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# Religion and Sexuality: Reading the Sixth Commandment (“You Shall Not Commit Adultery”) in the Context of Late Ming China

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**Abstract:** This article examines concubinage in late Ming China through Foucauldian discourse analysis of sexuality in order to explore different responses to the Sixth Commandment by the Jesuits and Chinese literati. It will be interdisciplinary and conducted by way of philology, sexuality studies, feminist studies, cross-cultural criticism, and inter-religious dialogue. Topics include the relationship between religion and sexuality, concubinage in late Ming China, the Jesuits’ attitude towards concubinage, and the case study of the Confucian Catholic Wang Zheng’s struggle. A cross-cultural study of the Six Commandment not only illustrates the complex interaction between religion, sexuality, and gender but also presents early encounters of the Chinese and Christian cultures and the dialogues between them.

**Keywords:** religion; sexuality; Sixth Commandment; Jesuit; concubinage; Confucianism; late Ming China



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## 1. Introduction: Religion and Sexuality

Religion and sexuality form a network of deep connections. Just as Taylor argues, “any religion that conceives of its god or gods having human attributes, or which articulates the divine—and, above all, the relation of the divine to the human—in narrative terms is going to have to struggle hard to avoid question of sexuality.” (Taylor 1998, p. 9). Paul Ricoeur observed three main stages in the Western understanding of the relationship between religion and sexuality: incorporating sexuality in religious myth and ritual, separating sexuality from the sacred, and reuniting sexuality with the experience of the sacred (Nelson and Longfellow 1994, pp. 71–72). On the one hand, most religions have sought to address the moral issues that arise from people’s sexuality in society and in human interaction. That is why each major religion has developed moral codes covering sexuality. These moral codes seek to regulate situations that can give rise to sexual interests and to influence people’s sexual activities and practices. When discussing the productive power of discourse about sex and its relationship to control and discipline, Foucault questions the early Christian idea of chastity and argues that sexuality is not simply a means of reproducing the species, the family, and the individual, nor is it just a means of obtaining pleasure and enjoyment. It is a privileged place where our deepest “truth” and structures of power are read and expressed (Foucault 1988, pp. 110–11; Foucault 1990, p. 106).

On the other hand, social norms on sexual conduct can also be linked to religious beliefs. Within the Christian context, religion and sexuality are frequently in conflict. For example, based upon the second creation story (Gen. 2.4b–3.24), the Church Fathers developed their discourse on sexuality, sin, and redemption in the “paradise of virginity” (Pagels 1988, pp. 78–97). In his book, *On the Veiling of Virgins*, Tertullian (c. 160–225 CE) advocates sexual renunciation and virginity and connects veiling to his conception of the salvation of the flesh (Tertullian 2004, pp. 135–61; Brown 2008, pp. 80–81). Foucault criticizes Tertullian’s view on virginity and explores Christian sexual ethics in the monastic life (Foucault 1997a, pp. 194–96). Origen (185–254 CE) understands virginity as the original state in which body and soul are joined (Brown 2008, pp. 170–71). The connection between

sex and sin, as Beverley Clack points out, finds its fullest and most lasting expression in the thought of Augustine (354–430 CE), where Paul’s notion of the flesh is interpreted specifically as “sex.” Consequently, virginity or chastity comes to be hailed as the *par excellence* of being spiritual (Clack 1998, p. 195). As Peter Brown observes, in Augustine’s mind, sexuality “echoed in the body the unalterable consequence of mankind’s first sin.” (Brown 2008, p. 422). As such, sexuality and spirituality are found to be polarized in much of the different Christian traditions. Such a Christian understanding of sexuality has deeply constructed and shaped sexual morality and activity of the Western world.

