogous concepts, like *can* 慚 – humiliation, *kui* 愧 – mortification, *xiu* 羞, *zuo* 作, *mi* 惡 – shame, *hui* 悔 – remorse, *fen* 憤 – resentment, *wu* 惡 – aversion, *yuan* 怨 – condemnation, *guan* 患 – worry, *ru* 辱 – dishonour. Cf. the sentence "they will feel a sense of shame and therefore improve" (*Analects*, 2/2/3).

<sup>48</sup> *Analects*, 15/6/13, 9/5/25, 7/4/22, 28/14/20, 29/14/27.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 8/5/15, 6/4/9, 17/9/27.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Zhu Guangqian, *Tan xiuyang, yan xiuwu zhi xin* [On self-cultivation and the sense of shame] (Chongqing: Kaiming Shudian, 1942), p.26. I am grateful to Maio Sabattini for letting me read his manuscript (now in the press) on Zhu Guangqian's aesthetic thought.

The two Chinese characters mostly used to express 'shame' are *chi* 恥 and *xiu* 羞. The latter seems to be derived from an ideographic element meaning 'ugly' (*chou* 丑) together with the same radical as in *ru* 辱 ('humiliate, offend'). *Chi*, in one form, is composed of the graphs for 'ear' and 'mind' and has sometimes been explained as expressing blushing caused by erroneous conduct.<sup>46</sup> Though they are usually both translated as 'shame', the meaning is broader than that of the Western term. In the *Analects*, where Confucius mentions the concept several times, it also means moral consciousness, and is the precondition for moral progress.<sup>47</sup> It is that inner sense of moral worth and modesty that makes us feel uneasy at pursuing a career, or honours, or wealth in a country that is badly governed. It prevents us from being hypocritical, or deceitful in our words or actions—for example, by disguising resentment with false friendship, or not matching deeds to words.<sup>48</sup> Two types of shame are, however, judged negatively in the *Analects*: we should not be ashamed either to ask about something from our inferiors, or to learn from them; nor should we be ashamed of bad clothes or bad food.<sup>49</sup> Mencius counts "shame at one's own illdoing and hatred for that committed by others" (*xiuwu* 羞惡) among the feelings that are the sources of the four virtues, and relates them to justice (*yi* 義).

Twenty-four centuries later the problem has been represented by Zhu Guangqian 朱光潛 in terms of the gospel parable of the woman taken in adultery. After having referred to the Buddhist position, and the attitude that may be taken in aesthetic terms, he observes:

In this imperfect world, the ideal remains always an ideal. We cannot but hope that everyone attains to what the Buddhists call 'perfect awareness' (*zhengjue* 真覺), and grasps the equality of all things. We cannot and we should not hope that everyone assumes, under any circumstances whatsoever, an attitude of pure appreciation, like that of the artist, when facing evil and guilt. Nor can we hope either that everyone assumes an attitude of forgiveness like that of Jesus, and that all crimes are pardoned. If, as human beings, we seek for the happiness of the human race, then we must hope that evils and wrongdoing diminish to the greatest extent possible. There are many ways this may be done, from those that are positive and effect correction through persuasion and example, to those that are negative and work through sanctions.

Not all of us can have the 'perfect awareness' of Buddhism, or the infinite love of Jesus, but we can all have in some degree the feeling of shame and detestation (*xiuwu zhi xin* 羞惡之心). There are many systems of laws and moral doctrines that use as a driving force this feeling which is common to all humanity. Modern psychologists have further demonstrated how much importance it has for the formation of the personality. It may be that moral influence founded on the feeling of shame is at a low level, but it is at any rate sufficiently realistic [to hope for] and close to what human beings [in fact] feel.<sup>50</sup>

According to Zhu, shame is born of self-love, and people experience shame when they are unable to measure up to their aspirations. After quoting Mencius, Zhu appeals to Adler's theory of the 'inferiority complex' and the



'manly protest' to demonstrate that the awareness of a defect or of a limit can produce, by way of reaction, a psychological force that is significant, with respect to both its physical and moral aspects. He further extends this idea to nations as well, searching back for a quotation from the *Annals of the Springs and Autumns* for this purpose.<sup>51</sup> In analogous fashion, he sees the resistance against the Japanese as an example of a heroism capable of making every sacrifice in order to avoid the shame of slavery.

For Confucians 'shame' was therefore a kind of negative aspect of the positive virtue of 'humaneness': *ren* 仁. The human being is the agent who reacts to events and circumstances, responding to their influences in order to adapt reality to his or her ideals. Here a person's choice and responsibility play a fundamental role, since moral notions have to be applied to conditions that are undergoing continuous change. Hence 'shame' and 'guilt' make their appearance whenever the attempt to recreate reality is unsuccessful, or the individual lets him- or herself be dragged along passively by events and circumstances against his or her own sense of moral worth.

The impact of Buddhism on Chinese thought intensified the development of the concept of sin and its interiorization. The importance of 'intention' was emphasized, seeing that all reality is derived from the mind; and this led to the introduction of a series of distinctions in the appraisal of human responsibility, as between the 'internal arena', the 'external arena', self-cultivation, and 'being subject to' political and legal controls. The concept of karma (*ye* 業) was, for example, applied not only to physical acts (*shenye* 身業) but equally to intentions and thoughts (*yiye* 意業). *Per contra*, an action in which there was no emotional participation, even if extremely serious from the point of view of principle, could be without consequences. Good or bad *karma* was only established when an act was performed consciously; and good deeds and repentance were necessary to eliminate the effects of bad *karma*.

Two other written characters could also be used, especially in Buddhist texts, for 'guilt' and 'shame', namely *can* 慚 and *kui* 愧. It is worth noting that at the end of the fifth century AD, Xiao Ziliang 蕭子良 distinguished the meanings of these two words. *Can* he took as 'inner shame' (*neizi xiuchi* 內自羞恥), in other words as a kind of guilt, while he associated *kui* rather with the embarrassment felt towards other people (*faluxiangren* 發露向人, 'to be exposed before others'.) But *kui* also came to express the discomfort, in an absolute sense, felt when faced with one's own wrongdoing, as in the saying 'to be ashamed before Heaven and other people', and hence the objective state of being guilty, as expressed in the goal of 'not being guilty with respect either to the principles of Heaven or the feelings of human beings'.<sup>52</sup>

The recitation of certain formulae, dhārānī, and the invocation of Amitabha, were in fact often considered sufficient to liberate the sinner from his faults, which weakened the role of contrition. The practices of confession and repentance, both for monks and for the laity, have however been

<sup>51</sup> "First make clear their shame, then teach them to fight" (*ming chi jiao zhan* 明恥教戰), *Chunqiu* [Annals of the springs and autumns] (*Chunqiu jing zhuan yinde* [Index of the Annals of the springs and autumns classics and commentaries] [Taipei: Chongqing Tushu, 1989], 120/Xi 22/4 Zuo).

<sup>52</sup> See the sentence "not to be guilty/ashamed in regard to heavenly principles and human sentiments" (*wu kui yu tianli renqing* 無愧于天理人情). Cf. the memorial stone which was erected by Suzhou textile workers in 1741 (*Ming Qing Suzhou gongsangye beike ji* [Collection of stone inscriptions on Ming and Qing industry and commerce in Suzhou] [Nanjing: Jiangsu Renmin Chubanshe, 1981], pp.17–18. For Xiao Ziliang see Richard B. Mather, "Wang Jung's 'Hymns on the devotee's entrance into the pure life,'" *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106.1 (1986): 88.

<sup>53</sup> *Huanxi yuanjia* [Adversaries in love] (Shenyang: Chunfeng Wenyi Chubanshe, 1989), 5: 87–107. Cf. also Robert Keith McMahon, *Causality and containment in seventeenth-century Chinese fiction* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), p.94. For Fengjie's remorse see the beginning of chapter 113 of *Shitou ji* [The story of the stone] (1791; reprint ed., Beijing: Renmin Wenxue, 1972).

<sup>54</sup> *Adversaries in love*, 7: 123–33.

enforced by Buddhism and Daoism under certain circumstances. In order to dwell in, or to recover, the condition of 'purity' (*jing* 淨), and to 'wash away' (*dichu* 涤除) *karma*, Buddhist and Daoist devotees often confessed their sins in public assemblies. The term signifying 'confession and repentance' (*chanhui* 懺悔) derives from the Sanskrit *ksamā*, 'seeking for forgiveness'. Expressions like 'to repent of one's sins' (*huiguo* 悔過, *huizui* 悔罪), and 'to regret the sins that have brought calamity' (*huibuo* 悔禍), entered into use in connection with such practices. These latter were so deeply engraved in people's minds that they may be found in varying forms throughout Chinese history, from the sedate gatherings of the Neo-Confucians, and the meetings held on the basis of the system of the 'rural compact' (*xiangyue* 鄉約) to certain assemblies of the Chinese Communist Party when accused officials would make their self-criticisms, for example, or confessions were offered during the various campaigns to 'rectify thought', or the Cultural Revolution.

Eberhard has shown how deeply the sense of guilt—not only that of shame—runs in popular literature. Although there is no doubt that the types of sentiment experienced in China were to some extent differentiated according to social status, the increased influence of syncretic theories from the end of the Ming onwards, and of the idea that the three religions (*sanjiao* 三教) were at one in their teachings, as well as the greater homogeneity of the culture, may have affected the class of the literati in the direction of melding shame-orientated tendencies with guilt-orientated ones. Literature from this time also contains examples of remorse which manifests itself in inauspicious presentiments and the apparition of ghosts or haunting memories. The *topos* of a particular thing or event evoking the memory of a past situation, feeling, or person, is represented by the expressions *chujing shengqing* 觸景生情 for a feeling, and *dujing siren* 睹景思人 for a person. Thus peonies can remind an adulteress of her husband, and cause her to repent.<sup>53</sup> Likewise, the seventh tale of *Huanxi yuanjia* 歡喜冤家 (Antagonists in love) tells the story of the infidelity of Madam You with the merchant Chen Cai, who has killed her husband to marry her. After many years of love they feel compelled to confess their crime and accuse each other. In one episode, after having intercourse with Chen by the edge of pond, Madam You frightens two mandarin ducks by striking at the water with a stick. Chen is prompted by this seeming trifle to recite some verses on the misfortunes that arise from disturbing mandarin ducks when they are engaged in their amours. She is surprised by his ability to quote poetry, and tries to induce him to declaim some more, by hitting a frog in the pond. But the sight of the dead frog floating on the water reminds him of the sight of You's husband whom he had pushed into a river eighteen years before. To begin with he does not want to hurt her by reciting the poem that is coming to his mind but at her insistence he writes it down. It is these lines that she will take to court to lay as a charge against him.<sup>54</sup>

One of the best examples of repentance and confession is to be found at the end of Feng Menglong's story "Han Wu sells love at Newbridge." Wu

Shan is a young merchant who runs his family's textile shop and other businesses such as lending money and trading in grain. He works hard, and treats his family with respect. One day, though, he chanced to meet a young lady—an unlicensed sing-song girl—and starts a secret and passionate relationship with her. Eventually he falls seriously ill, and—dying—sees a monk in his hallucinations. It is only then that, conscious of the gravity of his sickness, he starts to think over his past. He weeps, confesses his faults to his family, and repents. He realizes that his contrition has come too late, and asks that after his death his corpse be thrown into the river.<sup>55</sup>

In another tale by Feng Menglong, “A minor quarrel over cash leads to unbelievable hatreds,” we learn of the suicide of the wife of a potter at Jingdezhen (a leading centre of porcelain manufacture) because of her shame and the threats made by her husband. He has learnt of her faithlessness by chance, overhearing the accusations that another woman makes during an argument. “Having tossed her a rope, he shouted, ‘Run off and kill yourself! Run off and kill yourself. If you don’t that means you’re having an affair with someone else!’ The artisan then went to bed, and she found herself alone, under the night, outside the door of the house. There was no way to save herself. The fault was hers, and there was no other solution but suicide. Her anguish and remorse (*zibei ziyuan* 自悲自怨) continued unabated until, fearing the dawn was coming, she hastily took the rope and left ...” In this terse but dramatic passage all the motives behind the woman’s despair are made evident, her shame at the unveiling of her illicit relationship, above all in her husband’s presence, and the only solution possible that will liberate her from her sense of guilt and in some measure redeem her, namely suicide.

A poem is quoted in Feng Menglong’s anthology, *Tales Old and New*, that warns one not to do anything that gives one a guilty conscience.<sup>56</sup> The expression used, *kuixin* 虧心, literally ‘to damage one’s mind’, has the implication of remorse. In *The Story of the Stone*, the insecurity felt by Black Jade (Lin Daiyu 林黛玉), and her possessive attitude towards Baoyu 寶玉, provides another example—though a pathological one—of a conscience torn between impulses of shame and guilt on the one hand, and self-pity on the other. An unusual situation is that of the ‘country of the great men’ (*darenguo* 大人國) imagined by Li Ruzhen 李如珍 in his allegorical *Destinies of the Flowers in the Mirror*, where social praise and shame are determined by the conscience within, and thus the internal state coincides with the social state. Everybody here walks on a cloud that changes colour according to his or her moral status. “The colour ... arises completely from the mind, and depends absolutely on good or bad behaviour, and not on social or economic conditions. ... The colour follows the changes of the mind.”<sup>57</sup> The moral judgement here is not only produced by the individual conscience, but everyone can see the moral condition of others. Though this passage may show a development of the concept of an individual conscience, it is hardly indicative of a high valuation of privacy.

<sup>55</sup> Feng Menglong, ed., *Gujin xiaoshuo* [Tales old and new] (c.1620; reprint ed., Beijing: Renmin Wenxue, 1979), 3: 62–9; see Bishop’s translation in John Lyman Bishop, *The colloquial short story in China: a study of the San’yen collections* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1956), pp.65–87. Bishop (*ibid.*, p.47) finds unconvincing such repentance induced through a supernatural agency (the ghost of the monk who died while violating Buddha’s injunctions against lust); it seems to me, however, as it is described, realistic and sincere in the context of the time, and shows some analogies with Wei Xi’s dream.

<sup>56</sup> Feng Menglong, *Tales old and new*, 36: 402.

<sup>57</sup> Li Ruzhen, *Jinghuayuan* [Destinies of the flowers in the mirror] (1828; reprint ed., Taipei: Sanmin Shuju, 1979), 14: 58–9.

In conclusion it may be said that questions relative to the self-directedness or other-directedness of the moral sense—whose values are normally acquired by the individual in any society during the course of socialization—are distinct from the question of shame. The controversial concepts of ‘shame as relating to one’s moral worth’ and ‘face’ in China cover a wide range of meanings that go from the formal respecting of certain labels to everything that safeguards one’s personal prestige, that complex of capacities that serves to preserve one’s social image and at the same time reflects a concern with perfecting oneself, and respect for oneself and for others, with the objective of establishing the ideal of social harmony.

## 2. Self-Examination

<sup>58</sup> Xue Xuan, *Dushu lu* [Record on reading books] (1868), p.3a, cit. in Handlin, *Late Ming thought*, p.194.

<sup>59</sup> The first letter of Paul to the Corinthians, 3: 5; *The new testament, Kuoyü and English* (Seoul: Gideons International, 1988), p.451.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. for instance, the Chinese translation of *The new testament*, pp.480, 494, 595, 1 Corinthians, 4: 4, 10: 27, 1 Timothy, 1: 19; *Xinyue quanshu, new testament in today's Chinese/English versions* (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Bible Society, 1988), pp.422, 434, 4: 4, 10: 27, 534.

<sup>61</sup> Wu Pei-yi presents some significant examples of this sort of scrutiny. The same Wang Ji, for instance, in the course of a spiritual crisis that afflicted him in his seventy-second year, came to some bitter conclusions once the profound contradictions between himself and others had become apparent: “Can I be really bright and clear, externally as well as internally, even down to the bone and marrow, like the sun fresh from a bath in Xian pond, totally without the dark clouds of worldliness or other misty impurities? In a large assembly and among the mass of people, I appear to be amiable and faultless enough; but in private can I really be strict with myself and commit nothing dishonorable in the eyes of the supernatural beings? I seem to love all people, but I may be too indiscriminate. I seem to be much concerned with the affairs of the world, but I may be too pedantic in my approach. Sometimes I give full rein to my passions in dealing with people, yet I take it as being consistent in my likes and dislikes. Sometimes I form partisan alliances

Every night when go to bed I must think over the deeds of the day. If my actions were principled, I can sleep peacefully; if they were unprincipled, I toss and turn restlessly, and wonder how I can mend the errors. Because I want to start being diligent and to put an end to my laziness, I am keeping a record to warn myself.

—Xue Xuan 薛瑄<sup>58</sup>

The Latin term *conscientia* derives from the Greek *syneidesis*, and for the Stoics corresponded to the knowledge of what was good. Seneca defined it as the observer inside us keeping watch over the morality of our actions. For Saint Paul this faculty of moral judgement is subordinate to the judgement of God.<sup>59</sup> Allusion has already been made to the confession of sins among the Buddhist and Daoists, and likewise to the sentiments of shame and remorse. In the fifteenth century Wu Yubi 吳與弼 (1391–1469) referred to the original goodness of the mind (*liangxin* 良心) as that faculty within us which re-bukes us for our misdeeds. The same term is used in modern Chinese for ‘moral conscience’ in the current European sense.<sup>60</sup> The presence of a capacity in human beings for moral discernment has always

/and attack outsiders, which I justify by pretending to be impartial. When I do someone a favour and continue to remember it, I err in exaggeration. When I fail to repay favours done me by others, I am ungrateful. My integrity is compromised when I let calculations guide my actions. If I take my conjuncture as true understanding, then my judgement suffers.” The monk Zhuhong 株宏 (1535–1615), however, confessed at about the same time in his *Zizi* 自責 [Self-accusation] that not only had he behaved badly with his body, his words, and his thoughts in the days before he had embraced the monastic life, but had failed time and again in many respects: “In my youth, before I took orders, I did not know the

/Three Treasures, nor did I believe in retribution. It goes without saying that I committed various evils with my body, speech, and thought. After taking orders, although I have been vigilant in the larger matters concerning body, I have overlooked some small points. As for speech I have erred even more. I indulge so much in desultory discourse on worldly issues that I absent myself from correct thinking. I speculate out of ignorance and end in deviating from the holy scripture. I give free rein to my tongue and offend the leaders of the day. I am wantonly critical and reproachful, humiliating the young and the lowly. In this way countless evils have been caused by speech. As for thought, my errors are even greater.

been recognized in Confucianism, ever since Mencius's notions of 'the knowledge of the good' (*liangzhi* 良知) and 'the capacity to do good' (*liangneng* 良能). Last of all we may note the idea of the 'innate awareness of the good' (equally *liangzhi*) that was developed by Wang Yangming 王陽明 and his school. Wang Ji 王畿 had defined it as the mind's capacity to differentiate good from evil. It was the judge of one's intentions, and the guide to correct behaviour. Perhaps 'conscience' may be identified with the Neo-Confucian 'moral mind' (*daoxin* 道心). Other scholars, including Wang Ji, showed that they could reach a noteworthy depth of enquiry into their own minds, and, well aware of the complexity of human thought-processes, dug deeply into their own consciences, seeking to identify the more profound motives that they glimpsed in the ambiguity of human behaviour, or the ambitions and interests that might conceal themselves even behind apparent virtues.<sup>61</sup> This feeling of pain at their own weaknesses on the part of these thinkers, the moral tension that they felt, their renewed scrutiny of their own moral progress, and doubts as to their real solidity in this respect, show how developed the sense of a moral conscience was in China even if there was no general and comprehensive word for it, as there was in the West. The quotations given in the preceding pages time and again express certain aspects of this faculty, even if no need is felt to have recourse to a metaphor, and conscience comes to be identified simply with the ego. In general, then, the conscience is considered to be the function of the mind, whose reactions permit a person to tell good from evil. So Zhu Xi wrote in his commentary on the Mencius: "Shame is the embarrassment that one feels for one's own misconduct. Loathing is the abhorrence that one feels for the misconduct of others."<sup>62</sup>

Another relevant concept that should be mentioned is *shen du* 慎獨, 'vigilant solitariness' or 'vigilance in solitude'. This idea appears in the *Daxue* 大學 (Great learning) and the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the mean),<sup>63</sup> and there denotes a method of personal self-cultivation with ethico-religious implications. In this form of spiritual practice, conscience finds itself alone and confronting itself, and not in a position to consider itself under the influence of elements of an external nature, such as the expectations of a social group, with the exception perhaps of the imagined presence of some listener of superior moral quality. Huang Zongxi 黃宗羲 (1610–95) said of Liu Zongzhou 劉宗周 (1578–1645) that "he considers as his essential doctrine vigilance in solitude. The Confucians all speak of vigilance in solitude, but only Liu has acquired its truth . . . . Students need only attest the distinctness of nature-in-itself (*xingti fenming* 性體分明), and adhere to it constantly, in order to practise what is called vigilance. The effort of vigilance consists only of [self]-mastery. Our consciousness has a master, which is called intention (*yi* 意). To be one step removed from the root of intention is illusion, and therefore not solitude. So the more one is recollected, the more one's [intention] is also extended."<sup>64</sup> For his part, Zhou Rudeng 周汝登 (1547–?1629) stated that self-examination was as necessary as washing the face.