In the Hebrew Bible, the commandment לֹא תִנָּאֵף, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exodus 20:14; Deuteronomy 5:18), effected the prohibition of sexual activity outside marriage and became an essential part of Christian ethics. The intention is to protect the possession of the male. A man having sex with an unmarried female will have to marry her, but having a sexual relationship with a married woman is a great sin as it infringes on the property of the husband. Because the Decalogue is addressed to Israelite men, the commandment forbids one Israelite man from having sex with the wife of another Israelite man, his neighbor. (Coogan 2014, pp. 83–84; Stanton 1999, pp. 126–27; Brenner 1994, pp. 255–58). The definition of adultery is one-sided. A woman’s sexuality is understood to belong to her husband alone. Violation of a husband’s sexual rights, the most serious of sexual offenses, is signified by the term נִאֲפָה, while all other instances of sexual intercourse outside of marriage are designated by the term זִנָּה, including a daughter’s premarital sex, seen as an offense against her father (Bird 1997, p. 222). Christian history has seen broad interpretations and implications of this commandment. Different Christian traditions number this commandment in different ways (Coogan 2014, p. 28).

In the late 16th century, with the arrival of the Jesuit missionaries to China, the commandment “You shall not commit adultery” was introduced and translated into Chinese by the Jesuits as the sixth command, *Wu xing xieyin* 毋行邪淫 in Catholic catechetical literature. Sexual morality has varied over time and across cultures. Views of religions in relation to sexuality also range widely, from the belief that sex and the flesh are negative to the belief that sex is the greatest expression of the divine. Sexuality and reproduction are fundamental elements in human interaction and society worldwide, just as an early Confucian saying goes in *Liji* 礼记 (the *Book of Rites*), “Food and sex constitute great human desires 饮食男女，人之大欲存焉” (Liji Zhengyi 2009, p. 3080). A similar view attributed to Gaozi 告子 affirms that “eating food and having sex is the nature of human beings 食色，性也” (Mengzi zhushu 2009, p. 5979). Due to cultural differences, when the Jesuit missionaries encountered the Chinese *literati* in late Ming, moral issues were at the core of their debates.

By the sixteenth century, Ming China had become a commercial society and struggled with the confusion caused by pleasure (Brook 1999, pp. 10–11). Traditional and social norms were eroded in the new mercantile society, and family and sexual orders were challenged. Reconstructing the social and moral order represented the elite’s response to such social situations. During the late Ming, large numbers of “morality books” emerged, reflecting the moral chaos caused by social turbulence and various crises of the time. These books usually contain two lists: one of good deeds, which awarded merit points (*gong* 功), and the other bad deeds, which doled out demerit points (*guo* 过), while different deeds corresponded to different numbers of points. The final balance would indicate the progress one had made in morality and therefore be a prediction of good or bad fortune in the future (Brokaw 1991, pp. 1–2). The social setting of morality books was similar to the textual context of the Jesuits at that time: a large portion of the various catechetical writings or texts about Christian ethics introduced were devoted to the Ten Commandments. The Christian teachings about charity and the divinely proclaimed Ten Commandments were offered as one answer to social disorder. For the Jesuits who arrived in China for the first time, they soon came to consider the practices of Buddhism and Daoism “false religions”, but “were so impressed by the Confucian moral teachings that they had difficulty in calling them ‘false’, though they were unable to recognize them as fully ‘true’.” The Confucian morality was then to be supplemented with revealed Christian doctrine.”

(Standaert 2001, pp. 95–96). Moral issues were among the most debated topics between the Chinese scholars and Jesuit missionaries. Taking the biblical commandment against adultery as their guide, the Jesuits began a long and heated debate with Chinese *literati* concerning a tradition deeply steeped in China's history: concubinage.

## 2. Concubinage in Late Ming China (Late 16th Century to First Half of the 17th Century)

In ancient China, it was common for successful men of high social status to have multiple concubines. Chinese emperors have kept concubines since ancient times. In the earliest historical records (from the twenty-second century BCE), Emperor Ku (帝嚳), one of five legendary emperors in the earliest history of China, had four concubines (Standaert 2016, p. 22). Concubinage, partly to guarantee a male heir for a family, had been an institution for thousands of years for Chinese, who had always had an exceptionally pragmatic view toward sex. If a man's spouse did not bear a son, or if his son died young, he could take another woman in order to produce a male heir. As a product of patriarchal society, concubinage favored and maintained the interests of men, especially the social elites with special privileges. There are several underlying reasons for this system, including observing filial piety by bearing a son (the most explicit reason) and satisfying men's sexual desires, while concubines also performed housework, entertained their husbands through songs and dances, and served as status symbols. Apart from these conventional roles, concubines also served other functions. Firstly, men might give concubines to their male friends as gifts to show their generosity. Secondly, abusing concubines was regarded as fashionable among gentry, and men considered concubines a dispensable household item. Thirdly, concubines were frequently sacrificed at the husband's death (or encouraged to sacrifice themselves) to follow him into the afterlife and be able to serve him there, thus ensuring his complete ownership of them, a point well illustrated in the late Ming. Finally, through sexual intercourse, men extracted so-called female essence to boost their own health (S. Wang 2008, pp. 65–78). Concubines were objectified and commercialized as products to be sold (Hsieh 2008, pp. 262–90). As such, concubinage was both a product of and a tool to strengthen the Confucian patrilinear family system and reflected "the complicated power dynamics between the state, the elite, local communities, and women." (Fei 2012, p. 1010).

In Confucian moral orthodoxy, the Three Bonds (三纲 *sangang*) affirmed the authority of ruler over minister, father over son, and husband over wife. The Three Bonds comprised the basis of the hierarchical and patriarchal order of a society in which male and female sexuality were greatly embedded in large-scale socioeconomic and gender inequality. Traditional Confucian morality places great emphasis on filial piety, and to lack filial piety is the most grievous sin. Mencius (372–289 BCE), the great Confucian philosopher who sought to defend the teachings of Confucius (551–479 BCE), states that "the greatest of the three unfilial acts is having no male heirs 不孝有三，无后为大" (Mengzi zhushu 2009, p. 5923). The core Confucian value of filial piety was intended to produce male heirs to sustain ancestral worship and continue the family line. For this reason, many Chinese criticized celibacy, as it meant discontinuance of ancestor worship (Sun 2002, pp. 17–18). Concubinage was also supported by the law. For example, the 1533 law code of the Ming Dynasty stipulated that any commoner aged 40 and over who had no male heir must take a concubine, and if not, he would face punishment (Li 1963, pp. 6–7; Hsieh 2008, p. 262). Moreover, men's social status determined how many concubines they could take; generally, the higher one's rank, the greater the number. For instance, *literati* who had passed the civil service examination were encouraged to take a concubine in keeping with their new social status (Y. Huang 2006, p. 137). In the late Ming, the practice of concubinage was more common among the general population than in any previous time.

As far as women were concerned, in the Confucian family-state continuum system, their social status was associated with that of their son(s), husband, and their families (Hsieh 2014, p. 41). Late Ming Confucianism was deeply influenced by the Neo-Confucianism

of the Song Dynasty, which led to a change in attitude toward sex in the reigning ideology. As the preeminent Neo-Confucian master Zhu Xi (1130–1200 CE) said, “the theme of thousands of words from sages is only to teach people to preserve the natural order and eradicate human desires 圣贤千言万语，只是教人存天理，灭人欲” (Zhu 1962, p. 389). During the late Ming, in order to strengthen family order and patriarchal authority, female sexuality was strictly controlled, both ritually and legally. The most prominent honor for a woman was the Jingbiao 旌表, an imperial award codified and promulgated by the state to celebrate acts of chastity. Jingbiao was not a new institution but “underwent a major change in the Ming. The court began to stipulate the standardized definition of female chastity under two specific circumstances: remaining chaste after a husband passed away or committing suicide when facing sexual assault.” (Fei 2012, p. 993). In 1398, the founding emperor of Ming, Zhu Yuanzhang 朱元璋 (1328–1398), issued the first Jingbiao to a faithful maiden (Ming Taizu Shilu 1967, p. 3707; Zhang 1997, pp. 1970–90). Thus began the government’s campaigns promoting female chastity. As a state award for chastity, Jingbiao was an honor that came with thirty taels of silver from the local government to build a commemorative arch and the privilege of exemption from corvée service (Fei 2012, p. 993). The fast rise of the female chastity cult in the Ming was “powered by various strains of activism”. (Lu 2010, p. 183). In the second half of Ming, the performance of female chastity was increasingly dramatized and even violent in an attempt to embody the defining characteristics of true virtue, such as suicide, physical suffering, and endurance of hardship (Lu 2008, pp. 8, 31–67, 103–246).