/Greed, desire, anger, envy, foolishness, and obsession come and go at random. Sometimes they seem to disappear but actually they are always present. Sometimes I am carried away by the moment and forget to hold them in check; at other times the more I try to control them, the stronger they grow. In this way countless evils have been caused by my body, speech, and thought. Thus I realize that I am just an enfeathered ordinary person, far removed from the Way. How am I going to fulfill the wise orders of the Buddha, enlighten the students in their perplexities, repay the boundless kindness of my parents, or rescue sentient beings from the Sea of Sorrows? Consequently day and night I am plagued by shame, anxiety, and fear: I travel, dwell, sit, and sleep as if I were always in thorns and brambles. Therefore how can I dare to drift and idle? It is hoped that everybody will believe in my sincerity, sympathize with me, and point out my errors. Let us admonish and guide each other, so that our endeavour may succeed and the declining world be saved from the fall. This is the wish I hold most dearly, and I can never rest until it is fulfilled. I am not someone who dares to say that having perceived completely the Way he no longer depends on his teachers and friends for anything."

<sup>62</sup> *Xiu chi ji zhi bushan ye; wu zeng ren zhi bushan ye* (羞恥己之不善也惡憎人之不善也), cit. from Zhu Zhenlou, "Shame orientation," p.103.

<sup>63</sup> The full form is *shen qi du ye* 慎其獨也 – 'to be watchful over oneself when alone'. See *Daxue* (Great learning) and *Zhongyong* (Doctrine of the mean) as well as the *Liji* (Rites and vessels) in *Liji* [Book of rites], *Duanju shisan jing jingwen* [Punctuated text of the thirteen classics] (Taipei: Kaiping Shidian, 1984). *Liji yinde* [Index of the book of rites] (Taipei: Zongqing Tushu, 1989), (42/1) 125, (31/1) 107:1, (10/17) 48:17.

<sup>64</sup> Huang Zongxi, *Mingru xue'an* [Records of Ming scholars] (1693; reprint ed., Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1984), 62: 675, translated by Julia Ching in *The records of Ming scholars. A selected translation edited by Julia Ching with the collaboration of Chaoying Fang*, ed. J. Ching (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1987), p.262.

<sup>65</sup> Zhou Rudeng, *Dongyue zhengxue lu* [Testimonials to learning in Shaoxing] (1609; reprint ed., Taipei: Wenhai, 1970), p.3a, cit. in Handlin, *Late Ming thought*, p.195. Compare this expression to the campaign launched in 1947 by the cadres of the Communist Party in the Daihang region, with Mao Zedong's slogan "Wash your face." Yet for Mao the 'mirror' that would denounce the 'blemishes' seems more Mencian than Neo-Confucian since it represented not their 'innate conscience' but the criticism of the people. (Cf. William Hinton, *Fanshen. A documentary of revolution in a Chinese village* [Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1972], p.281.)

<sup>66</sup> The different personalities appear from their writings and confessions. For instance, the dissatisfied and perfectionist character of Hu Zhi is clear in his desperate conclusions at the end of his life: "In the twenty years [of my striving] I have suddenly aged very much and I am ashamed that I have not reached [my goal]" (*Records of Ming scholars*, 22: 224, transl. by Marlies Epping-von Franz in "Reflections on the relationship of self-awareness [*Selbstbewusstsein*] and self-portrayal [*Selbstdarstellung*] in the Neo-Confucianism of the Song and Ming periods," *Collected Papers of the XXIX congress of Chinese studies*, ed. Tilemann Grimm, Peter Kuhfus and Gudrun Wacker [Tübingen: Attempto, 1988], p.47). Less dramatically, Chen Xianzhang expressed his effort and moral tension, writing: "If, then, it is not possible to criticize [one's own mistakes] together with teachers and friends, [but] rather one is all alone and cannot call on reciprocity, [then one should] list [one's mistakes] in daily records with all the necessary conscientiousness" (*Baishazi quanji* [Complete works of Master Baisha (?1710)], 1: 63a, transl. Epping-von Franz, "Reflections," p.46).

<sup>67</sup> Cf. Miyakawa Hisayuki, "The concept of shame and guilt in Chinese traditional thought," in *Symposium of International Congress of Philosophy* (Furen Catholic University, 1978), pp.286-7.

<sup>68</sup> Tu Wei-ming, "Subjectivity in Liu Tsung-chou's philosophical anthropology," in *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist values*, ed. Donald Munro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), pp.228, 31.

"How can you face others," he asked, "if you do not wash your face?"<sup>65</sup> Similar ideas can be found both in prominent and less famous scholars like Chen Xianzhang 陳獻章 (1428–1500) or Hu Zhi 胡直 (1517–85).<sup>66</sup>

This idea was not, however, entirely new. The well-known story of Yang Zhen 楊震 (?–124) relates that he rejected the gift of a subordinate official. When it was pointed out to him that it was dark and nobody need to know, he replied: "Not know? Heaven knows, Earth knows, you know, and I know too. How could you say that nobody knows?" Similar concepts are found in the *Taiping jing* 太平經, where the 'secluded room' (*youshi* 幽室)—a synonym of 'dark room' (*anshi* 暗室)—is the place where the devotee meditates on the conduct of Heaven. This place recalls the 'quiet room' (*jingshi* 靜室) where Daoists prayed and repented their sins against the 'original energy' (*yuanyi* 元氣). These transgressions were sins in the moral and religious field, called *zhe* 謫, which originally meant 'banishment from Heaven', hence 'fault'.<sup>67</sup> 'Solitariness' is therefore an inherent part of our moral self-perfection, and the self becomes a "dynamic moral agent."<sup>68</sup> In his *Songguofa* 訟過法 (Method of accusing oneself of one's faults), Liu Zongzhou writes:

I place a bowl of water and a lighted incense stick on a small, spotless table. In front of this table I arrange a rush mat upon which I sit, at sunrise, facing the table, in the lotus position, holding myself erect and full of reverence. I control my breathing and adopt a serious attitude, as if there was some majestic and imposing presence there to which I could confess my bad actions without hiding a single one.<sup>69</sup>

It was not by chance that the Christian convert Yang Tingyun 楊廷筠 (1557–1627) emphasized the importance of the daily examination of the conscience, and established its rules, following Neo-Confucian methods.<sup>70</sup> There, too, we should notice a basic difference between the Christian and

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Liu Zongzhou, *Renpu* [Spiritual guide], p.11, cit. in Gernet, *China and the Christian impact*, p.144; cf. also Wu Pei-yi, "Self-examination," pp.26–7.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. Gernet, *Christian impact*, p.143; see also Standaeert's recent study on Yang Tingyun, *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in late Ming China. His life and thought* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), pp.61–2.

<sup>71</sup> This does not mean negation of a divinity, for example, where a divinity is considered as a judge. See Wu Pei-yi, "Self-examination," pp.29–34. Furthermore, the presence of gods and spirits is believed in especially in popular strata, and their existence is emphasized by monks in order to frighten people and make them do good and avoid evil (cf. Yü Chün-fang, *The renewal of Buddhism in China: Chu-hung and the late Ming synthesis* [New

York: Columbia University Press, 1981], p.117). "Heaven and earth surround us," writes Yuan Huang in his guide to self-perfection, "and the spirits are difficult to deceive. Even if a man transgresses in secret, heaven, earth and the spirits can see his actions as if they were reflected in a mirror. ... Even though he covers his actions with the greatest secrecy, and disguises them very cleverly, his innermost feelings will ultimately be revealed" (cf. Yuan Huang, *Gaiguo* [Correcting faults], quoted in Brokaw, "Yuan Huang," p.178).

<sup>72</sup> Cf. Zhu Zhenlou, "Shame orientation," pp.108–15, and Du Weiming, ed., *Dangdai yanjiu yu quxiang* [Contemporary studies and tendencies] (Taipei: Shibao Wenhua, 1988), pp.403–4; cf. also Liang Shuming, *Zhongguo wenhua yaoyi* [Essentials of Chinese culture] (Hong Kong: Xianggang Jicheng Tushu Gongsi, 1964), p.90.

the Chinese (especially the Confucian) moralities. While Christian ethics is centred on God and the Supernatural, the Chinese orientation is fundamentally humanistic, in the sense that the models are human beings and those with respect to whom one acts, or is answerable, are always human, whether individuals or social groups. Thus, even in the case of *shendu* what is taken into account is not an external sacred entity, but other people and their interrelations.<sup>71</sup> In such a context we can accept the definition of the attitude adopted as 'dependent', provided that we follow Liang Shuming's gloss that this 'dependency' does not imply any passive attitude, but a deep *social sense* of morality.<sup>72</sup> The only concept that transcends man is that of the universe and its inner order, which may be either rational or religious and mystical. This order was not, however, considered as detached from humanity, or superior to it. It included human beings, as its highest expression.

As may be seen from the diary of Wu Yubi, a work from which there emanates an intense spirituality, the examination of one's conscience had become an irreplaceable instrument in the spiritual journey pursued by many Chinese, especially during the Ming period.<sup>73</sup> Although some basic work has been accomplished on the subject of the 'books on morality', the topic deserves greater attention for the understanding of the intellectual history of late-imperial China.<sup>74</sup>

Hai Rui 海瑞 (1513–87) had the custom of examining his spirit (*shen* 神) as if it were before a court of law, and Li Yong 李顥 (1627–1705) showed that he followed the same practice in one of his works in which, after a close critical examination of himself, he invited his disciples to examine themselves everyday, in a meditative posture, and calling upon Heaven to be their witness.<sup>75</sup> Zhu Hong, another proponent of such practices and books, wrote in his *shanshu* entitled *Zizhi lu* 自知錄 (A record of self-knowledge): "The immortal said that everyone should keep a notebook by the side of his or her bed. When they are about to go to sleep, they are to write down both the merits and the demerits that they have acquired during the day. As the days accumulate into months, and the months to years, they will be able either to cancel out demerits by merits, or vice versa. By looking at the tally of merits and demerits they will know by themselves whether they can expect blessing or punishment."<sup>76</sup> Huang Wan 黃綰 (1480–1554) and Lin Chun 林春 (1498–1541) suggested marking merits in red, and demerits in black.<sup>77</sup> Wang Ji in his *Zisong* 自訟 (Accusation against myself) blamed himself his behaviour in an analysis that went deeply into the complexity of

/not find rest anymore. In the winter of the last and the spring of this year, I devoted considerable energy to my efforts [at improvement], but I perceived it in daily affairs as yet more and more difficult. Thus, fool that I am, I was afraid that I could not dare to hope for the sage and the worthy in myself after all, and that it was inevitable that I would have to step back [into the ranks] of the small people. Since the fifth or sixth month now I have had the feeling that my character is slowly improving." Cf. Wu Yubi, *Riji* [Spiritual diary], in *Kangzhaiji* [Collected works of Wu Yubi (1526)], 11: 3b, 4a-b, 6a, 11a, 18b, 25a (*Siku quanshu* [The complete collection of the Four Treasures (1733)], 1251: 567–71, 575, 578), transl. Epping-von Franz with small changes, "Reflections," pp.45–6.

<sup>74</sup> Among the most important essays on the subject, see Sakai Tadao, *Chügoku zensho no kenkyü* [A study on the 'morality books'] (Tokyo: Kōbundō, 1960); Sakai Tadao, "Confucianism and popular education works," in *Individualism and humanitarianism in late Ming thought*, ed. Th. De Bary (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp.331–66; Tu Wei-ming, "Yen Yuan: from inner experience to lived concreteness," in *The unfolding of Neo-Confucianism*, ed. Th. De Bary (New York: Columbia University Press, 1975), pp.511–41; Wu Pei-yi, "Self-examination," pp.5–38; Irene Bloom, "On the 'abstraction' of Ming thought: some concrete evidence from the philosophy of Lo Ch'in-shun," in *Principle and practicality. Essays in Neo-Confucianism and practical learning*, ed. Th. De Bary and Irene Bloom (New York: Columbia University Press, 1979), pp.69–123; Yü Chün-fang, *Renewal of Buddhism*, pp.90–100; Handlin, *Late Ming thought*, pp.129–212, passim; Hellmut Wilhelm, "The background of Tseng Kuo-fan's ideology," *Asiatische Studien*, 3.3–4 (1949): 90–100.

<sup>75</sup> Cf. Wu Pei-yi, *The Confucian's progress. Autobiographical writings in traditional China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), p.231.

<sup>76</sup> Translation by Yü Chün-fang, *Renewal of Buddhism*, pp.233–59.

<sup>77</sup> Cf. Hou Wailu, *Zhongguo sixiang tongshi* [General history of Chinese thought], 5 vols (Beijing: Renmin Chubanshe, 1960), 4b: 930, and Wu Pei-yi, "Self-examination," p.38.

<sup>73</sup> In his *Ritu* [Spiritual diary], Wu Yubi wrote: "While I lay ill in bed one night, I thought of domestic affairs and inevitably there were things to reflect on. And to the extent that my thoughts got more and more confused, my mood and energy, too, lost their clarity. But if I really think about it, virtue alone one can attain through one's striving. Besides [virtue] there is nothing that one could know for sure.

/What should I strive for, then? I should only strive to increase my virtue. Through it, the mind becomes quiet and the vital energy becomes clear. My constitution and character tend onesidedly to the hard, stubborn. ... For fifteen or sixteen years I have been wild and impetuous and have not restricted myself in any way. But as soon as my conscience stirred, I became very angry [about myself] and did

<sup>78</sup> Cf. *Wang Longqi quanji* [Complete works of Wang Ji] (1882; reprint ed., Taipei: Huawen Shuju, 1970), 15: 17a–b, cit. in Wu Pei-yi, “Self-examination,” pp. 17–18.

<sup>79</sup> Cf. *Yangyuan xiansheng quanji* [Complete works of Mr Zhang Lüxiang] (Nanjing: Jiangsu Shuju, 1872), 20: 28a–30b, cit. in Wu Pei-yi, “Self-examination,” p. 21.

<sup>80</sup> Cf. Meng Huali, *Meng Yunpu xiansheng ji* [Collected works of Meng Huali] (late sixteenth-century ed.), 6: 19a–b, cit. in Wu Pei-yi, “Self-examination,” p. 23.

<sup>81</sup> Cf. Handlin, *Late Ming thought*, pp. 188–90.

<sup>82</sup> A similar type of intimate diary, rare in traditional China, was written by Luo Rufang 羅汝芳 who, however, burned it before his death. See Handlin, *Late Ming thought*, p. 191.

<sup>83</sup> Huang Zongxi condemned all types of moral registers, and also Liu Zongzhou's ideas themselves. See *Huang Zongxi quanji* [Complete works of Huang Zongxi] (Hangzhou: Zhejiang Guji, 1985), 1: 255.

human motives.<sup>78</sup> In his *Zize* 自責 (Self-reproach) Zhang Lüxiang 張履祥 (1611–74) annotated his reflexions on his self-examination, and in a subsequent treatise contrasted several pairs of mutually opposite terms all having the prefix ‘self’.<sup>79</sup> Among the ascetic and quasi-monastic rules that Meng Huali 孟化鯉 (1545–97) recommended to the students in his school was the following: “After breakfast you should report for the purpose of discussing how you have spent the night . . . Did you have dreams? . . . Did your period of keeping vigil cause you any shocks? . . . You should examine all these points one by one, and present them for discussion. You must not indulge in self-deception. At night . . . you should calm your mind, and take up quiet-sitting for half-an-hour, or an hour. You should then examine in detail all that you have done during the day, whether good or bad. If there are errors you should repent deeply, and make a resolution never to commit them again.”<sup>80</sup>

Lü Kun 呂坤 (1536–1618) was one of several scholars who elaborated his own system of self-examination, as may be seen in his *Xinxin ji* 省心紀 (Record of self-scrutiny) and his *Shenyin yu* 呻吟語 (Groaning words). Lü Kun laid down instructions for keeping a list of every thought, word, and action, day by day. For this purpose he drew up a chart consisting of several columns, one for each kind of mistake, instead of the three traditional categories (mental, verbal, and physical). The faults of each day had to be checked off under the appropriate column, and at the end of every month one should concentrate on correcting the most frequent mistakes.<sup>81</sup> *Groaning Words* is an exceptional document that records his “innermost thoughts, self-doubts, and emotional struggles.”<sup>82</sup>

The examination of the conscience, in various forms and following various practices, became very common towards the end of the Ming dynasty, as much among intellectuals as among the people at large. It could be done either individually or collectively. In the second case, it took the form of a public confession, made before either a vast audience, a small group or a single person. It could moreover be linked to beliefs in the gods and spirits, or constitute no more than a simple form of self-cultivation.

There were defects in such practices, however, especially the excessive reliance on the calculation of merits and demerits. Worse still, they could be used to justify the misconduct.<sup>83</sup> As some contemporaries lamented, they could become an immoral ‘monetarization of morality’. Moral perfection could be understood as a simple means to obtain material benefits, through a mechanistic interpretation of the concept of retribution.