Intriguingly, the female chastity cult is broadly correlated with “national and political crises, cultural fascination with acts, and intensification of Confucian moral discourse on the cultivation of loyalty.” (Lu 2008, p. 7). Since the thirteenth century, Confucian ideology has long constructed a parallel relationship between female chastity and male political loyalty, as illustrated by Weijing Lu’: A loyal subject should not ally himself with a different lord, just as a chaste woman should not remarry. In late imperial China, this conventional analogy found special resonance among the high-minded Confucian elite, who were, on the one hand, battling perceived moral corruption within their own ranks, and on the other hand, confronting the gloomy reality of dynastic collapse.” (Lu 2010, p. 186). In comparison, monogamy, which was advocated by the Jesuit missionaries, formed a kind of constraint on male sexuality. As a result, as Eric Zürcher notes, Christianity may have improved the position of women in general, but “in many cases the disposal of the concubine may have only worsened her situation.” (Zürcher 1997, p. 646).

### 3. The Jesuits’ Attitude towards Concubinage

At the end of the Ming Dynasty, the Jesuit Matteo Ricci 利玛竇 (1552–1610) initiated a new era of Christianity in China through a deep and comprehensive dialogue with traditional Chinese culture. Before the Jesuits arrived in China, few Chinese questioned the value and legitimacy of concubinage. However, based on the Sixth Commandment, “You shall not commit adultery”, the Jesuits prohibited the Chinese converts from having more than one wife at a time, which meant absolutely no concubines. On this point, no compromise was possible. In chapter 8 of his *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主实义 (*True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, 1603), Matteo Ricci highlighted the commandment on adultery and stressed abstention from lewdness, lasciviousness, filthiness, and the like, especially in regard to the widespread situation of concubinage. He hoped to share insight into the goodness of celibacy with the Chinese. Ricci wrote, “a person who has undertaken to be chaste is like one who has cleaned the eyes of his mind of all dust and who has therefore increased the volume of light and can thoroughly comprehend the subtlest truths of morality.” (Ricci 1985, p. 418). In his morality book, which was quite popular among the Chinese, the Spanish Jesuit Diego de Pantoja 庞迪我 (1571–1618) outlined three levels of chastity from low to high: monogamous chastity, widower or widow chastity, and virginity (Pantoja 1965, p. 1029). He further stated that concubinage would produce trouble in the family and that “women are source of disasters, so the more concubines, the more

harm.” (Pantoja 1965, p. 1408). Here, the prejudice against women in male-dominated societies was shared by both Confucianism and Christianity.