A classic example of this pragmatic utilitarian approach is the work of Yuan Huang. In one of many significant passages, he quotes a conversation that he had with the monk Yungu:

... He asked: “Do you think that you deserve to pass the examination? Or that you deserve to have a son?” I reflected for a while and replied, “I do not deserve either. The sort of man who passes the examinations possesses signs (*xian* 相) of good fortune. My good fortune is slight; moreover I have not been able to



build up merit or accumulate good deeds to increase my good fortune. And I have no patience with troublesome affairs, and am not tolerant of other people. At times I use my abilities and intelligence to override others. Or I believe things too easily, and speak carelessly. All these characteristics are signs of my lack of good fortune—how could it be right for me to pass the examinations? ... I am easily angered—that is the second reason I shouldn't have a son. ... I am always concerned about my reputation, and cannot put aside my own interests to help others—this is the third reason I shouldn't have a son. I talk too much, and thereby dissipate my material force—this is the fourth reason I shouldn't have a son. I like to drink, and so wear down my mental energy—this is the fifth reason I shouldn't have a son. I like to sit up all night, and do not know how to preserve my inborn virtue and nurture my spirit—this is the sixth reason I shouldn't have a son. ... Then I confessed all my past sins before the Buddha. I wrote a petition, seeking first to pass the examination for the *junen* degree, and pledged to perform three thousand good deeds to repay the goodness of heaven and my ancestors if this petition were granted. ..."<sup>84</sup>

Yang Dongming 楊東明 (1548–1624), a follower of the school of Wang Yangming, and Feng Congwu 馮從吳 (1556–1627), were critical of the method of correcting faults. In his *Shanli tu* 善利圖 (Chart of goodness and profit), Feng recognized the value of daily self-examination, but drew a contrast between goodness and the seeking of profit.<sup>85</sup> Liu Zongzhou also severely criticized bookkeeping of this sort, and although he himself wrote books of this genre (e.g., his *Renpu* 人譜 [Spiritual guide]), maintained a strict moral attitude. He stated in this work that good actions should be performed for their own sake, and not in order to get 'indulgences' and cancel demerits. Self-scrutiny was given the form of a judicial trial in which the self played the role of both accuser and defendant. As in the practices of the Stoics, the self became *speculator sui censorque*.<sup>86</sup> In the passage that follows, the process of accusation assumes, in its moral tension, the same dramatic quality as a legal trial, whose various phases it imitates:

I proceed to accuse myself, saying: "You certainly have the appearance of a human being. But once you have stumbled, you act like a beast. Degradation after degradation, you never stop." I reply, "Yes! Yes!" I then imagine that the above accusations are repeated by ten voices, while ten eyes and ten fingers are staring and pointing at me. I again reply, "Yes! Yes!" At this moment my heart throbs. Bitter sweat begins to flow, my face flushes, as if my body were being tortured in a court of law. Thereupon I leap up and shout, "I am guilty!" I then accuse myself further: "You are making an insincere confession!" To that I reply, "No! No!"<sup>87</sup>

Another criticism against the use of ledgers, and one that was by no means groundless, focused on the undue emphasis placed on evil and wrong doing. Meng Qiu 孟秋 (1525–89) argued that one should concentrate on achieving goodness rather than on correcting one's faults.<sup>88</sup> It was, however, precisely in order to distinguish their self-cultivation from the utilitarian practice of accumulating merits in order thereby to earn advantages that a number of Confucian literati only recorded their faults in their diaries. These diaries did

<sup>84</sup> Cf. Yuan Huang, *Liming pian* [Determining your own fate (1607)], pp.3b–5a, transl. Brokaw, "Yüan Huang," pp. 164, 166.

<sup>85</sup> Cf. Feng Congwu, *Shaoxu ji* [Collected works of Feng Congwu] (Taipei: Shangwu, 1974), 8: 4a–8a; see Handlin, *Late Ming thought*, pp.198–202.

<sup>86</sup> "The observer and judge of itself."

<sup>87</sup> Liu Zongzhou, *Spiritual guide*, p.11, cit. in Wu Pei-yi, *Confucian's progress*, p.224.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. Handlin, *Late Ming thought*, p.196.

<sup>89</sup> Wu Pei-yi presents a background of Daoist and Buddhist influences on the practice of the confession of sins (*Confucian's progress*, pp.209–15.)

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, pp.229–34.

<sup>91</sup> Cf. Sakai Tadao, *Morality books*, pp.345–57; idem, “Confucianism,” pp.342–5. For the relation with social evolution see Brokaw, *Ledgers*.

<sup>92</sup> Cf. Sakai Tadao, “Confucianism,” p.346.

<sup>93</sup> Cf. Yü Chün-fang, *Renewal of Buddhism*, p.113.

not mention merits in order to make it clear that their authors did not cherish any hope of material or spiritual reward.

It has already been noted above that practices such as these grew stronger during the Ming dynasty, as compared to previous periods,<sup>89</sup> and underwent major changes that reflected, on the one side, transformed social and economic conditions, and, on the other, the evolution of ideas. Self-examination and the process of self-perfection were, to a greater or lesser degree, connected with religious practices and feelings, and with the idea of retribution. Sometimes in these cases the sense of guilt overcame that of shame insofar as the humiliation of the confession was sublimated in the expiation of the offence.<sup>90</sup> One of the principles on which the examination of conscience was grounded, and this was even more the case as regards the books on morality, was that virtue was rewarded and vice punished. Now, as we have seen, during the Ming dynasty the concept of moral retribution became uncoupled to an ever greater degree from divine favours, moving in the direction of abstraction and internalization. Belief in an impersonal and automatic law made people psychologically more the masters of their own destinies, leaving little space for the choices to be made by divinities. Irrespective of whether Daoist and Buddhist beliefs and techniques were maintained or suppressed, the role of the individual was thereby reinforced. Everyone was considered capable of achieving sagehood, a capacity that was innate in each person. Thus everyone could control his or her own destiny through his or her moral progress; and notwithstanding their mechanical usage, the new registers of merits and demerits presupposed on the part of the individual a belief that his or her behaviour mattered, and a determination to carve out his or her own fate.<sup>91</sup> Neo-Confucians of Song times had affirmed the possibility of anyone becoming a sage, but, as compared with the weight given to this assumption, the preoccupation with political and social aspects, prompted by the purpose of justifying social stratification, and based on the conception of the different grades of the purity of the ‘energy’ (*qi* 氣) with which each person was imbued, were more prevalent in this era. Both the voluntarist doctrines of the school of Wang Yangming, and the organizations promoting Daoist or Buddhist propaganda, as well as networks of laypersons, contributed to the new attitude. The method of personal self-cultivation developed at the same time, based more on experience than on either acquired learning or on the study of the commentaries to the classics. Study-groups also aided the exchange of opinions and experiences.

During the Ming dynasty, the doctrines of Wang Yangming emphasized those aspects in which human beings were equal as regards their moral worth. They helped to spread a voluntarist orientation that was opposed to fatalism. Concern with secular life was stronger at this time than that with religious salvation.<sup>92</sup> If further appears that the secularization of the processes of self-cultivation advanced at the same rhythm as the internalization of morality, and the placing of significance on intentions.<sup>93</sup> This does not mean that religious beliefs and practices were abandoned. This was indeed

a matter of regret to a *literatus* of the Qing dynasty, who wrote in the introduction to a book on morality, in a rationalist mode of analysis, that: "People look for happiness in the other world, and neglect the life in this one. They believe that it is meritorious to heap praises on the Buddha, to spend their cash on Buddhist ceremonies, or meet the huge expenses of Daoist services. They do not realize that even a single coin expended on these religious services is squandered."<sup>94</sup> In spite of the trend towards cultural homogenization, the distance between the critical, rationalist spirit of the Great Tradition and the beliefs of the mass of the people still remained great.

Another change connected with the practices of self-cultivation affected the way in which errors were corrected, becoming more personal and subjective. Apart from the 'ideal' method, which was based on learning acquired through study, and making notes on the Confucian classics and their commentaries, another of a 'factual' type developed, as has been shown by Handlin. This latter consisted in the correction of one's defects (*gaiguo* 改過), and in the accumulation of merits with the help of the usual registers and diaries. Its starting-point, however, was not the teaching of one or another master, but particular experiences, actual events, and one's personal interpretation of them.<sup>95</sup> Intentions became increasingly seen as important, and the *shanshu* insist ever more strongly on the distinction between overt behaviour and hidden motivation.<sup>96</sup> External norms were progressively overshadowed by personal criteria.<sup>97</sup> The authority of the written texts came to be undermined by individual evaluation, and by the exchanges of impressions, opinions, and experiences whose frequency had been increased by the formation of study-groups (*huiyue* 會約).

The impact of intention and motivation is clear from the way in which the evaluation of good and evil actions in the books of morality differentiated them in accordance with the spirit in which they had been performed. One and the same act could give rise to different consequences, either positive or negative, depending upon the attitude of mind that accompanied it. This may be deduced from the following episode:

Once a woman went to a temple. She wanted to make a donation, but, being poor, had only two cash. These she gave to the temple anyway. The head monk then heard her confession himself. Later she entered the imperial palace, and there gained wealth and high status. She came back with several thousand pieces of gold, all of which she donated to the same temple. The head monk however directed another monk to handle the transference of merit from the deed.

"Before," said the woman, "when I contributed two cash, you heard my confession yourself. Now that I have contributed several thousand pieces of gold, you are not transferring the merit yourself. Why is that?"

"Previously," replied the monk, "your material goods were few, but you gave them with a true mind. If I had not heard your confession myself, your goodness would not have received an adequate recompense. Today, though your material goods are plentiful, your mind is not as devoted as it was in giving them. It suffices for me to appoint someone else to hear your confession."<sup>98</sup>

<sup>94</sup> Cf. *Bu feiqian kongde li* [Meritorious deeds at no cost] (1742), p.49a, cit. in Sakai Tadao, "Confucianism," p.349.

<sup>95</sup> The term *tiren* 體認, 'personal understanding', was often used. See, for example, Lü Kun and Xue Xuan (1389–1464) quoted in Handlin, *Late Ming thought*, pp. 192–4.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. Yü Chün-fang, *Renewal of Buddhism in China*, pp.112–18.

<sup>97</sup> The change of perspective is evident in Zou Yuanbiao's (1551–1624) comments to *Groaning words* by Lü Kun: "I began to believe that the Six Classics were all commentaries on the self" (quoted in Handlin, *Late Ming thought*, p.192).

<sup>98</sup> Cf. Brokaw, "Yüan Huang," pp.181–2.

<sup>99</sup> See the examples reported by Eberhard (*Guilt and sin*) concerning suicides.

<sup>100</sup> G. D. Musso, *La Cina e i Cinesi: loro leggi e costumi* [China and the Chinese: their laws and customs] (Milano: Hoepli, 1926), pp.301–2.

<sup>101</sup> See J. Gernet, “A propos de la notion de responsabilité dans l’ancien droit chinois” [On the concept of responsibility in Chinese law of former times], in *Il diritto in Cina* [Law in China], ed. L. Lanciotti (Firenze: Olschki, 1978), pp.127–36. A. Smith, *Chinese characteristics*, pp.228–9, wrote at the end of the last century that “This responsibility is based upon the theory that virtue and vice are contagious. Good neighbours will make good neighbours, and bad neighbours will make others like them . . . . Their gross dereliction of duty is in not exerting a good moral and reformatory influence over the criminal.”

<sup>102</sup> Smith, *Chinese characteristics*, p.65. Also E. Alabaster, *Notes and commentaries on Chinese criminal law and cognate topics with special relation to ruling cases* (London: Luzac & Co., 1899), p.361.

<sup>103</sup> V. W. Ng, “Ideology and sexuality: rape laws in Qing China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 42.1 (1987): 60.

<sup>104</sup> Cf. Mark Elvin, “Female virtue and the state in China,” *Past and Present* 104 (1984): 111–52.

<sup>105</sup> This work (examined by Van Gulik, *Sexual life in ancient China. A preliminary survey of Chinese sex and society from ca. 1500 BC till 1644 AD* [Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1961; repr. 1974], pp.246–7), attributed to Lü Yan [ninth century], but probably composed in the Yuan period and edited by the Ming poet Tao Wangling is collected in *Daozang jiyao* [Essentials of the Daoist canon] (Taipei: Xinwenfeng Chubun Gongsi, 1977), 3: 10311–39. It consists of negative and positive exemplifications of the following ten moral commands:

1. Do not kill (pp.10311–16)
2. Do not steal (pp.10316–20)
3. Do not fornicate (pp.10320–3)
4. Do not offend (pp.10323–5)
5. Do not cause disagreements (pp.10325–8)
6. Do not disrespect you neighbour (pp.10328–30)

In texts such as this one, rewards and punishments are anticipated not only for actions that have been fully realized, but even—on occasion—solely for entertaining their possibility. In Tao Wangling’s 陶望齡 (1562–?) table of merits and demerits, for example, it is possible to find the same crime evaluated differently according to the accompanying intention.

Changes such as these in the direction of a greater internalization of the sense of guilt did not, however, follow the course taken by the West in the wake of the Christian tradition. The process of ‘personalization’ kept as ever to the tracks of Confucian morality, while retaining some Legalist residues. Under the rubric of offences that are condemned in and of themselves, independently of motivations and intentions, are certain cases in which the person responsible acted against his or her will, or at all events without the intention of so doing. Such is the case of a ‘crime’ committed by a person who is mentally deranged, but whose infirmity could be considered a punishment for sins committed during a previous existence, rather than as a mitigating factor.<sup>99</sup> Eberhard also examines certain ‘involuntary’ sins, in which the ‘automatic’ responsibility of a person for his or her behaviour can in no way be attributed to his or her will—acts that recall so-called ‘material sins’—and that are linked to an ‘objective’ responsibility of a Legalist variety. There are certain cases in the domain of penal law, moreover, whose significance goes beyond the legal system and the ‘objective’ conception of what is right, and which lead one to reflect on certain idiosyncrasies of Chinese ways of thought. It is essential, first and foremost, to keep in mind the idea of ‘responsibility by implication’, in the sense given to this term by Musso, namely the expansion of collective responsibility, for certain crimes, to all the members of the family group to whom the offender belongs, or even to his neighbours.<sup>100</sup> We are dealing here, as Gernet has shown, with two different types of penal responsibility: the first is grounded on the ‘objective’ responsibility of the members of a small community when the crime committed is one of those considered to be of an extremely serious nature, while the second is of a ‘subjective’ type, strictly speaking responsibility by implication, and inspired by Confucian morality to function more in a preventative than in a *post hoc* repressive fashion.<sup>101</sup> The ‘predominance’ of social effects on morality is illustrated by deviant female sexual behaviour. The woman was frequently assigned the determination of the status of such an offence, and of its social effects, regardless of her will or intentions in the matter. A paradoxical, but at the same time instructive, example is that of the judge, confronted with a case of rape, who reduced the punishment of the rapist from strangling to exile once he had established that, prior to being raped, the victim had had illicit relations with another man, and hence had lost her sense of shame.<sup>102</sup> In another case of rape, a band of rogues who had violated a woman, even while acknowledging their responsibility for this act of violence, rejected any guilt for destroying her reputation on the grounds that she had remarried after the death of her first husband.<sup>103</sup> The

rationale behind these arguments and verdicts was that a woman could not lose her virtue (or, in other words, her good name) if she had already been deprived of it previously.

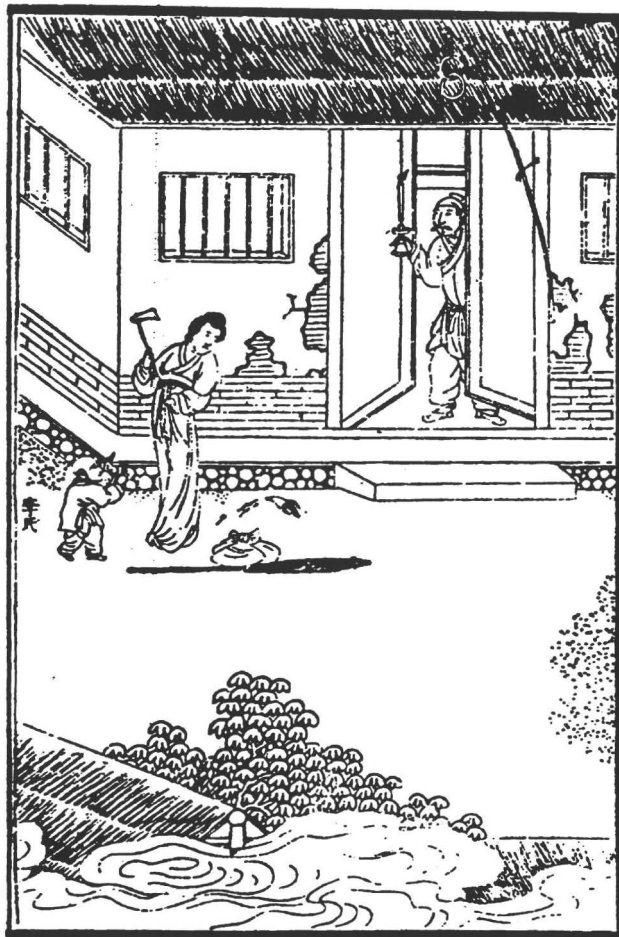
It is plain that we are face to face here with two different motives that combined to induce the Chinese to ignore the part played by subjective intent of a specific nature. This was either because rape carried a significance of especial social relevance, or because it was desired to give it a particular moral meaning of its own. It was the objective aspect that dominated, in conjunction with the fact that the norms had been violated and society, or a certain social group, thereby damaged. Furthermore, it was held to be the case that the offender had often actualized an 'immoral' attitude that had in some wise made possible, or facilitated, the crime. It thus became of secondary importance that this crime had been really actualized in fact, since a mere simple word or slander might have produced the identical effect, or that the act might have been voluntary or involuntary. Not only a woman's violation of sexual propriety but the damage that she had thereby inflicted on herself were both felt to be not so much a crime that derived from her responsibility (in the Western sense of that word) as a loss of moral worth which, from any point of view, weighed on her and on her family, and the supreme redemption from which was the sacrifice of her own life. In such cases, only suicide could exempt the woman from 'social' condemnation,<sup>104</sup> demonstrating her innocence and exalting her honourable character. Having lost her face, she could only regain her good name through an act of heroism, or escape from the otherwise insoluble dilemma in which she found herself.

If we look at the section on lust in the *Shijie gong-guoge* 十戒功過格 (Register of merits and demerits according to the ten precepts),<sup>105</sup> it appears that the gravity of the transgression depended first of all on the role of the woman, and in second place upon her consent. Thus the sin committed against a free woman was evaluated as double that perpetrated against a woman of servile condition, while the will of a prostitute was hardly taken into account. Last of all, it was considered an offense—with appropriate differentiations made between nuns, widows, virgins, married women, and prostitutes—even to boast of having

- <sup>105</sup> 7. Do not speak thoughtlessly (pp.10330–3)
8. Do not be corrupt or greedy (for honours, riches, power, comforts, etc., pp.10333–5)
9. Do not get angry (pp.10335–7)
10. Do not be agitated or obsessed (pp.10338–9).

**Figure 4**

*Li, widow of Wang Ning, cuts off her hand with an axe to preserve her purity when an innkeeper throws her out at night by seizing her arm. The local prefect later had the culprit flogged. From a thirteenth-century story. (Source: Guifan [Exemplars of those in women's apartments], compiled by Lü Kun [1590; second edition, Huizhou, c.1613; photolithographic reprint, 1927], 3: 26a)*



<sup>106</sup> Cf. Helmut Martin, ed., *Li Yu quanji* [Complete works of Li Yu] (Taipei: Chengwen, 1970), 15: 6199–201; free translation by Nathan Mao, *Li Yü's twelve towers. Retold by Nathan Mao* (Hong Kong: Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1975), pp.63–4.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. the criminal reports (*xingke tiben* 刑科題本) of the first year of Qianlong (1736), *bao* 117, cit. in Paola Paderni, “Le rachat de l’honneur perdu. Le suicide des femmes dans la Chine du XVIII<sup>e</sup> siècle” [The recovery of lost honour. Women’s suicide in eighteenth-century China], *Etudes Chinoises* 10, 1–2 (1991): 149.

<sup>108</sup> I am grateful to Mark Elvin for information on the case reported in his essay “Female virtue,” n.177.

had an illicit relationship with a woman, even if this was untrue. Li Yu provides another significant example in this respect:

During the Ming dynasty, there was a virtuous widow who lost her husband before she was twenty years old. She had been faithful to him while he lived, and during the next twenty years she successfully resisted her clansmen’s efforts to persuade her to remarry. Her loyal heart was as firm as iron and her reputation irreproachable. And then one night the widow was raped in her bed. Half-asleep she first thought her husband was returning to her, but quickly discovered her error and found a stranger on top of her. Realizing the irreparable damage done, she cried and screamed, demanding to know from the stranger how she happened to be chosen to be raped. The stranger, confident that nothing drastic would happen to him since he had already had her, admitted that the widow’s maid had helped him to her bed. Why did the maid do such a thing? She decided to involve her mistress in the illicit relationship she was having with this man in order to eliminate the possibility that the mistress might otherwise discover the affair and expose the maid. The widow’s virtuous reputation of more than twenty years standing was thus ruined in an instant by the maid’s seemingly clever strategy. How could she ever face others, or even herself? She summoned the maid and in revenge bit her severely several times and then committed suicide.<sup>106</sup>

The sense of shame for a woman, however, and the social and personal implications thereof, did not derive exclusively from rape. The mere fact of having been the target of vexatious comments, insinuations, or improper propositions, could involve her in equally serious difficulties, which might end with her ‘immolation’. We do not encounter physical violence in many cases of female suicide, or ‘publicity’ for the offence provoking it. Some legal sources report women who insisted on their determination to die because, their honour compromised, they were no longer worthy to live in society, even in defiance of the objections of their parents who acknowledged their complete innocence.<sup>107</sup>

When we look over the above-mentioned cases, responsibility appears a very broad concept in Chinese thought. In every case where the presence of will may be assumed, there is no doubt about the moral responsibility for an offence. Next, in certain cases, the consequences of an act are in and of themselves ascribable in a legal or moral sense to the actor even if he or she lacks intention, or the capacity to will or to purpose them is limited, or, if it is a question of an offence perpetrated by others, when the effects of the wrongdoing on the fabric of society are especially serious. In the later Qing, however, it would appear that there was a tendency to attribute ever greater value to intention in some of these cases as well, for instance those relating to female sexual propriety.<sup>108</sup>

### 3. Responsibility

All men are born of Heaven in an identical way. Yet they differ in intelligence and character. Who causes this? Each man himself. ... Everything depends on the conduct of each individual. When his will to self-acting is strong, he is capable of mastering himself. This will lead to him loving himself. When his heart is firm in its self-love, he will be capable of directing himself. He will then know what it is that he should gain, and what he should lose. He will know what he should make, and what he should forego. He will know how to decide, and how to choose.

—Zhang Lüxiang 張履祥<sup>109</sup>

The Story of the Stone explains that the continual confrontation and interaction of good and bad energy not only influence the future and the career of a person but also his or her unchanging character. Whether someone becomes a prime minister or a bandit depends on the success, or lack of success of the energy of a correct character. From that with which we are initially endowed it follows whether we are born as virtuous persons (*daren* 大仁) like Yao, Shun, the Duke of Zhou, Confucius, Mencius, Dong Zhongshu, and Han Yu, or as criminals (*da'e* 大惡) like the rebel Chi Yu, the last rulers of the Xia and the Shang dynasties, the First Emperor of Qin, the 'usurper' Wang Mang, or An Lushan. Those who are born to a destiny that is definitively good or bad (*yingyun* 應運, *yingjie* 應劫), possess a character that may be traced back to what they have received from Heaven. All others, who have not been endowed at the outset with such a quantity of positive or of negative influence, are nearly identical in their normality or intermediate character. Exceptions to this are those whose fundamental endowment is of positive energy (because they have been born in a period during which this is dominant) but who are at the same time influenced by the negative, and in consequence of this, even while differentiated from the ordinary run of persons, are never able to become sages or worthies. They are nonconformists possessed of their own originality, like the heroes of romance, and artists and actors, who are in certain respects superior and in others inferior to ordinary people.<sup>110</sup> This passage, while providing numerous details, only presents a problem as regards whether or not, in view of the preponderant effect of external influences, a person is left with a sphere of moral self-determination, and, if the answer is 'yes', how large it is. There are, furthermore, the problems inherent in the idea of 'inherited' retribution, whether this links the members of a family, both ascendants and descendants, or different lives of a single person, in the sequence of karmic cycles. The term *yinyuan* 因緣 as used in Daoism does not necessarily mean only 'destiny', or 'karmic retribution', but may also indicate the merits that the individual has acquired. The responsibility of a person is not diminished when emphasis is placed on 'familial co-responsibility', for all that it is shared with that of his forebears. The salvation of all is conjoined in the mutual

<sup>109</sup> *Complete works of Master Zhang Lüxiang*, vol. 20, pp.29a–30a, transl. Wu Pei-yi, "Self-examination," pp.21–2; idem, *Confucian's progress*, p.222.

<sup>110</sup> Cao Xueqin and Gao E, *Hongloumeng* [The dream of the young ladies' apartments] in *The story of the stone*, vol. 2, p.20. See the similar ideas expressed by Wang Fuzhi 王夫之 in his *Du Tongjian lun* [Discussion of the "Comprehensive mirror to assist government"] (late seventeenth century), reprint ed. in 3 vols (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975), vol.7, and in his *Zhangzi zhengmeng zhu* [Comments to Zhang Zai's "Correction of youthful folly"] (late seventeenth century), reprint ed. (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975). See also Xiao Hanming, *Chuanshan yixue yanjiu* [Researches on the study of the *Yijing* by Wang Fuzhi] (Beijing: Huaxia, 1987), p.132.

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Isabelle Robinet, "Notes préliminaires sur quelques antinomies fondamentales entre le bouddhisme et le taoïsme" [Preliminary notes on some fundamental antinomies between Buddhism and Daoism], in *Incontri di religioni in Asia tra il III e il X secolo d. C.* [Encounters of religions in Asia between the third and the tenth centuries AD], ed. L. Lanciotti (Firenze: Olschki, 1984).

<sup>112</sup> One of the dominant themes of the seventeenth-century novel *Xingshi yinyuan zhuàn* [Tales of predestined unions to startle our age into awareness] (1721; reprint ed., Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1985) is precisely this contrast between determinism and free will, and karmic retribution and responsibility. These contradictions appear in affirmations of celestial predestination (*tiansuan* 天算) at times dominating human contriving (*renmou* 人謀), and at other times dominating the absurdity of karmic retribution (*bao* 報). See *Tales of predestined unions*, vol. 27, p. 402, and also A. Plaks, "After the fall: *Hsing-shih yin-yuan chuan* and the seventeenth-century Chinese novel," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 45.2 (1985): 543–80.

<sup>113</sup> Cf. the chapter on "Destiny" in Santangelo, "*Sin*" in *China*, pp. 86–145, and idem, "Destiny and retribution in late imperial China," *East and West* 42, 2–4 (1992): 377–442.

<sup>114</sup> Cf. Tang Yijie, *Wei Jin Nanbei chaoshiqi de Daojiao* [Daoism during the period of the Wei, Jin, and Northern and Southern dynasties] (Xi'an: Shaanxi Shifan Daxue, 1987), and Chen Jin, "Taiping jing zhong de chengfu baoying sixiang" [Thoughts on inherited evil and retribution in the *Taiping jing*]. *Zhong-jiaoxue* (1986), cit. by Barbara Hendrichske, "The concept of inherited evil in the *Taiping jing*," *East Asian History* 2 (1991): 1–30.

<sup>115</sup> For a penetrating analysis of the *Taiping jing* and *Taiping jing chao* concerning the concept of inherited evil (*chengfu* 承負) see Hendrichske, "Inherited evil."

<sup>116</sup> Cf. Santangelo, "*Sin*" in *China*, pp. 116–19.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. Liu Ji, *Tianshuo* [On heaven] (late fourteenth century), in *Zhongguo zhexueshi ziliao xuanji*, *Song Yuan Ming zhi bu* [Anthology of the history of Chinese philosophy: section on the Song, Yuan and

interplay of merits and demerits, even if in the final analysis the ultimate power pertains to the individual who is the last in the line, insofar as his or her destiny depends on him himself or her herself, and not upon Heaven.<sup>111</sup> If, then, given the prevailing conception of retribution, human responsibility is implicitly acknowledged, and seen as giving rise to consequences of human conduct that are inevitable, what is the relationship between the conditioning effected by cosmic energy (*qi*) and the human will? If a person's character is determined by kamma from the moment of his or her birth, or by the interaction of two opposed but complementary energies, and, further, if his or her behaviour is influenced by circumstances and circumambient conditions, and by the forces of Heaven and Earth, what is there left for his or her free will to decide? To what extent can one think of oneself as responsible for one's own actions if one has to take into account one's original destiny (*benming* 本命 or *benshu* 本數) and the consequences of the past (*suming* 宿命)?<sup>112</sup>

The problem of 'predestination' leads us to the debated *topos* of destiny and retribution.<sup>113</sup> which has been discussed in China even before the Buddhism spread the concept of *karma*.<sup>114</sup> In the case of the suffering or premature death of the innocent, how does the principle of retribution and responsibility work? If contemporary calamities stem from mistakes committed by men in the past and if everyone's transgressions may be detrimental to everyone else, it means that individual responsibility is confirmed even if the unavoidable consequences follow criteria which transcend the span of human life.<sup>115</sup>

The question as to whether the mechanical interaction between positive and negative energy in their impact on man might influence not only the latter's existence but also his moral qualities and choices recalls the famous debate between Platonists and Stoics on the *aporia* fate/responsibility. The early Ming thinker Liu Ji 劉基 (1311–75) returns to the Confucian distinction between the sphere of ethics and that of destiny: the former depends on man, the latter does not. Liu Ji's conclusions that Heaven is not responsible for the evil in the world seems to solve the ancient question of the relation between the responsibility/irresponsibility of man and the responsibility/irresponsibility of the Universal Order in terms analogous to the Western paradox according to which, in order to save the innocence of God, his omnipotence has to be denied.<sup>116</sup> "Good and evil depend upon man, but good and bad fortune depend upon chance. When abnormal energy prevails, man cannot resist his destiny."<sup>117</sup> But the stress on energy would lead to ethical determinism, and it is hard to see why man should be punished or rewarded for acts that he materially performs but the 'responsibility' for which belongs to other forces. Neither would it then be possible to assert, as Liu Ji in fact does, that good and evil depend on man. The emphasis on the crucial role of *karma* and hence the absence of 'free will' already pointed out in Confucian anti-Buddhist polemics still represented no negligible stumbling block and could lead to fatalistic amorality.



The Neo-Confucians themselves were aware of some of these problems, and they attributed the moral contradiction between predestination and liberty to the Buddhists. "If we accept the Buddhists' doctrine on behaviour," observed Gu Xiancheng 顧憲成 (1550–1612), "then every loyal minister and every filial son exists simply to pay back the benefits received in his previous life. Every traitorous minister and every treacherous son exists simply to pay back the grievances suffered in his previous life."<sup>118</sup> As has already been suggested, notwithstanding the infrequency with which the degree of internalization of moral norms was discussed, practices of self-cultivation were highly developed and, what is more, it was taken for granted that a person was capable of being an active participant in making his or her choices and decisions.<sup>119</sup> His or her feelings of shame and guilt, however understood, corresponded to the principle of responsibility grounded on the presence of his or her mind and will. The view of Wang Wei 王禕 (1323–74), an intellectual of the early Ming, may be taken as an example of Neo-Confucian philosophy on this subject. He affirmed bluntly that "the human will to do good derives uniquely from a strong determination" (人之欲為善也由乎一念之烈而已).<sup>120</sup> Similar concepts have already been met with in the works of Liu Ji. Yan Yuan 顏元 (1635–1704), a thinker who differed completely from Wang Wei as regards his mentality, cultural background, and period, nonetheless displayed a similar approach. He wrote that "the possibility of the reform of a person depends upon his or her will to return to his or her original nature, and upon his or her strength to do so."<sup>121</sup> The position of Wang Yangming and his school was no different. Zhang Lüxiang 張履祥 (1611–74), who wrote the epigraph at the head of this section, used a series of compound terms beginning with *zi* 自 'self', among which the following suggest at least the idea of reflexivity, if not of autonomy and free will: 'self-justification', 'self-indulgence', 'self-hurt', 'self-control', 'self-love', 'self-regulation', 'self-decision', and 'self-choice'.<sup>122</sup> This application of the prefix is in any event consonant with the presupposition made by Mencius of an original goodness in human beings, from which is derived the capacity of each person to attain sagehood through his or her own efforts. Such questions did not admit, however, of an unequivocal resolution, as was sketched out in the Buddhist debate on whether one could obtain salvation by means of one's 'own strength' (*zili* 自力) or with the 'help of others' (*tuo li* 他力).<sup>123</sup> For Jiao Xun 焦循 (1763–1820), a person's moral responsibility flowed from his or her conscience (*zhi* 知), as a choice between manifesting his or her own nature (composed of sexuality and appetites) in the domain of civil society or at an animal level.

Statements like this reflected the prevailing attitude, which went back at least to the origins of Neo-Confucianism. This current of thought gave a new value to the 'dynamic' conception of destiny in Mencius (understood as a person's capacity to act freely in the domain of moral concerns),<sup>124</sup> while making its own a series of related ideas adopted from certain Buddhist sects, and it took as evident the innate potentialities with which everyone was

/Ming dynasties] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962), p.412.

<sup>118</sup> Gu Xiancheng, *Xiaoxin zhai zhaji* [Collected notes from the cautious studio], 9: 8b. cit. by Brokaw, *Ledgers*, p.139.

<sup>119</sup> See Santangelo, "Sin" in China, pp.123–33, on the idea of retribution and on the active role of man in destiny. Cf. also Zhu Xi, *Zhuzi julei* [Classified conversations of Zhu Xi], ed. Li Jingdi (1270; reprint ed., Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1986), 13: 230.

<sup>120</sup> Cf. Wang Wei, *Zhici* [Words from the wine cup] (late nineteenth-century ed.), p.12a.

<sup>121</sup> Mansfield Freeman, *Yan Yuan, Preservation of Learning, with an introduction on his life and thought*. Monumenta Serica Monograph no. 16 (Tokyo & Los Angeles: Nichiōsha, 1972), p.40.

<sup>122</sup> *Complete works of Master Zhang Lüxiang*, 20: 28a–30a, cit. in Wu Pei-yi, "Self-examination," p.21; idem, *Confucian's progress*, pp. 221–2. The hundreds of compounds cited contain a first group of twenty-three pairs of opposites, a second group of twenty negative actions, a third with eight actions that indicate a process of self-growth and repentance, followed at the end by a series of behavioural attitudes, still reflexive, but with a positive connotation.

<sup>123</sup> Faith in the help of forces outside humankind obviously played a relevant role in the domain of religious ideas. See, for instance, Wu Cheng'en, *Xiyouji* [Journey to the west] (Beijing: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe, 1972), 55: 762–75, and A. Plaks, *Four masterworks of the Ming Novel, Ssu ta ch' i-shu* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987, p.255.

<sup>124</sup> For the 'dynamic' concept of destiny in Mencius, meant as man's ability to act freely in the moral field, and for its distinction from the concept of 'external', 'static', 'uncontrollable' destiny, cf. Santangelo, "Sin" in China, pp. 90–2.

<sup>125</sup> See below, n.187, p.75.

<sup>126</sup> Cf. *Analects*, 35/17/2. Compare Xunzi's position that the difference between the sage and the superior man lies in the degree of moral maturation which at a certain point no longer requires any efforts or decision. Cf. also the *Doctrine of the mean*, para.20, on the difference between innate wisdom and acquired wisdom. The contrast between the two is the theme of the above-mentioned novel, *Tales of predestined unions* (26: 378, 37: 539, 39: 568). Cf. also *Zhu Shunshui quanji* [Zhu Zhiyu's collected works], 14: 190-1 (quoted in Jiang Guozhu and Zhu Kuiju, *Zhongguo lishi shang de renxing lun* [On human nature in Chinese history] [Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue, 1989], p.297), in which Zhu Zhiyu among other things criticizes the theory that good or evil in human nature depends on cosmic energy since the universe is said to favour some people (that is, the wise) with the infusion of pure energy, and penalize others (the foolish) with turbid energy. However, as Zhu Zhiyu comments, this would mean that the evil committed by a fool should not be disapproved since it would then be natural, as it is natural that "he who sows squash must gather squash, and he who sows beans must gather beans." This would mean, then, that man is not to blame and all the responsibility belongs to the heavens. After raising other objections, like the impossibility of explaining the changes that happen in a man's life, or the diversities or the uniformity between men of the same period, he concludes that each person chooses by himself either good or evil, just as water can flow through different types of soil, or a mirror can be cleaned or dirtied. Cf. also the citation of the same proverb in *Jinpingmei* (*Jinpingmei cibua* [The vernacular story of *Jinpingmei*] [1617; reprint ed., Hong Kong: Sanlian Shudian Xianggang Fendian, 1986], 10: 106); an analogous concept of the moral responsibility of man is found in the same work [29: 346] where there is a reminder that "behind every human injustice there is a person responsible, just as behind every debt there is a creditor."

<sup>127</sup> Cf. Wang Fuzhi, *Shangshu yinyi* [Meanings from the classic of history] (1663; reprint ed., Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1976), 3: 64.

<sup>128</sup> For an example, see the part relative to the second commandment—"do not steal"—of the sixteenth-century *Shijie gongguoge*

endowed to accomplish acts of goodness. From the theoretical point of view, however, the problem remained partially unresolved insofar as it was taken for granted that certain persons were born endowed with an exclusively negative energy, such as the 'great criminals' mentioned in *The Story of the Stone*, or the 'barbarians' in the works of Wang Fuzhi 王夫之. How could it be possible for them to transform themselves and change their way of life? And furthermore, how could one explain that the nature of 'barbarians', which was seen by some as being like that of animals, could be reformed? How could one reconcile with the idea that human nature is good, or that people are morally responsible, a character so apparently negative as Jinlian (Golden Lotus) in the novel *Jinpingmei* 金瓶梅<sup>125</sup>—though in reality complex, like the great tragic figures in world literature, with her impulses, and her predisposition to evil, but also her legitimate aspirations to a serene and honourable life?