Matteo Ricci and other Jesuits strongly argued that there was no connection between filial piety and begetting sons (Ricci 1985, p. 430). In his *Jiaoyao jielue* 教要解略 (*Summary Explanation of the Doctrina Christiana*, 1615), Alfonso Vagnone 王丰肃 (1566–1640) criticized the various evils resulting from breaking the Sixth Commandment and argued that “one male and one female are the right way.” (Vagnone 2002, pp. 164–65). He concluded that “the act of having no heirs and then taking a concubine was evil 无后而娶妾，邪也。” (Vagnone 2002, p. 165). In the *Dadao jiyuan* 达道纪言 (*Illustrations of the Great Dao*), a morality book published in 1636, Vagnone focused on the husband-wife relationship and argued that monogamous marriage was the choice of wise people. He explicitly stated that monogamy was a universal law: as there is one sun and one moon, there should be only one husband and one wife (Li and Meynard 2014, pp. 173, 286–87; Vagnone 1996, p. 503). He stated that in a monogamous marriage, the condition for a couple to live in harmony was mutual fidelity. In the *Dizui zhenggui* 涤罪正规 (*Correct Rules of Confession*, 1627), the Italian Jesuit Giulio Aleni 艾儒略 (1582–1649) listed sinful acts according to the Ten Commandments. He argued that “Tianzhu created human being. Man is different from woman. A wife should have only one husband, and a husband should have only one wife, which is the right way 天主生人，男女有别，妇止一夫，夫止一妇，正道也。” (Aleni 2002a, p. 396). Moreover, he wrote, “whether you have a son or not, you should not take a concubine 有无子者不得娶妾”. (Aleni 2002a, p. 396). Another Italian Jesuit, Michele Ruggieri 罗明坚 (1543–1607) also clearly stated that one who took concubines was sinful because it would result in more jealousy and deceit (Ruggieri 2002, p. 75). Clearly, the Jesuits claimed that being childless had nothing to do with a lack of filial piety.

In late Ming, concubinage was a widespread practice among the *literati*, who were the Jesuits’ primary missionary target. According to the rules of the Jesuits, any man seeking baptism had to first resolve the concubine problem, and there are a number of well-known instances Pan Feng-Chuan’s study identified three ways to solve this problem (Pan 2001, p. 661). Erik Zürcher observed that “the prohibition of concubinage was a Christian innovation that raised serious problems and controversies.” (Zürcher 2006, pp. 125–26). For example, the ancient sage Shun 舜 is believed to have had two spouses, and King Wen of Zhou 周文王 had about twenty-four concubines. In the *literati* tradition, Shun was renowned for his modesty and filial piety, and King Wen was a paragon of virtue. Therefore, the Chinese were greatly offended to learn that the Jesuits had condemned these sages to hell because they had committed adultery. For example, Huang Zhen 黄贞 from Zhangzhou wrote of his argument with Giulio Aleni in a letter to the censor Yan Maoyou 颜茂猷 around 1639. Huang Zhen remonstrated that Aleni “slandered sages, and his crime cannot be tolerated 污谤圣人，其罪莫容”:

In their doctrine there is the Ten Commandments, which says that “if one takes a concubine when one has no son, one is violating a great commandment and will certainly go to hell.” That comes down to saying that, of all our saintly sovereigns and enlightened kings throughout the entire history of China who had concubines, not one has escaped the hell of the Lord of Heaven. So I put this question to him: “King Wen had many concubines. What do you make of that?” Aleni sighed deeply for a long while and made no reply. The following day I put the same question to him, once again, deep sighs and no answer. The next day, I questioned him again and said: “The matter must be discussed in depth and clarified. A great record of all the past should be set up and only then will people understand and be encouraged to rally to you, no longer harbouring any doubts.” At this, Aleni sighed again for a long time and then slowly: “I didn’t want to pronounce on this, but now I will.” Then he sighed again for quite a while and solemnly announced: “I will tell you, my old brother, but I would not tell it to others: I am afraid I would to say that even King Wen himself has been cast down into hell. 又彼教中有十诫，谓“无子娶妾，乃犯大戒，必入地狱”，是举中国历来

圣帝明王有妃嫔者，皆脱不得天主地狱矣！贞诘之曰：“文王后妃众多，此事如何？”艾氏沉吟甚久不答。第二日，贞又问，又沉吟不答。第三日贞又问曰：“此意要讲议明白，立千古之大案，方能令人了然，皈依而无疑。”艾氏又沉吟甚久，徐曰：“本不欲说，如今我亦说。”又沉吟甚久，徐曰：“对老兄说，别人面前，我亦不说。文王亦怕已入地狱去了。”(Z. Huang 1996, pp. 150–51; Gernet 1985, p. 177).