An indirect response to these theoretical questions comes from the working out of philosophical positions, and the philological-exegetical studies of certain thinkers and commentators during the late Ming and early Qing. Their point of departure was two propositions in the *Analects* according to which Confucius was said to have affirmed the identity of all human beings as regards their human nature, and their differentiation through their habits and practice (*xi* 習), while excluding from any possibility of change only the greatest sages (*shangzhi* 上智) and those who were extremely stupid (*xiayu* 下愚). Having recourse to practice and education, as making for acquired characteristics, was particularly useful for monists who were in no position to bring into play the dualism between principle and energy, but could by these means specify a way whereby the innate element of human nature could be affected. It was for this reason that many thinkers, such as Wang Tingxiang 王廷相, Wu Tinghan 吳廷翰, Liu Ji, Zhu Zhiyu 朱之瑜, Wang Fuzhi, and Yan Yuan, stressed the importance of daily practice to explain the differences in people's character and behaviour, attributing to each person a different balance between their innate nature and this sort of acquired second nature, and attacking the theory of a double nature as being determinist. By these means the existence of a space was recognized in which human beings were free and responsible. It was marked out by two variables, namely by the degree of 'fullness' of the innate nature, which had a bearing on the ease and possibility of change, and by the morally positive quality of a person's experiences and education, which in large measure depended on individual choices. Thus Zhu Zhiyu criticized the determinism of the 'innateness' that was derived from the theory of the infusion into the person of diverse types of cosmic energy, for which he substituted the theory of the influences of the environment and education. At all events he concluded that a person was able to choose his or her way. It was no accident that Zhu left to one side the two extremes of humankind, the sages and the fools, in order to concentrate on the common people.<sup>126</sup> Wang Fuzhi reached similar conclusions, underlining a person's power to

make his or her choices freely (*neng ziqu ziyong* 能自取而自用), and that these combined to mould a new nature that was acquired through the habits and the choices of daily life.<sup>127</sup>

The passages quoted in preceding pages enable us to understand that Chinese morality was not simply a formal and external set of norms, even if it was inspired by principles that were different from those conceived by Westerners. The significance of intent and of motivation is apparent in the different evaluations made in the 'books of morality' of transgressions, and of good actions, according to the spirit in which they were performed. The goodness could be at various levels, partial or false, depending on the state of mind that accompanied the good action;<sup>128</sup> and the same behaviour entailed diverse consequences according to the greater or lesser degree of intent. As a result, even a meritorious act might lose its positive effects on the actor if the latter had accomplished it for perverse or selfish purposes. *Per contra*, the negative effects of a bad action could be neutralized if, for example, this action had occurred in the course of altruistic behaviour.

Although the contrast between good and evil actions was clear—even to the extent that the moral conscience itself was represented by the God of the Stove 灶王爺, with his two jars, one for good and the other for evil—descriptions of the conflicts (*xinzhàn* 心戰, 'mental warfare')<sup>129</sup> experienced by the individual at the moment of choices between different actions, or the evaluation of a range of alternatives, seem to have been neglected. The spiritual battle that was first described in the West in Plato's *Phaedrus*, with the drama created by the soul struggling with itself and against its desires, its apprehensions, and internal tensions,<sup>130</sup> seems to have been absent in Chinese writings, as if a phase was missing in the process by which the will and the action are shaped, namely that relating to choice, and to the doubts that precede a decision, as well as to the tension and disputes that arise when were are confronted with opposing desires. As Fingarette has observed, Confucius seems to be unaware of this dimension, and the state of 'confusion' (*huo* 惑) does not signify doubt and hesitation, as far as he is concerned, but losing the true way.<sup>131</sup> Unlike the Western concept of responsibility where man has the role of absolute initiator of his actions ("Action," writes Fingarette, "has its inception with the person held responsible. It is this mysterious ultimacy that gives rise to such doctrines as that of 'the will' and 'the self,' the invisible interior person and act ... We postulate a secret homunculus with a wonderful special power."), Confucian thought ignores the individualistic notion of person which is endowed with a mysterious inner self or with a transcendental soul.<sup>132</sup>

The term *zhi* 志 is often used by Confucius and Mencius in the sense of 'will' and 'positive determination'.<sup>133</sup> Mencius traces back differences in moral stature to people's greater or lesser capacity to develop their consciences and their minds, emancipating themselves from the domain of sensibility.<sup>134</sup> Xunzi makes reference to moral choices on a number of occasions, employing the images of the balance and the crossroads.<sup>135</sup> In

[Register of merits and demerits according to the ten precepts], *Essentials of the Daoist canon* 10318, p.16: of the praiseworthy acts, even an enormous act of charity that foresees 200 merits is degraded by two levels if it is performed for ambition (*tanming* 貪名), and the giving of alms to old people and children loses all merits if carried out with the same motivation. See also, for example, the importance attributed to thoughts as well as actions, in *Taishang Dongxuan lingbao yebao yinyuan jing* [The scripture on retribution of the Taishang Dongxuan lingbao (tradition)], in *Essentials of the Daoist canon*, pp.1653–4.

<sup>129</sup> See Sima Qian, *Shiji* [Records of the grand historian], reprint ed., (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1973), 23: 1159, where there is a brief account of the internal conflict experienced by Zi Xia 子夏 (Bu Shang 卜商), a disciple of Confucius, between the "temptations" of the world and the morality taught by the master.

<sup>130</sup> For ancient Greece, see Martha Nussbaum, *The fragility of goodness. Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), esp. pp.25–50, and Vegetti, *L'etica degli antichi* [Ethics of the ancients] (Rome-Bari: Laterza, 1990), pp.99, 192, 227. Aristotle saw in freedom and the awareness of circumstances the factors of responsibility (Cf. *Etica nicomachea*, III, 1–3, V.10), while Sophocles focussed on external constraints (of the gods of Fate). Euripides doubted man's free will and responsibility because he is blinded by passions. Still, Aristotle focussed on the moment of choice—a sort of interior debate of assembly—as the moment in which one decides one's goals and the most efficient means of achieving them. Thus the Stoics also identified the 'strategic moment' in which judgements are formed about the representations capable of generating the impulse to act.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Fingarette, *Confucius*, p.22.

<sup>132</sup> Fingarette, "Comments and response," pp.199–200.

<sup>133</sup> Cf. for instance, *Analec*s, 2/2/4; 6/4/4; 6/4/9; 12/7/6; 17/9/26; 38/18/8; Mencius, 2–4/1a/7; 22/3b/2; 27–28/4a/10; 30/4b/1; 38/5b/1; 44/6a/9; 49/6b/8/9; 52/7a/24; 53/7a/33; 56/7b/15. Notwithstanding the differences, both Mencius and Xun Yue emphasize the role of determination. (Cf. Chen /OVER

/Ch'i-yün, *Hsün Yüeh and the mind of late Han China. A translation of the Shen-chien with introduction and annotations* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), pp. 47–9). Roger Ames suggests correctly the meaning of “disposition,” “purpose.” See R. Ames, “Reflections on the Confucian self: a response to Fingarette,” in Bockover, ed., *Rules, rituals, and responsibility*, p. 110.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. Mencius, 45–46/6a/15.

<sup>135</sup> Heng 衡—‘balance’. Cf. *Index of Master Xun*, 21: 28–30, where Xunzi presents the sage who knows how to act in the multiplicity of events. Qu 衢—‘crossroads’. Concerning the difficulty and importance of the recruitment of civil servants, Xunzi relates a brief anecdote about the life of Yangzhu 楊朱 when at a fork in the road: he expresses the suffering caused by the risk of possibly having chosen the wrong road, and by the serious consequences that may derive from the error of taking the first step in one direction rather than another (*Index of Master Xun*, 11: 86–7).

<sup>136</sup> Cf. Irene Bloom, “On the matter of mind: the metaphysical basis of the expanded self,” in *Individualism and holism: studies in Confucian and Taoist values*, ed. Donald Munro (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1985), pp. 300–1.

<sup>137</sup> In Zhu Xi, moreover, and above all in Xu Heng 許行 (1209–1281), we find a distinction being made between “the reason for which something is the way it is” (*suo yiran* 所以然), and that “for which it ought to be the way it is” (*suo dangran* 所當然), and thus between destiny and morality. See A. C. Graham, *Two Chinese philosophers: the metaphysics of the brothers Ch'eng* (1958; reprint ed., La Salle: Open Court, 1992), pp. 29–30.

<sup>138</sup> *Zbuzi yulei*, 104: 2623. Compare the concept of ‘determination’ (*zhi*) with that of intention and emotion, *ibid.*, 98: 2514.

<sup>139</sup> Cf. Irene Bloom, “On the matter of mind,” p. 312.

<sup>140</sup> *Zbuzi yulei*, 23: 551. transl. Irene Bloom, “On the matter of mind,” p. 312, with small changes.

<sup>141</sup> See the observations of Joseph Needham, *Science & civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954–), vol. 2, *History of scientific thought*, p. 293. The ‘automatism’ and the ‘spontaneity’ of the behaviour of the sage, both Neo-Confucian

effect, since the existence of moral responsibility is recognized, there is no doubt about a person's need to make choices from time to time; it is only that emphasis is not placed on this moment, and even less is it dramatized.<sup>136</sup> This choice, being morally predetermined, is made because it is the only one that *should* be made. Moral action—even the heroism involved in the decision—appears as a necessary consequence given the preceding conditions and the present circumstances. In this respect it is not felt necessary to devote space to the description of how a decision is reached, whether moral or immoral, or to act well or badly: it is recognized that the time of responsibility begins with the formation in the human mind of the representations of objects and actions that constitute ‘intentions’ or ‘ideas’ (*yì* 意). When these are ‘sincere’, and a person is thus not deceiving himself or herself, he or she reaches the height of uprightness.

This attitude is equally present among the Neo-Confucians. Even Cheng Yi 程頤 (1033–1107), who identified ‘destiny’ with ‘principle’, and hence seemed to accentuate the deterministic aspects of the process of choice, implicitly recognized human liberty and responsibility. He accepts that a wicked person is endowed from the time of his or her birth with a negative energy, and thereby is responding to a principle, namely that of wickedness, but it is also true that he or she is able to conquer this energy and to restore ‘nature’, which followed Principle. This shows that ‘principles’ are, in Cheng's eyes, both descriptive and prescriptive at the same time. They express the possibility of a certain event or action, or the effective precondition for these latter, which is the *ethical* value to which one has to conform.<sup>137</sup> This ambiguity in ‘principle’ probably contributed to obscuring the theoretical question of moral liberty. It was clear to the Neo-Confucian thinkers, however, that a person can follow various ‘ways’, even wrong ones, but the only one of these is the ‘Way’. For Zhu Xi, will or determination is the mental resolve to follow what is good. Nor is the energy of this will (*zhiqi* 志氣) undermined by changes affecting the physical energy (*xueqi* 血氣).<sup>138</sup> He explicitly refers to the existence of various alternatives and possibilities between which the mind has to select, but he has no doubts about that which will be chosen since, in his view, the human being is spontaneously orientated towards moral action. He uses as a model for the determination to do what is good (at least in the case of the sage) the naturalness with which one seeks out a warm spot in the winter and a cool one in the summer.<sup>139</sup>

In the world there are a thousand bifurcations and ten thousand roads. The sage is not inclined toward any other road, but only this one road. The will lies in the deep recesses of the mind, and therefore the doctors say that the will belongs to the kidneys. . . . If one can set one's will on learning, then one naturally cannot stop. If one “learns and constantly practices what one learns” [*Analects* 1.1], to the point of achieving pleasure from it, then each step follows in turn. It is like a person who in cold months is spontaneously drawn toward a place where there is fire and in hot months is spontaneously drawn toward a place where there is breeze. In serving his sovereign he is motivated by reverence; in serving

his parents he is motivated by filiality. Although in the course of it there are difficulties, he does not shrink from difficulty but carries out these actions with thoroughness.<sup>140</sup>

It may perhaps be possible to interpret this attitude through the idea of the *dao* 道, which may be likened to a field of force. The Chinese were convinced that objects were naturally drawn towards it, without any direction or external pressure.<sup>141</sup> As Fingarette has pointed out, in Confucian thought superior man understands *his* determination and will (*zhi*) as an expression of the impersonal will of Dao:

If one seeks to understand deeply the content of an egoistic will, one must necessarily understand that particular person—the motives, anxieties, hopes, and other personal data that go to make intelligible the conduct of that person. But the more deeply one explores the *junzi's* will, the more the personal dimensions are revealed as purely formal; the individual is the unique space-time bodily locus of that will; it is *that which* controls, but it is nonsignificant regarding why, specifically, or in what specific direction, the control shall be exercised. To understand the content of the *junzi's* will is to understand the *dao*, not the *junzi* as a particular person. The ego is present in the egoist's will. The *dao* is present in the *junzi's* will.<sup>142</sup>

Wang Yangming referred to the 'principle of the Way' (*daoli* 道理) when presenting some cases in which making a choice was difficult, in that they involved a comparative judgement between several values, and the consequent opting for the lesser of evils. In the three situations that he offers for discussion, our love for the beings in the universe has to be limited in view of fixed priorities. We love both plants and animals, yet tolerate the latter feeding themselves on the former. We love both animals and human beings, yet tolerate the butchering of the former so they may be served up at table, and used to celebrate sacrifices. We love both our parents and strangers, but in time of famine we prefer to appease the hunger of the former, even at the cost of letting the latter die.<sup>143</sup> Thus the moral dilemma of choosing between two values was foreseen, and the conflict (which might be a painful one) involved in giving priority to one good at the sacrifice of another, even the supreme sacrifice—that of one's life. Under these circumstances of painful responsibility the mind seemed to find the correct path 'naturally', without encountering contradictions or theoretical tensions. Even Li Zhi 李贽 (1527–1602) condemned indecision and incertitude when he was expounding one of the most dramatic dilemmas that exercised the minds of many Chinese men of letters of all epochs, namely, whether to commit oneself to the duties

/ *Ersbier zi* [The twenty-two philosophers] [Shanghai: Shanghai Guji Chubanshe, 1986], 6: 213–14). Hansen, "Freedom and moral responsibility," pp. 169, 86, is of the opinion that, "For Confucianism, moral action is completely natural and ultimately does not even involve moral rules. No excuse conditions are necessary since, obviously, the mind in intuiting what is right in the concrete situation already considers the total situation, not just an abstraction." Hansen contrasts the prescriptive character of Western ethical systems with the descriptive character of the Confucian system, which is based on the teaching of moral examples, and identification with and emulation of these models. It was thus that, the actors having internalized models rather than norms, doctrines of moral responsibility and theories about justification (relative to liberty and conscious awareness) became superfluous, and that in their place the conception of the 'rectification of names' was developed. The individual was thus held accountable not so much for a single transgression as for a lack of self-cultivation and failure to educate his dependents. This question was later to be deepened in the light of recent Chinese investigations, such as Jin Yaoji, "Shame," who typically tries to give a moral interpretation of the Chinese ideas of 'shame-responsibility' and 'face', not a purely formal and external one, and who denies the prevalence of a 'shame culture' in China.

<sup>142</sup> Fingarette, "Problem of the self," p. 135. Roger Ames singles out what Fingarette calls the "lack of an inner psychical life" in the different concept of self (Ames, "Reflections on the Confucian self," p. 105).

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Wang Shouren, *Yangming quanshu* [Complete writings of Wang Yangming] (Shanghai: Sibu Beiyao, 1935), 3: 14. Cf. Chan Wing-tsit's translation, *Instructions for practical living and other Neo-Confucian writings by Wang Yang-ming* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963), pp. 222–3, and, on the question of the choice in Wang Yangming, A. S. Cua, *The unity of knowledge and action. A study in Wang Yang-ming's moral psychology* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1982), pp. 37–40.

/and Daoist, transcend the wearisome process of conscious choice and internal struggle unavoidable for the ordinary person, and in this wise necessity and freedom, determinism and responsibility are merged into a single point in time. The movements of the sage (or so it is

/stated in the *Liezi* [Master Lie]) are like that of a machine, a machine, adds the commentator, without intentions or mind (*wuxin* 無心). (See the anecdote about Guan Zhong, and the discussion between Yang Bu and Yang Zhu in *Liezi* (c. third century AD), reprinted in

<sup>144</sup> Cf. Li Zhi, *Fenshu* [Book to be burnt] (1590; reprint ed., Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975), 2: 46; idem, *Xufenshu* [Supplement to the Book to be burnt], 2: 74–5; *Cangshu* [Book to be hidden] (1599; reprint ed., Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1959), 9: 146; 68: 1140–42.

<sup>145</sup> The conflict between freedom and necessity was resolved for the Daoists in the transcendence of both by the sage. They affirmed the determined nature of fate (and here one thinks of the self-justification of the criminal who attributes the penal amputation of his leg to Heaven), but counterbalanced this with the liberty of the 'true man' who knew how to identify himself with the irreluctable transformations of the universe.

<sup>146</sup> For some examples from the *Sanguo yanyi* [Romance of the three kingdoms] see Plaks, *Four masterworks*, pp.392, 422, 439–40. See also *Zhongguo chengyu dacidian* [Great dictionary of Chinese idioms] (Shanghai: Shanghai Cishu, 1987), p.1635, for other sources.

<sup>147</sup> Zhu Xi, annotated Zhang Boxing, *Jinsilu jijie* [Collected explanations of the reflections on things at hand] (1180, 1710; reprint ed., Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1981), 4: 139, as translated by Chan Wing-tsit, *Reflections on things at hand. The Neo-Confucian anthology, compiled by Chu Hsi and Li Tsu-ch'ien* (New York & London: Columbia University Press, 1967), p.132. The difference in tone should be noted between this and the following passage taken from a classic of Western moral thought, Saint Paul's epistle to the Romans:

14. For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.

15. For that which I do I know not: for not what I would, that do I practise; but what I hate, that I do.

16. But if what I would not, that I do, I consent unto the law that it is good.

17. So now it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me.

18. For I know that in me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing: for to will is present with me, but to do that which is good is not.

19. For the good which I would I do not: but the evil which I would not, that I practise.

20. But if what I would not, that I do, it is no more I that do it, but sin which dwelleth in me.

of civil office, with the honours and risks of a bureaucratic career, or to opt for the lowly but free life of 'this-worldly eremitism'? Determination was stronger than uncertainty, and Li Zhi gave a decisive expression to his sense of civic duty notwithstanding his choice of eremitism.<sup>144</sup> This problem seems not to have existed for the Daoists, because the entire question had been inverted: self-discipline should have developed the capacity to act and respond 'spontaneously' in the unique manner socially agreed upon, rather than to conceive of alternatives between which one made aware and well-pondered choices. The value of free choice was thus denied, and the decisions commonly held to be the proper ones were understood as an obligatory conformation to the external situation.<sup>145</sup>

Hesitation (*youyu weijue* 猶豫未決) was thus regarded with disfavour, as a weakness, or a paralysis of the will.<sup>146</sup> A negative judgement with respect to this question may be found in a passage from Cheng Hao 程顥 (1032–85) that is quoted in Zhu Xi's *Jinsilu* (Thoughts on things near at hand):

There are men who always seem to have two people in their minds; when one wants to do good, there seems to be evil to obstruct him, and when he wants to do evil, there seems to be a sense of shame. There are not really two people. What happens in the mind is sure evidence of its own conflicts. One must hold the will firm so the vital force cannot disturb one. One can then readily see the evidence. Essentially, sages and worthies never suffer from such mental defects as these conflicts.

[Comment:] One has only one mind. If there were one mind to subdue and restrict and another mind to be subdued and restricted, there would be two minds. In that case, there would seem to be two people. When one mind wanted to do good, another mind that wanted to do evil would prevent it, and when one mind wanted to do evil, another mind with a sense of shame would stop it.<sup>147</sup>

The lack of interest in this moment in the moral life is even more evident when it is contrasted with the anguish that flows out of the dramatic pages

/21. I find then the law, that to me who would do good, evil is present.

22. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man.

23. But I see a different law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity under the law of sin which is in my members.

24. O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me out of the body to this death?

<sup>148</sup> See also the allegorical poems on the struggle between the virtues and the vices of human beings, whose prototype may be traced back to the *Psychomachia* of Prudentius. These works were read with the most intense interest during the middle ages. It cannot be denied that works of this sort also existed in China, beginning with the *Xiyouji* itself, with

/its metaphorical, cartoon-strip travel adventures; but the spirit that inspired it was different. (See Plaks, *Four masterworks*, pp.234–76, 504.) In Christian Europe, choice, even for less tormented persons, could become so arduous that it might be entrusted to accidental events through a sort of faith in fate, understood as Providence. The biography of Ignatius Loyola relates that the saint, reflecting on a conversation that he had held slightly earlier with a Muslim about the virginity of the Madonna after the birth of Christ, was suddenly possessed with the desire to punish the infidel. He then found himself racked by doubt as to whether he should seek him out to kill him or pay no attention to him. Finally, "weary of examining what he should best do, and finding no certain way of reaching a decision, he resolved that he

of Saint Augustine, Dostoevski, and Kierkegaard in the West.<sup>148</sup> Once again we have to go back to the differences in the underlying ideology, and especially ontology, in Europe and China. Examples are the concept of divinity, and the relationships between spirit and matter, reason and desires, and the individual and the infinite,<sup>149</sup> factors that have without doubt contributed to removing any dramatic quality from such problems as the contrast between necessity and freedom, or between nature and morality, in Chinese culture.

If we look at the Chinese genres of biographies and autobiographies, we find that, with only rare exceptions, they draw an 'external' profile of their subject in which the events in which he was involved are presented, along with the family environment, the kin-group, the neighbourhood, the course taken by his studies and examinations, his career and the public affairs in which he was involved, and so on. In this respect there are not many differences between autobiographies and the biographies in the dynastic histories or the local gazetteers.<sup>150</sup> On the other hand, little space is devoted to an individual's intimate life or the internal domain. It is difficult to find hints about internal conflicts, or the tragic dimension of his awareness of the distance between his own will and reality, the only exceptions being a few spiritual diaries from the late Ming period.<sup>151</sup>

Perhaps the elaboration of the argument that dilates most fully upon it is that to be drawn out from the system of Wang Fuzhi, even though he never asked himself the question directly. He developed his conception of the emotions within the context of his vision of reality, which focussed on the unceasing transformations of the universe. Within this context he identifies the moment of moral choice not as an isolated decision of a solitary conscience, but as the meeting-point of stimuli coming from different directions: the contact between human energy and external phenomena, the way in which events and external objects appear to the senses and to the conscience of the individual, and the person's reaction to these selfsame things. Any human impulse is good to the extent that it is 'natural', like everything with which we are endowed at the time when we are born. Evil can only come to pass in contact with external events. Although this is not a new position in Chinese thought, Wang Fuzhi's re-elaboration of it is original. He in fact places the emphasis on the initial moment (*ji* 幾) of the interaction—which is one of the fundamental aspects of the eternal encounter and combination between the two opposed poles of the *yin* and the *yang*—in order to focus on the transition from the phase of latent 'potentiality' to that of 'actualization'. This *initial moment* is also the point of departure for a decision, an act, or a thought; hence it sets the direction of an entire series of behaviours that may become habits and so have a deep effect on the very character and personality of the subject. The sages are thus in a position to foresee the manner in which matters will develop, by forming a judgement about this 'moment',<sup>152</sup> and their will conforms with the Dao,<sup>153</sup> that is to say with the course of events, which does not necessarily corres-

/would let his mule go with a slack bridle to the point where the roads divided, and if the beast took the road to the village he would go in search of the Moor and stab him, but if it did not go towards the village but took the main road, he would do nothing more about the matter." See *Il racconto del Pellegrino. Autobiografia di Sant' Ignazio di Loyola* [Story of the pilgrim. Autobiography of St Ignatius de Loyola] (Milano: Adelphi, 1966), p.30 (quoted in Remo Bodei, *Geometria delle passioni. Paura, speranza, felicità: filosofia e uso politico* [The geometry of the passions. Fear, hope and happiness in philosophy and political practice] (Milano: Feltrinelli, 1992), pp.107–8).

<sup>149</sup> Cf. Bloom, "On the matter of mind," p.299.

<sup>150</sup> Cf. W. Bauer, "Icherleben und Autobiographie in älteren China" [Experience of the self and autobiography in pre-modern China], *Heidelberger Jahrbücher*, 1964.8, pp.12–40. Hervouet finds that the modesty expressed in speaking of one's private life is a demonstration of the inability of Chinese writers to speak about themselves (Hervouet, "L'autobiographie dans la Chine traditionnelle" [Autobiography in traditional China], in Yves Hervouet, *Etudes d'histoire et de littérature chinoises* [Studies of Chinese history and literature] (Paris: Bibliothèque de l'Institut des Hautes Etudes Chinoises, 1976), pp.107–41, esp. 135). Cf. also D. C. Twitchett, "Problems of Chinese biography," in A. F. Wright and D. C. Twitchett, eds., *Confucian Personalities* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1962), pp.35–7.

<sup>151</sup> Gan Panlong (1562–1626), for instance, talks of the inner war between principle and desire. Cf. Wu Pei-yi, *Confucian's progress*, p.132.

<sup>152</sup> Luo Guang, *Zhongguo zhexue sixiang shi. Yuan, Ming, Qing* [A history of Chinese philosophical thought. Yuan. Ming. Qing]. 2 vols (Taipei: Xuesheng Shuju, 1981), 2: 192.

<sup>153</sup> See *Du sisbu daquanshuo: Mengzi* [On reading the imperial collection of new commentaries on the four books: Mencius] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1975), 8: 537–8. Zhou Dunyi made plain the importance of this moment with the formula "the moment open to good or evil" (*ji shan e* 幾善惡), and it was later scrutinized by many moralists and authors of books on morality, such as Liu Zongzhou.

<sup>154</sup> On the unforeseeability of the evolution of events, and the possibility of their changing from good to evil and vice versa, see Xiao Hanming, *Yijing*, pp.129–33.

<sup>155</sup> Cf. *On reading the imperial collection*, 8: 569–72; see also Luo Guang, *Philosophical thought*, pp.89–92.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. *On reading the imperial collection*, 8: 570.

<sup>157</sup> Epping-von Franz, “Reflections,” pp.41–50, 73. See, for example, the following passage she quotes from Fang Xiaoru (1357–1402): “How lamentable is my own unworthiness! ... I am indeed not of the kind my father was, for only rarely do I follow the good examples of which I hear. Because I allow myself to be confused by surface ornamentation, I do not grasp what lies behind it. Because I lack the courage to keep to [what is correct], I commit endless mistakes. Because I indulge myself in nothing but carelessness and a lack of discipline, I am not at home with what is essential. How much I once hoped to become some day like those who are worthy, but when I looked within myself and saw that I was not able to, I rose at midnight and wept with bitterness into my garments. Like the swan [who is lost] in the forest, [I did not know] where I might find a place to rest.”

pond to the will and the aspirations of human beings.<sup>154</sup> If an event or a phenomenon manifests itself at an inappropriate time or place, or if a person's approach or reaction to it is disproportionate, or out of place or untimely, then behaviour will take place that is not in harmony with the pattern of development of the universe, and to this extent it will be either ineffective or harmful.<sup>155</sup> In the case, for example, of a person who allow himself or herself to be carried away by an uncontrolled desire, this means that things external are disturbing his or her disposition, and this in its turn shakes his or her will. When this happens, “his or her disposition [i.e. energy] loses its balance and his or her will does not acquire [the necessary] energy.”<sup>156</sup> More generally, it is possible to state that the nerve-point that in the West is represented by the moment of moral choice corresponds to that instant at which, for the Neo-Confucians, the mind passes from a state of quiescence to one of arousal. And the point of transition, of impulse (*ji* 機), that decides if the emotion is to be moderate, balanced, and timely, or, on the contrary, excessive, unbalanced, and untimely, leads respectively to socially acceptable behaviour or to the folly induced by the passions, and to alienation from oneself and the ego-centred separation of the individual from the social group of which he or she forms part.

There is no doubt that Neo-Confucianism contributed to stimulating greater attention being paid to internal experience, to the perfectibility of human beings, and the possibility for everyone of becoming a sage. In this manner the area of responsibility was extended. We may say with certainty that the Neo-Confucians opened a new dimension of self-awareness, and thus it was that personal diaries began to deal with internal states of mind and experiences in addition to more usual matters.<sup>157</sup>

#### 4. *The Pattern of Choice*

<sup>158</sup> *Analects*, 22/12/1.

<sup>159</sup> Analogous expressions may be encountered in Greek writers from Plato to Antiphon who fix on the idea of resisting (*antetechein*), conquering (*nikan*), or dominating (*kratein*) pleasures (*bedonai*) and desires (*epithumiai*). See Foucault, *L'usage des plaisirs*, pp.71–82.

Thus one cannot say that the moment of introspection was lacking, nor the effort to overcome the present reality. Both among scholars and the common people, penitence was one of the more important practices, and effected either collectively in a meditation-hall, or individually by reading books of morality for example. An awareness of the existence of an internal conflict was also the outcome of the debate that continued over many centuries on the interpretation of the expression *keji* 克己 (‘self-control’ or ‘mastery of one's selfish desires’) found in the Confucian *Analects*.<sup>158</sup> Zhu Xi explained the expression in his commentary as a victory over one's desires, and although this interpretation was subjected to many subsequent critiques, it at all events expressed the idea of ‘conquering’, ‘controlling’, and ‘dominating’.<sup>159</sup>

Introspection of this sort does not necessarily imply an emphasis on internal conflicts, however, nor on remorse for the past, or the rending of the heart. A series of factors, on the contrary, made for the lessening of the



dramatic aspects. As has already been suggested, individual choices were in general understood as a natural process, the logical consequence of a situation, rather than the result of an internal travail or of a painful self-restriction. They were more in the nature of an acceptance than the meeting of a challenge.

A topic that one finds with many variations in Ming tales is that of a married woman who is obliged to remarry a domineering person, such as an evil official or a bandit, after he has either killed her first husband or had him killed. In the end the woman revenges the injustice by killing the blackguard. Such a plot might, one would have thought, have offered the opportunity to expatiate on the woman's psychological condition, her desperation, and her emotional reactions, but we find little of this sort. We can of course imagine the hidden drama, her long-concealed hatred, and her continuing anguish. But none of this appears. What leaps to the eye is her cold and silent determination to restore the balance that previously existed, either of a social or an internal, individual nature. Another example that is in some ways analogous to the foregoing can be identified in the protagonist of the opera *Zhaoshi guer* 趙氏孤兒 (The orphan of Zhao). In spite of his growing apprehension and anguish, Cheng Bo's tragic decision to kill his adoptive father in order to revenge his parents is not preceded by any hesitation or doubt of the kind that affected Hamlet.<sup>160</sup> Likewise, although one cannot deny the existence of an intense conflict in Cheng Ying between his love for his son and his sense of duty, the two contending forces do not appear as equal, and so there is no difficulty in deciding which of them is destined to triumph.<sup>161</sup>

If we look at a play like the *Pipaji* 琵琶記 (The story of the lute), which dates from the time of the transition from the Ming to the Qing, it is evident that, as in other pieces for the theatre, the central theme is the conflict between two virtues. The characters face the dilemma of a choice between loyalty (*zhong* 忠) and filial duty (*xiao* 孝), making decisions that are sometimes courageous and sometimes mistaken, and give rise to suffering for the person responsible and for others. Such decisions are, however, made in the name of moral principles, on the basis of the priority assigned now to one virtue and now to another, since the various moral values were arranged in a precise hierarchy and it was all but predetermined which one would prevail.<sup>162</sup> Is it therefore the case that the sense of drama is attached more to questions of morality than to conflicts within the individual? Two other major problems, of a more general character, are interlinked with this question: one concerns the 'justification' of particular interests by having recourse to moral principles, and the other that of choice between competing moral norms. Although it is not possible to find any explicit solution to these two problems, there are nonetheless some starting-points that are of interest. One catches only an indirect glimpse of the interests that appear behind these choices, while the feelings that manifest themselves in the foreground seem to derive wholly and solely from the emotional reactions that develop from interpersonal relations.<sup>163</sup>

<sup>160</sup> Wilt L. Idema, "Orphan of Zhao. Self-sacrifice, tragic choice and revenge and the Confucianization of Mongol drama at the Ming court," *Cina* 21 (1988): 175–6.

<sup>161</sup> Ch'ien Chung-shu, "Tragedy," in "Old Chinese drama," *T'ien Hsia Monthly* 1.1 (1935): 42–3.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, p.44.

<sup>163</sup> Bureaucrats often faced the dilemma of choosing between the application of the impersonal norms that governed official duties, and the likewise legitimate satisfaction of the feelings that bound them to their families, kinsmen, and friends. See Jin Yaoji, "Shame," pp.98–101; C. K. Yang, "Some characteristics of Chinese bureaucratic behaviour," in *Confucianism in Action*, ed. Nivison and Wright (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959), pp.134–64. On the conflict between loyalty and filial duty see Hsieh Yu-wei, "Filial piety," p.185. The ban on taking up an official position in one's province of origin was designed to avoid at least some of these conflicts. A similar phenomenon can be observed among the travelling merchants, and these engaged in inter-provincial trade, who left their places of origin far behind, distancing themselves from the bonds of their home environment, and so from the feelings and obligations that might otherwise have been stumbling-blocks in the way of their business. See Jin Yaoji, "Shame," pp.97–101; Donald de Gloppe, "Doing business in Lukang," in *Economic organization in Chinese society*, ed. W. E. Willmott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1972), pp.297–326; and M. Cartier, "Le marchand comme voyageur. Remarques sur quelques histoires du Chin-ku ch'i kuan" [The merchant as traveller. Remarks on some histories of the Chin-ku ch'i kuan], *Études d'histoire et de littérature Chinoises offertes au Prof. Pruček* (Paris, 1976), pp.39–50.

<sup>164</sup> See, for example, the description of the hero Lin Taikong, who was characterized by his "calmness within as he faced adversities," cited in R. K. McMahon, "Two late Ming vernacular novels: *Chan Zhen yishi* and *Chan Zhen boushi*," *Ming Studies* 23 (1987): 24. There is a more detailed picture in the Tang-dynasty tale *Liu Yizhuan* where the hero is at first seized with panic at the sight of the dragon. But here too we find that a concern with morality dominates any psychological introspection. Curtis Adkins, "The hero in Tang ch'uan-ch'i tales" (in *Critical essays on Chinese fiction*, ed. Winston Yang and C. Adkins [Hong Kong: Chinese University Press, 1980]), p. 22, notes that the hero makes use of the Confucian idea that one may have recourse to violence as the ultimate remedy, this being the heroism of the cultured civilian approach to life (*wen wen*).

<sup>165</sup> This question does not just touch on a particular literary genre, or the principles that inspire this genre, or the effects it produces on those who enjoy it, but on the concept of 'tragedy' itself as it has been understood in the West, namely, as that complex of emotions aroused by the aesthetic contemplation of an event in which a 'positive hero' is defeated, or good worsted, by a superior and amoral power. Comparative analyses may be found in Chu Kwang-tsién, *The psychology of tragedy* (Strasbourg, 1933; reprint ed., Hong Kong, 1987); Ch'ien Chung-shu, "Tragedy," pp. 37–46; Shih Chung-wen, *The golden age of Chinese drama: Yuan Ba-chü* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1976); and J. S. M. Lau, "Duty, reputation and selfhood" "Duty, reputation and selfhood in traditional Chinese narratives," in *Expressions of self in Chinese literature*, ed. Robert Hegel and Richard Hesney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp. 367–71. Ch'ien Chung-shu, in his analysis of the *Wutong yu* (Rain on the wutong tree) by Bai Pu (1226–1306), and the *Changsheng dian* (Palace of long life) by Hong Sheng (1645–1704), agrees that there is no true internal conflict in the heroes of Chinese operas.

<sup>166</sup> The passage cited here was translated from the *Huaxi yuanjia* collection, 3: 48–9. Of the two Shanghai editions of *Tanbuanbao* (Van Gulik collection nos 1323/1 c 1301/1), one lacks this part (3: 6), while the other (18:

We also find an absence of tension and of doubts in the heroes of the novels about knights-errant. They are heroes because they are strong and fearless; their heroism does not derive from an inner strife, and of their victory over human weakness.<sup>164</sup> This is why numerous scholarly studies deny the existence of 'tragedy' in the Western sense in traditional China.<sup>165</sup>

With regard to the problem of moral choice, it is, however, possible to find some cases of psychological introspection in popular tales which throw light upon the hesitations and internal struggles that precede a decision, or the dilemma that grips a protagonist when he or she has to choose between two actions, neither of which is desirable. Both of the two examples that follow end with a wrong choice. We shall cite first "Li Yuexian Gives Up Her Lover to Save Her Devoted Husband," which tells the story of Wang Zhongxian, who is married to the young widow Li Yuexian, and his adopted younger brother, Zhang Biying. Zhang starts an adulterous liaison with his sister-in-law, and tries to murder his brother-in-law by throwing him into a river. Wang survives, however, and has Zhang arrested, but the latter succeeds in having himself set free, and in his turn has Wang arrested by making false accusations against him. He then marries Li under an assumed name. When she sees that her new husband is none other than her brother-in-law, however, she denounces him. The following passage describes how the adultery begins.

His member ... stood straight up, like an iron spear. "How does such a young fellow have a thing as gigantic as this?" she thought to herself in surprise. "Neither of my two husbands had ones as large as his!"

Once the flames of passion are stirred, they cannot be controlled. She started thinking: "The world is full of brothers-in-law having the love affairs with their sisters-in-law. If I have it off with him covertly just once, I'm sure no one will know." Then she thought again: "No. If he were to play me false and tell someone else, I'd have no face left in this world." So she took up the lamp and began to make off. But she was still drunk and this is why matters turned out as they did. She quickly put the light out and placed it on its stand. Then she climbed the steps, but came down again.

"How will he know," she thought, "sleeping so soundly? I'll get in with him, quietly, and give his great thing just a little try. What's wrong with that?"

Yuexian was a young woman, after all, and wine has a will of its own. Once lust is aroused, who cares about a sense of shame? She went over to the bed, and climbed up noiselessly. She straddled herself over Biying's body.<sup>166</sup> She pulled back her skirt, planted both hands on the mat, and inserted his member into her. Since she was already wet, she slid all the way down, and in no time at all it was fully in. Sure enough, his member was not in the least like her husband's. What's more, it was as hot as fire.

She paused, and thought to herself: "This sensation. It's terrific. Not at all the same!" So she rode up and down thirty times or more, until she felt the rush of pleasure. Then she remembered what she'd told herself previously, and had no choice but to stop. She rolled herself over to the edge of the bed.

Biying saw that she was getting down. "I can't let her go," he thought in

alarm. "This is love-making sent by Heaven." So he turned over nimbly and held her so she could not move. Then he parted her thighs and directed himself into her.

In this story the woman is led into temptation by seeing the man's naked body, and by her own state of drunkenness. In other novels it can be loneliness or widowhood that drive a woman, in particular circumstances, to break the norms of morality.<sup>167</sup> In the case just quoted the protagonist faces the dilemma of whether to seduce her brother-in-law and become an adulteress, with all the consequences that can flow therefrom, or to restrain herself and let slip the occasion offering itself to her. At several points she is about to draw back, in accordance with what would be 'normal' behaviour for a married woman, but in the end her desire gets the better of her fear of being discovered and of having her reputation destroyed. It has to be added that in this case her sense of shame is not supported by any internal moral tension, nor by a sense of guilt originating from affection for her husband. It is purely and simply a matter of calculating the intensity of the immediate pleasure as against the risks entailed by such behaviour.

The second piece, "The Metamorphosis of the poet," is a condemnation of arrogance and selfishness. The poet Li Wei considers himself the equal of his great contemporaries Li Bo and Du Fu, and because he has several times failed the state examinations, he puts the blame on injustice and human ignorance. In the end he shuts himself up in his house and there turns into a tiger. In his new condition, Li Wei at first appears reluctant to kill other living creatures and to feed himself on human flesh, but one day he is no longer able to control himself and gradually adapts himself to the way of life of a wild beast:

Although I was quite hungry, I thought that if I refrained from eating living creatures I might one day be changed back into human form. So I put up with my hunger and refrained from preying on living things. *But after a while my hunger got the better of me and so I caught deer, boars, and hares to satisfy it.* But it wasn't long before the animals grew afraid of me and fled, leaving me with nothing to hunt. I was ravenous. One day a woman came past the foot of the mountain. Driven by my hunger *I was just about to eat her when I reflected that she was a human being, after all, and that, since I was already afflicted with my present misfortune, it might be unwise of me to aggravate my crime. Then, having let her go by, I reflected how hungry I was, and how I had no way of getting food;* it occurred to me that she was, after all, a gift from Heaven, and that if I let this opportunity slip away, goodness only knew when I might next find something to fill my belly with. I was in a quandary, torn this way and that, *but in the end I couldn't restrain myself and so I caught and ate her.* The taste was pleasant and sweet, quite unlike that of the animals I had been hunting. Her jewelry is still down there below the rocks; it will prove that what I am telling you is the truth. Ever since then I've had a craving for human flesh. No matter what their age or status, or whether they are carrying burdens or not, I devour all the passers-by I can catch, right down to the last morsel. *I now accept it all as quite normal and no longer suffer any fear of punishment.*<sup>168</sup>

/2b) is very synthetic. Cf. the English translation by McMahon, *Causality and containment*, that has some variants based on the edition kept in the Library of the University of Beijing (3: 7b).

<sup>167</sup> The above episode can be compared with the story "The case of the dead infant," in Feng Menglong's *Jingshi tongyan* [Common words to warn the world] (1624; reprint ed., Hong Kong: Zhonghua Shuju Xianggang Fenju, 1965), 35: 534-45, esp. 538.

<sup>168</sup> *Zuixing shi* [The sober stone] (c.1650; reprinted., Shanghai: Shanghai Gudian Wenxue, 1956), 6: 86. The translation is from Patrick Hanan, "The fiction of moral duty: the vernacular story in the 1640s," in *Expressions of self in Chinese literature*, ed. Robert Hegel and Richard Hessney (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), pp.210-11. Cf. also Pu Songling, *Liaozhai zhiyi* [Strange stories from the studio of Liao] (1679/1766) (Hong Kong: Shangwu Yinshuguan Xianggang Fenguan, 1988), 2: 87 (Ren Xiu), in which the author describes a similar inner struggle (against the temptation of playing dice) in the soul of a young man who is addicted to gambling.

<sup>169</sup> Thus we read in a story by Ling Menchu on how the goddess of the sea fell in love with a merchant: "It is truly strange, and hard to understand, that even the spirits bright are endowed with emotions. There is no way of knowing how it is that they, with their pure substance, can fall in love with a common man!" In *Erke pai'an jingqi* [Slapping the table in amazement—second collection] (1632; reprint ed., Hong Kong: Youlian, 1985), 37: 761.

<sup>170</sup> Deities are sometimes accused of having had illicit relations with girls and women, as in the following story quoted in Eberhard, *Guilt and sin*, p.114: "When a woman sacrificed in a temple, the judge-deity smiled and visited her at night, expressing a wish for sexual relations. Refusing, she ran away, finally flew and landed on top of a pagoda. When she went down, she came into a bedroom where she met the judge. Now she could not refuse him and lived with him. During the day, he went out and did his job of meting out punishment to sinners; at night he returned with food for her. In a conversation with him, she learned that a person can improve his fate by reciting the Guanyin sūtra. This she did, with the result that the judge-deity became unable to have sexual relations with her. She was miraculously returned to her own house and bed. It was found out that only her soul, not her body, had had sexual relations with the deity."

<sup>171</sup> A. C. Graham, *Disputers of the Tao. Philosophical argument in ancient China* (La Salle: Open Court, 1989), p.29.

<sup>172</sup> Cf. P. Santangelo, *Emozioni e desideri in Cina. La riflessione neoconfuciana dalla metà del XIV alla metà del XIX secolo* [Emotions and desires in China. Neo-Confucian reflection from the half of the fourteenth century to the mid-nineteenth century] (Bari: Laterza, 1992).

<sup>173</sup> Cf. Idema, "Orphan of Zhao." p.175.

The relationship of a person to his or her destiny is here subsumed into the wider context of retribution. The reference to the difficulty of making a choice is, however, explicit. It is appropriate to note that, in the popular imagination, all beings are responsible for their actions, even if it is recognized that the behaviour of animals is ruled by the instincts of their nature. Thus a tiger could not be blamed for killing a human being. The story quoted here shows at the same time, that everything seems to be predestined by Heaven.

In the popular mind the gods shared their fate with human beings, and were responsible for their actions. Being endowed with the same feelings and the same passions as humans,<sup>169</sup> they too could commit crimes.<sup>170</sup>

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, we can maintain the definition of a 'society inclined to be based on shame' for the Ming and Qing periods, provided that we understand this phrase in its most richly suggestive sense, namely the internalization of the moral norms conceived of as the rules of behaviour for the members of one's own social group. In contrast with Western conceptions, the sense of responsibility was directed more towards others than towards oneself, both in the sense that the self itself was fundamentally understood in terms of its interpersonal relationships, and in the sense that one took into account the reaction of other people. It is in a perspective such as this that we can find, as it were on the far side of the different positions that have been worked out on this question, a general agreement on underlining the importance of morality for the individual, and on the acceptance of the concept of moral responsibility. In Confucius' doctrine, moral duty is presented in a form that is almost free of problems, and the tragic aspects of choice are not exalted as they have been in the West, to the degree that we might adopt Graham's lively metaphor according to which the actor, at the moment of choice, does not so much resemble the man with the balance in his hand as the arms of the balance itself.<sup>171</sup> This does not mean that the silent drama of 'solitary' decision-making was not present. Differences in the perception of the manifestation of the moment of decision depended on diverse conceptions of the world, of human beings, of religion, and, above all, of the soul. Clearly, the ethical contents were differentiated according to the different social strata and the various schools of thought. In particular, towards the end of the Ming dynasty, these ethics often slackened off in practice, a process contributed to by a diffuse utilitarian and pragmatic attitude. A number of thinkers recognized this tendency, and sought to adapt theory to practice accordingly.<sup>172</sup>

This brief examination of the representation of the conscience and of moral responsibility leads us to two series of considerations. The first of these concerns the scale, or scales, of values: faced with two competing and mutually exclusive obligations, and having to choose between two opposed

values, to which of them should precedence be given? Some scholars think that the tragic dilemma of the choice between two equivalent alternatives did not exist in traditional Chinese morality, because there was a specific duty for every situation,<sup>173</sup> or a hierarchy running from a superior duty (*dayi* 大義) to an inferior duty (*xiaoyi* 小義), and from a general obligation (*gongyi* 公義) to a personal obligation (*siyi* 私義).<sup>174</sup> At all events, there were extreme cases where mutually incompatible duties were in conflict, and in which any and every choice to be made was morally wrong, as in the example reported by Elvin of a conflict between filial duty and the continuation of the line of descent.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, although conflicts between Confucian and Buddhist moralities are in theory possible, in practice there was a tendency to combine their values, at least in the period under examination, to make compromises between them, and to give the upper hand now to one system and now to the other, in accordance with the preferences of the individual. Some examples are to be found in the story-literature, but the conflict, rather than being brought to the forefront, is overcome thanks to the syncretistic ideology of the 'Three Doctrines' (*sanjiao* 三教). The 'books on morality' themselves combined Confucian duties with Buddhist and Daoist prescriptions. This does not mean that there was not a certain tension, or at least a latent one, as is shown by the personality of Li Zhi, who lived out these contradictions in profound fashion.

The second reflection, which derives from the preceding one, concerns the question of the degree of responsibility. It is possible to point to the existence of a classification, or several classifications, of offences by order of gravity, as was also the case for virtues and their merits. (As regards the possible competition of two or more opposing duties, perhaps it is true that there always exists a pre-eminent duty or principle, even when it appears that two possible choices present themselves as alternatives in the individual's mind. Thus they lack the sense of moral 'absurdity' and of the tragic nature of the decision. What is more, in the case of the sage, moral reflection is to all intents and purposes replaced by the natural and spontaneous response that comes forth from his mind. For the ordinary person, on the other hand, reflection of this sort was of fundamental moment for the decisions to be

**Figure 5**

*"The heroic daughter-in-law cuts out part of her liver to save her mother-in-law." On a moonlit night, watched by a benevolent deity from the clouds above, while her mother-in-law sits in bed indoors, propped up on pillows, the young woman bows before an altar in the garden, and takes a knife to her own liver. Livers cut out in this fashion were often made into a medicinal soup for sick parents, and death was not infrequent among the filial donors.*

(*Nüzi ershi xiao tushuo* [Illustrated accounts of the twenty-four paragons of female filiality], compiled by Wu Jiayou [active 1850–1910])

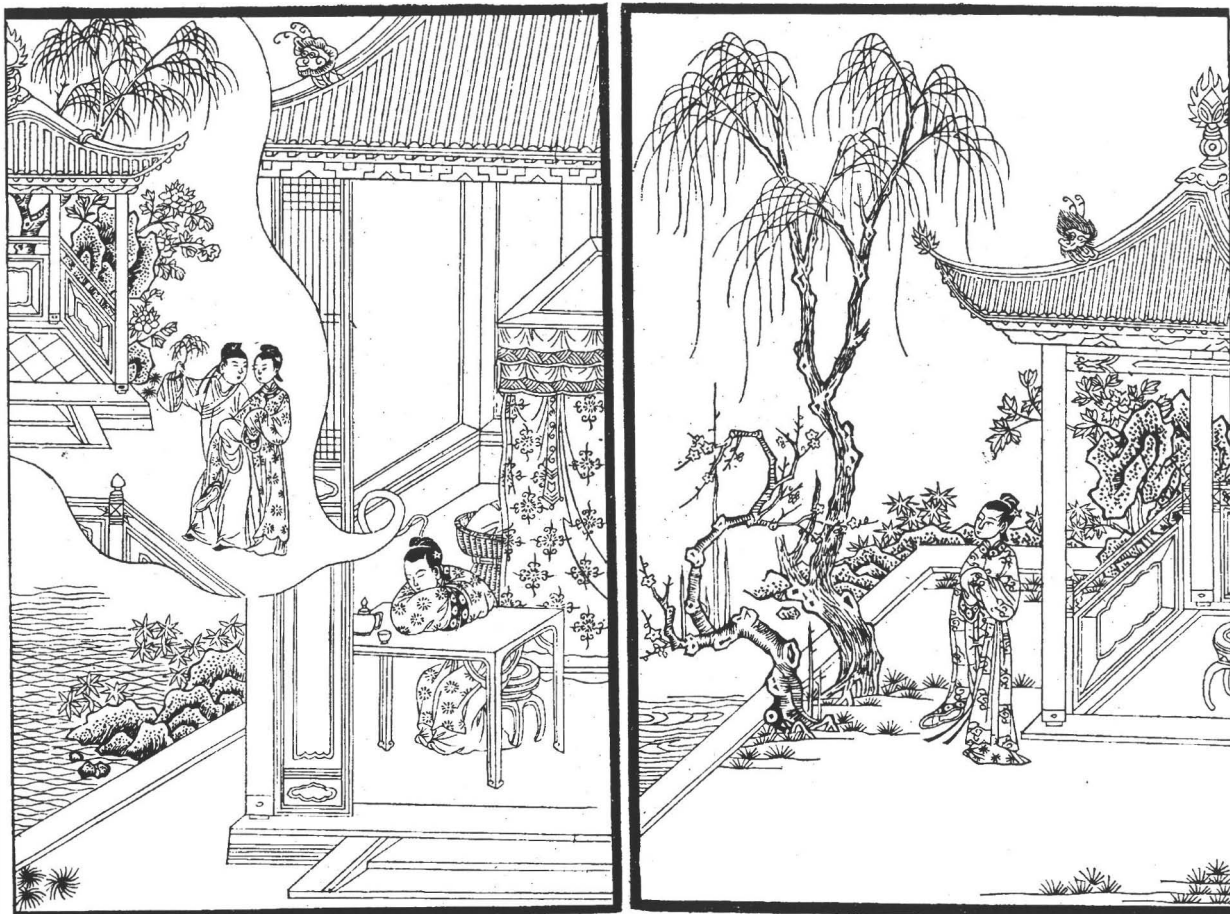


<sup>174</sup> See, for example, the *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, 81: 644–5 and 82: 651, where the choice lies between keeping an oath and avenging a brother, on the one hand, and the interests of the state, on the other. Cf. also B. Rifün, *Istoricheskaya epopeia i fol'klornaya traditsiya v Kitae* [The historical epic and the folklore tradition in China] (Moscow, 1970), pp.190–3; Plaks, *Four masterworks*, pp.489–90, records some of Mao Zonggang's comments.

<sup>175</sup> Cf. Elvin, "Female virtue," p.141–2.

**Figure 6**

Two scenes from *Mudan ting* [The peony pavilion]. In the first scene (left), "The Interrupted Dream," Du Liniang, the main female character of the drama, sits before a teapot and tea-bowl sleeping. This is a classical representation of a love-dream: she imagines herself talking to her beloved Liu Mengmei, who holds a spray of willow-twigs in his hand. There is a peony tree beside the pavilion on the left and a willow tree in the background. In the second scene (right), "In Search of the Dream," Liniang stands under the eaves beside a small plum-tree on which the first blossoms are beginning to burgeon. Note the description of spring as a metaphor for the awakening of love. (The gable decoration is probably only a fabulous beast conventionally thought to provide protection against fire.) (Tang Xianzu, *Yümingtang Huanhunji* [Nuanbongsbi edition, c.1920], pp.28, 36)



<sup>176</sup> Cf. Cua, *Unity of knowledge and action*, pp.63-4.

taken; and from it there proceeded a moral judgement that presupposed an evaluation of the conditions and the situation, and that was not limited to being just a deductive operation or an inductive generalization.<sup>176</sup> The problematical nature of choice could appear, albeit in a quieter mode than in Western tragedy, examples being the plight of Cheng Bo in *The orphan of Zhao*, and that of Cai Yong in *The story of the lute*, and others in other operas. The anthology *Shi diantou* (The nodding stones) offers some sym-

holic examples in which certain moral questions are raised: when filial piety clashes with other duties towards the family, which obligation should prevail? Among the duties linked with status, career, and studies, on the one hand, and filial piety on the other, which is the more important? For example, is a father who has abandoned his family worthy of being sought out and found again?<sup>177</sup> Can an action that is as a rule considered as deserving of reproof be redeemed or justified by the end in view, or by a virtuous feeling such as filial piety? In the story entitled "The bell in a quiet night," two types of filial duty come into conflict: a young man kills his father's concubine in order to avoid the suicide of his mother, and in this case the choice of the lesser evil is approved of.<sup>178</sup> Insofar as it is possible to deduce a general answer, it can be said that filial duty, or a choice given this label, is in reality privileged.

A person's evil behaviour is also often justified, or at least partially justified, by the evils of society: moral strictness may turn love into an 'illicit' passion;<sup>179</sup> an excessive burden of taxes and labour-services can provoke the break-up of families,<sup>180</sup> and the same can result from the cruelty of corrupt and dishonest officials.<sup>181</sup> At all events we may acknowledge a general recognition of the part played by circumstances and intentions as factors that could alter or aggravate the moral responsibility of the individual.

The criticism of moral rigorism that emerges with a certain frequency in the literature of the late Ming was without doubt the expression of a reaction against the prevalent Neo-Confucian puritanism. At the same time we need to note the repeated occurrence of episodes of extreme moralism, on the border-line between heroism and folly, as in the case of the increase of suicides among women driven by the determination to defend their sexual purity or fulfil their filial duties.<sup>182</sup>

Popular literature provides examples of the attitude then prevailing with regard to differences in the level of responsibility, and which considered a variety of circumstances and occasions as facilitating misdemeanours or sins. There are two *topoi* relating to illicit liaisons that appear most commonly in stories, namely festivals, especially that held at the New Year, and widowhood. The first of these typifies a 'relaxation' of the social norms of everyday life that can be compared to the carnival in the West, the loosening of the barriers that bar communications between the inner quarters of the house and the outside world. The second expresses a constant condition of instability or weakness. Another important element is the changing of the seasons, and in particular the coming of the spring:

Spring flowers and the autumn moon conduce to love and vengery.<sup>183</sup>

Nor can we forget the influence of literary texts and illustrations, both for the meaning with which they are laden, and as means of seduction. Du Liniang, the leading character in "The peony pavilion," is awakened to love by reading the first poem in the *Book of Songs*, seeing its amorous message coming through the mystification of puritanical interpretations of her tutor,<sup>184</sup>

<sup>177</sup> Cf. *Shi diantou* [The nodding stones] (1635/40), reprinted in *Shi diantou, xibu jiaohua* [Nodding stones, memorable stories of the Western Lake] (Taipei: Shijie Shuju, 1979), 3: 36–57.

<sup>178</sup> Cf. Patrick Hanan, "The fiction of moral duty," p.203.

<sup>179</sup> Cf. *Nodding stones*, 4: 58–74.

<sup>180</sup> *Ibid.*, 3: 36–57.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid.*, 8: 115–34.

<sup>182</sup> See Tien Ju-k'ang, *Male anxiety and female chastity. A comparative study of Chinese ethical values in Ming-Ch'ing times* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988). Elvin, "Female virtue," pp.144–8, offers an interesting account of the casuistry applied to the grave moral dilemmas that a woman might face with respect to betrothal, marriage, widowhood, and her reputation.

<sup>183</sup> Cf. Feng Menglong, *Common words*, 35: 534.

<sup>184</sup> *Mudanting* [The peony pavilion], seventeenth century; reprinted in *Tang Xianzu ji* [Collected works of Tang Xianzu] (Beijing: Zhonghua Shuju, 1962), 7: 1841; Cyril Birch, trans., *Tang Xianzu, the peony pavilion (mudanting)* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980), pp.24–6.



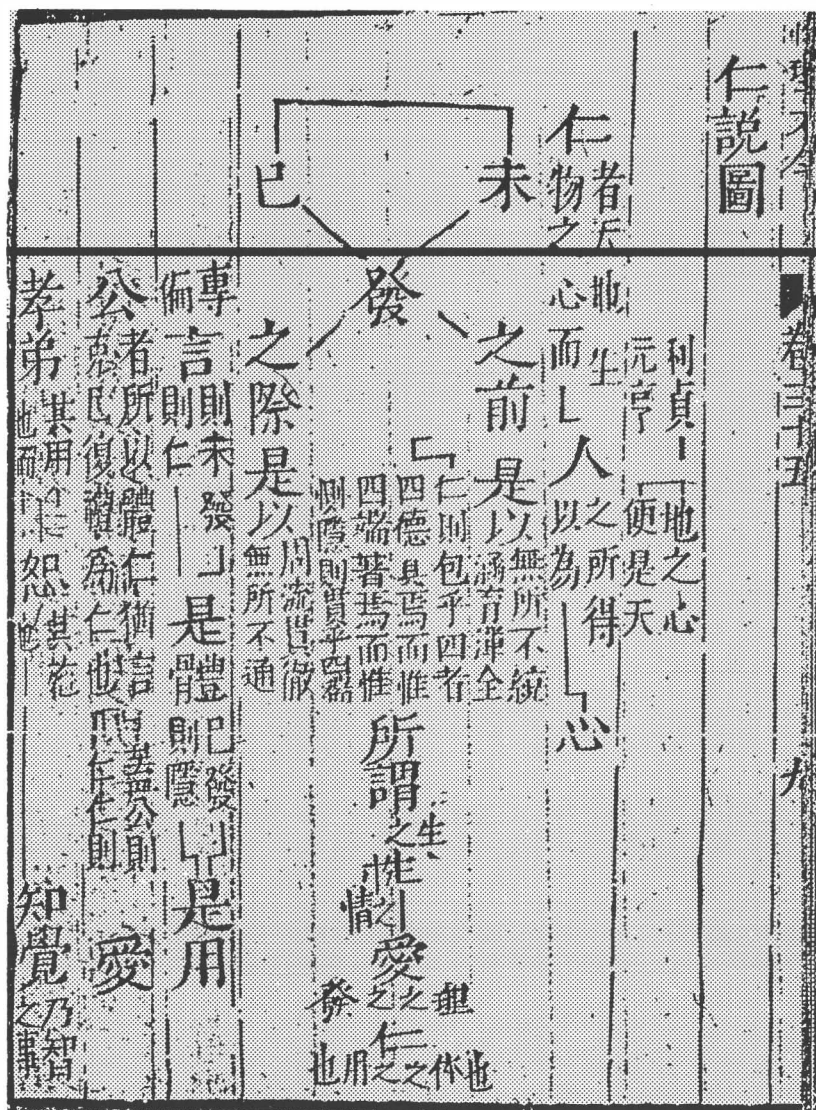
<sup>185</sup> See, for example, the first picture in G. Bertuccioli, ed., *Mandarini e cortigiane* [Mandarins and courtesans] (Rome: Editori Riuniti, 1988), which shows a young girl aroused by a desire for love at the sight of a pair of birds.

<sup>186</sup> Cf. R. K. McMahon, "Eroticism in late Ming, early Qing fiction. The beautiful realm and the sexual battlefield," *Toung Pao* 62, 1–3 (1976): 250.

while Yingying in *The Western Pavilion* is seduced by the poems of the student Zhang. We can also find temptations and weakness of will in the presence of sensory stimuli described in literature, as for example in the contemplating of scenes of love-making, even between animals,<sup>185</sup> or the smelling of a body,<sup>186</sup> or even the feeling of solitude and the passing of time. Many of these 'falls' or 'breaches', for which the Chinese term is *pozhan* 破綻 ('rent', 'inconsistency'), are made to depend on the influence of situations and external conditions, and this puts before us the moral question of the links between predisposition, personal responsibility, and causality, as well as in more general terms, the 'historiographical' problem that chance is made

**Figure 7**

The so-called 'four seeds' or 'origins' [of virtue], *siduan* 四端, first elaborated by Mencius (Mencius, 2A: 6); in the chapter on "Gaozi" (6A: 6) Mencius deals with the same sentiments and virtues, but does not mention the 'origins', were taken up by Neo-Confucians. Zhu Xi modified the relationship between virtues and seeds. While for Mencius the seeds had to be developed into the four virtues, Zhu Xi abolished any temporal sequence between the two terms and reversed their logical order. (Cf. Zhuxi yulei, 5: 86–98, 59: 1380–9, 119: 2872–80, 54: 1277–300, esp. 1285–97). They are constituted by the feelings of 'compassion', which corresponds to the virtue of humaneness, of 'shame', which corresponds to the virtue of justice, of 'modesty', which corresponds to the virtue of propriety, and of 'conscience', which corresponds to that of wisdom. They are emblematic of the double nature of the mind and the emotions: they are the developments of the respective virtues, when emotional reactions of the mind occur in a correct and moderate way, and, at the same time, belong to the category of emotions. (Cf. P. Santangelo, *Emozioni*, p. 52)





to play in tales. The presence of a conscious predisposition towards wrongdoing, a willing submission to it, and a tendency to yield in the face of lustful impulses, was commonly recognized, even if rarely mentioned.<sup>187</sup> More explicit are the descriptions of the immoral intentions of a third party who plans to use snares to encompass the downfall of a victim, employing methods that have much in common with those of traditional theories of strategy.<sup>188</sup> Nor are examples of temptation lacking in highbrow literature. An illustrative example is the eighteenth-century novel *Yesou puyen* 野叟曝言 (A rustic's idle talk) which is a non-stop testing of the hero, Wen Suchen, compared to which the temptations of Saint Antony are but child's play. Among the many attacks made on his sexual continence (not his purity) we may note here the practical joke arranged by some of his friends. After making him drunk, they put a young girl on his bed. At first Wen pours forth his feelings in intimate fashion, urged on by the girl herself, but then he regains control of himself and resists any desire to go further. Another test is that of the orgy in which he finds himself taking part: he is tempted by young girls who arouse him with a series of exhibitions, and the most sensual of them finally tries to seduce him. This time, too, the hero resists.<sup>189</sup>

How much of the merit or demerit, though, should be ascribed to the personality? According to Xun Yue 荀悅 (AD 148–209), the internal nature cannot be evaluated; only completed actions and their effects can be examined from the ethical point of view. In other words, we are only in a position to pass judgement once the internal emotions react to external stimuli. This leads us to the set of problems relative to the evaluation of the emotions, and in particular to the Neo-Confucian of the two states, one before and one after their appearance (*weifa* 未發 'not yet issued', and *yifa* 已發 'having been issued'). Although this conception mainly concerned the debate on human nature, it also touched upon the question of moral responsibility, which it solved in a fashion that was inclined to be mechanical. What is more, as has been pointed out on several occasions above, the orientation of Chinese morality had the effect that the social import of the consequences of a given way of behaving could automatically engender a responsibility therefrom for the individual himself or herself, independently of intentions and circumstances. On the other hand, irrespective of this social component and these 'objective' aspects, it has been shown here how, from ancient times on, the process of internalizing moral norms grew deeper, and how the sense of guilt was not unknown to either the intellectuals or the common people. What was called 'shame', even though it was basically perceived in terms of its encounter with a social context, gave rise to a variety of forms of repentance. Although we cannot find a detailed casuistry for the factors that made guilt and responsibility heavier or lighter, with the exception of the manuals of criminal law, the 'books of morality' enable us to understand how intentions and circumstances were considered: they not only increased or decreased the merit or demerit of a particular action, but could even change the very nature of the morality of that act itself. If we strip

<sup>187</sup> See for instance, chap.24 of *Jinpingmei* (1617; reprint ed., Taipei: Xiaoyuan, 1990). Cf. also David Rolston, ed., *How to read the Chinese novel* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), pp.92, 207, 304.

<sup>188</sup> See "Prefect Kuang solves a case of infanticide," in Feng Menglong, *Common words*, 35: 534–5.

<sup>189</sup> McMahon, *Causality and containment*, pp.39–44.

<sup>190</sup> Cf. *Chanzen yishi* [Lost tales of meditation truth] (late Ming; reprint ed., Hangzhou: Zhejiang Guji, 1987), 6: 79; *Slapping the table*, 34: 596.

away the subjective attachments of modern times from the concept of responsibility, there is no doubt that it was recognized by traditional Chinese morality, both in the sense of carrying the burden of the consequences of one's own actions, and as a necessary corollary of liberty and of human will.

One also meets with a certain degree of mechanism and determinism in many writings which emphasize the role of destiny and of causality in the form of the combinations of positive and negative energy. Examples of this may also be found in many popular tales, in which the influence of earlier incarnations makes itself felt as a conditioning factor. It is necessary, however, to regard every action as being influenced by internal and external factors, and determined by competing causes. Even though predestination was assigned a most important role in human life, religious thinkers and literary writers alike believed in the fundamental liberty and responsibility of human beings. Along his or her path through life, the individual often meets with a parting of the ways that is determined by the interaction of primary and secondary causes, as well as by outside circumstances and internal inclinations. He or she thus finds himself or herself in the position to make a decision, and in the very act of making this decision, changes these circumstances and thereby influences his or her own destiny. What is felt as an existential anguish by the Western intellectual, whether understood as 'the giddiness of liberty' or the frustrating experience of the inadequacy of the response of the world to the demands he makes of it, from St Augustine to Sartre, becomes in China participation in the process of universal creation through the 'spontaneity' and liberty of the sage. No human being can wholly ignore the past and its influences, but he or she can function in the present and, by so doing, modify the future. Except in a few extreme cases, therefore, willpower and personal determination are thought to be able to overcome all predetermined conditions. From another point of view, as the old adage quoted by Fang Ruhao 方汝浩 (seventeenth century) at the end of the Ming would have it,

Wine maketh not the man be drunk,  
But drunk the man doth make himself,  
Nor beauty cozeneth the man,  
But man he cozeneth himself.<sup>190</sup>

When we take all these cases into consideration, responsibility takes on the appearance in Chinese thought of an exceedingly wide-ranging concept. In no case is the moral responsibility for an offence placed in doubt, insofar as there exists a presumption of the existence of a will. In certain cases, furthermore, the consequences of an act are imputable to the actor even if this latter has not intended to cause them, or if, when the offence has been committed by others, it has especially serious effects on the fabric of society. In general, last of all, the conscience is considered to be a function of the mind, whose reactions enable it to distinguish between good and evil, and a clear distinction in this regard implies a clear choice.

The common element that comes out of all the different positions is the lack of any interest in the problem of the ultimate power or liberty of a human being to make moral choices, but at the same time the sources take for granted the capacity of a person to be an actor in his or her choices and decisions. A person's sense of shame or guilt, however understood, at all events is codependent with the principle of responsibility that derives from the presence in him or her of a mind and of a will.

In contrast to the frequency of the distinctions made in practice between good and bad actions, therefore, and their abundance of details concerning particularities, descriptions of internal conflicts seem to have been neglected. Dilemmas of this sort did, however, exist, as may be verified through the examples presented by Eberhard.<sup>191</sup> Finally, we must take into consideration the fact that good and evil, who have pitched their opposing camps in every one of the religious and political systems of metaphysics that have followed one another throughout the course of Western history, are concepts configured very differently in China.

In Chinese thought, moral evil is in general conceived of as incorrect conduct, or as a transgression. Above all else, it is the violation of an ordinance or of a status, the failure to fulfil a duty or the absence of an attitude of mind held to be natural or correct. Sometimes it can be understood as something repugnant, with a marked negative aesthetic character, or as something noxious, in which latter case it would correspond to what we define as a 'natural evil'. It is never, however, represented as a cosmic force, as an 'absolute' entity in its own right, in opposition to good, nor as one of two opposed and mutually incompatible divinities. In effect, the handful of terms that have acquired a metaphysical value in China, such as the 'principles of Heaven', 'great unity', and so on, always pertain to the human domain, society, nature, and the cosmos.

Good itself does not have a divine origin, but is closely linked with humanity (some norms being traced back to the sage-kings of antiquity), even if values and virtues are made to derive from Heaven. 'Heaven', moreover, is nothing other than the reification of the unique natural, moral, and cosmic order that does not transcend the world but, *per contra*, manifests itself in nature and in humankind. This is above all true for Confucianism. Daoism and Buddhism have an ontological vision, but not an absolute one. In a vision such as theirs good and evil are understood as two *complementary* opposites. For Daoism, *any* distinction that is drawn is *in itself* an abstraction that distances us from the holistic understanding of reality.

Neither good nor evil exist for Buddhism insofar as everything is illusory appearance, beginning with suffering itself, which can be eliminated precisely by the elimination of *karma*, and thus of all attachments, aversions, and attractions. While *mahāyāna* Buddhism has terms analogous to 'sin' (Latin *peccatum*, etc.), its conception of guilt is different from that of the Mediterranean religions. It has in mind the idea of the unity of the absolute and the relative, and as much may be said of the 'norms of purity' (*qinggui*

<sup>191</sup> For an examination of subjects concerning the concepts of evil, guilt, and transgression in China, see Santangelo, "Sin" in China, pp.22–241.

**Figure 8**

*"The consequences of avarice," from the late sixteenth-century novel Jinpingmei. A pictorial representation, with the marginal caption "Mother Wang, greedy for wealth, overlooks inevitable disaster," of the main judgement concerning chapter 87 of the novel: avarice drives old woman Wang to her ruin. The old woman—who is in effect auctioning the widowed Golden Lotus who has left Ximen's house and is lodging with her—is engaged in making financial calculations in front of a steelyard balance, while the two servants of a disappointed prospective purchaser depart with their box filled with ninety ounces of silver. In the end old woman Wang ignores her agreement with Chen Jingji and accepts the five taels that Wu Song, the brother of Golden Lotus' late husband Wu Da, draws out of his leather satchel and offers her in order to secure his marriage to his sister-in-law and, thereby, the opportunity to avenge the death and humiliation of his brother, in which mother Wang had played a part. (He later succeeds in beheading her.) As may be seen from the placard as well as the ox turning the grindstone and the basket containing flour, old woman Wang lives in a mill, a profitable flour mill owned by her son, which was worked by donkeys in the novel, but is here shown worked by an ox. (Jinpingmei xinke xiuxiang piping [New critical and illustrated edition of Jinpingmei] [Taipei: Xiaoyuan Chubanshe, 1990], p.1238)*



清規) of Daoism. Not only is there no contrast, in the Chinese mind, between sins committed against divine beings and these committed against human beings, but the *automatic* nature of *retribution* renders divine intervention of secondary importance. Lastly, the doctrine of the Tiantai sect of the 'mutual interpenetration of the Ten Worlds', and the Chan school's conception of the interrelationship between the nature of the Buddha and that of demons, are further elements that have contributed to a relativistic vision of the problem

of evil. Nor does Chinese Buddhism, therefore, know the idea of absolute and radical evil. At the metaphysical level, it denies the existence of evil as a real force, and 'sin' is not an objective entity, but only a state of mind. Like suffering and like death, sin is caused by ignorance, and ignorance and enlightenment only impact upon the individual's perception.

So we can assert that in general what is at issue here is a transgression that provokes negative effects on the agent, or on his or her social environment, insofar as it sets in motion an automatic negative process, whether this is *karma*, the action of the 'three worms' (*sanchong* 三蟲), or the consequences of the principle of retribution, or, again, harm to his or her own social group.

This many-faceted attitude can be traced back to a few ideological presuppositions and historical preconditions that we may synthesize as follows:

A. There is no monotheism in the domain of religion, nor the idea of a personal god in a direct relationship with the individual who would otherwise find himself or herself in total isolation. This means the absence of the exclusiveness of a 'jealous God', and of any absolute opposition between a divinity identified with Good, and a devil identified with Evil. It also means the absence of a *personal relationship* between the individual and God.

B. In the domain of ethics this means a many-faceted concept of responsibility, which cannot be linked with the severity or the pity of a transcendent entity, but has to make a reckoning with *the bonds between the subject and his or her social group*. Even the idea of retribution is influenced by this, because it is often understood as an automatic consequence of certain kinds of human behaviour; and the role of the spirits and the gods of the common people is reduced to responding in contractual fashion to propitiation. Bonds such as these increase the effectiveness of social and moral norms rather than weakening them.<sup>192</sup> Furthermore, even if the Chinese are free of monotheistic intolerance in the religious domain, their feeling of moral indignation is often expressed with fury, 'destroying' individuals.<sup>193</sup>

C. There is no clear separation of spirit and matter, or of soul and body, two dualisms that contributed to dramatizing the Western ethical vision, even before the advent of Christianity, as may be seen in the contrast between freedom and necessity. The concept of 'heart-mind' (*xin* 心) is different from the idea of an exclusively human soul, endowed with reason and able to make free decisions. The heart-mind includes both feelings and thoughts, both will-power and judgements. So, too, there is no place for the idea of the individual developed in Europe from the concept of the immortality of the soul, and further amplified by the romantic movement.

D. No matter whether we consider Mencius's idea of the goodness of human nature or Xunzi's idea of its badness, China does not have the notion of original sin, with the consequent *contemptus mundi* that this entails, and the metaphysical corruption of the *massa damnata*.

<sup>192</sup> As Smith observes in sharp-eyed testimony in *Chinese characteristics*, pp.237–8, "in China every man, woman, and child is directly responsible to someone else, and of this important fact no one for a moment loses sight. Though one should 'go far and fly high' he cannot escape, and this he well knows. Even if he should himself escape, his family cannot escape."

<sup>193</sup> Pye, *Chinese politics*, pp.230–3, writes: "The basis of the destructive powers of vilification seems clearly associated with the cardinal importance of the use of shaming in the Chinese socialization process. Traditionally, parents freely practised both teasing and shaming in disciplining children, and it seems that with Communism there is even more use of 'shaming' in schools and in criticism sessions. Cultures which place great importance on shaming as part of their socialization process also tend in their legends to exploit the fantasy potentials of people becoming invisible or of changing their guises. The tradition of Chinese legends from *Monkey* to *The woman warrior* is filled with stories of ghosts who assume different guises and it is the task of heroes to unmask them and hence destroy their potency. To be unmasked is to be stripped of the protective shield that comes from conforming to one's expected rules. That is to say, when one has experienced the humiliation of shame, one has also learned the destructive 'consequences of being unmasked'."

<sup>194</sup> Pasquale D'Elia, *Fonti ricciane: storia dell'introduzione del cristianesimo in Cina* [Ricciian sources: the history of the introduction of Christianity into China], 3 vols (Rome: La Libreria dello Stato, 1942–49), 1: 132.

E. The lack of an absolute and exclusive conception of opposites, which were rather understood in terms of a complementary bipolarity, or an interaction and alternation, relativized the metaphysical conception of good and evil. Thus if virtue itself went too far for harmony and balance, it lost its positive character, and the excess transformed good into evil. This was symbolized by the two elements of the *yin* and *yang*. What is more, the superposition, coexistence, and combination of the three different ideological systems of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism, each with its own order of values, developed a syncretism that was not accessible to the Mediterranean mind. This is shown by the scandalized comments of the Jesuit Matteo Ricci:

Nowadays the most common opinion of those whom they believe to be wisest among them, is that these three sects all amount to the same thing, and that all of them may be retained together. They thereby deceive themselves, and others, in the greatest disorder, judging that in this matter of religion the more modes of expression there are, the more useful this will be for the kingdom. In the end all this leads to the opposite of what they claim, since, wishing to follow all the laws, they come to remain without any, as they obey none of them with their hearts. And so it comes about that with some of them openly avowing their credulity, and others deceived into false persuasions of belief, the greater part of this people have come to be sunk in the depths of atheism.<sup>194</sup>

F. Last of all, Chinese history did not experience the opposition between a political order and a supernatural order that transcended it and surpassed it, as did the church. The relationship between the imperial authority and the Buddhist 'church' was not comparable to that between the Christian churches and the European states.

Neo-Confucianism, while the inheritor of certain Daoist and Buddhist sets of problems, developed its own metaphysics of good and evil, which nonetheless did not effect a conceptual separation from relativism and the complementarity of opposites. This does not mean that detailed precepts and commandments were not formulated. On the contrary, from the beginning of the second millennium, and especially during the sixteenth century, manuals of meditation and texts teaching self-awareness proliferated, reflecting these syncretistic trends and combining the instructions of the three principal doctrines. Thus we find side by side with prescriptions supporting the familial and social order (and clearly of Confucian provenance) others defending living beings (and of Buddhist inspiration). Thus Neo-Confucianism developed a deep sense of 'shame and moral worth' in order to bring about harmony and social cohesion. In spite of the interpersonal orientation of this sentiment, it does not lack an internal dimension, nor is it any less profound than that which we customarily define as a 'sense of guilt'.

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