Such a rebuttal originated from the Jesuits' attacks and criticisms of concubinage. "But whether King Wen was saved or damned, the very thought of inflicting punishment upon him was, in itself, scandalous." (Gernet 1985, p. 177). The Chinese could not tolerate any evil slander against their ancient sages. Confucian Xu Dashou (许大受) took Diego de Pantoja's *Qike* (七克) as an example and attacked the Jesuits by saying that "monogamy violated human relationships 只许一夫一妇违反人伦". He criticized the Jesuits for lacking filial piety, which "reversed the ethics throughout the ages 倒置万古之伦理". (Xu 1996, pp. 190–91).

In late imperial China, for kings and those who enjoyed political and social privileges, concubinage was a common practice. As the "Three Pillars of Christianity in China" (Peterson 1988, p. 129) and officials at the imperial court, Xu Guangqi 徐光启 (1562–1633), Li Zhizao 李之藻 (1565–1630), and Yang Tingyun 杨廷筠 (1557–1627) were no exceptions in this (Y. Huang 2006, p. 140). All of them had concubines or planned to take one due to issues with male heirs. Those who had a concubine were confronted with a dilemma as the Jesuits prohibited the Chinese converts from having more than one wife at any given time, and according to the stipulations, those who wanted to get baptized must get rid of the concubines they already had. Xu Guangqi stated that the most difficult commandment to observe was the prohibition on taking concubines (Y. Huang 2006, pp. 76, 464). He planned to take a concubine to produce another male heir because he had only one son and no grandson. The Jesuit João da Rocha 罗儒望 (1565–1623) instructed him patiently. After that, he changed his mind and baptized Paul in 1604 (Y. Huang 2006, pp. 76–77). Li Zhizao was attracted to Christianity and requested baptism in 1603. Because he already had a concubine, Matteo Ricci refused to baptize him until March 1610, when he finally accepted monogamy by abandoning his concubine and was baptized Leo right before Matteo Ricci's death (Dunne 1962, p. 99; Y. Huang 2006, p. 82; Young 1994, p. 86). The exact fate of the concubine was unknown.

Yang Tingyun was serious about the moral and religious values of Christian teachings. He faced the same impediment of having a concubine as well as a wife that confronted Li Zhizao in 1603 (Standaert 1988, pp. 54, 87). When Yang expressed his desire to receive baptism, Nicolas Trigault did not permit it because he had a concubine who was the mother of his two sons. Yang discussed it with Li Zhizao and said that "the missionaries' attitude bewilders him." (Peterson 1988, p. 133) He experienced intense internal struggles because he had accepted the strict moral code of Christianity, but at the same time, he thought that repulsing his concubine was against natural law. Moreover, he believed that abandoning an innocent concubine who should be taken care of would violate the moral principles inherent in being an ideal Confucian gentleman (Junzi, 君子). However, after extensive deliberation, he overcame his misgivings, moved his concubine to a "separated dwelling", and has since lived in separation from her (Dunne 1962, pp. 113–14). After that, Yang was baptized Michael in 1611.

These baptized Confucians underwent great suffering, caught between Confucianism and Christianity. Getting rid of concubines was hard to accept for Christian converts, who experienced great struggles internally and externally in accepting this. This was a difficult issue, especially for the first generation, which had taken concubines before they knew about Christianity. It was not simply because they could not give up their lifestyle, but also because they did not want to strip a concubine of her social status, turning her into an outcast (Li and Meynard 2014, pp. 173–74). They had to make a choice between their concubine and the Lord of Heaven. Matteo Ricci also learned that it was not an easy task to convert a scholar, as concubines were frequently "the major obstacle" (Criveller 1996,

p. 371). As the most practical issue of Christian morality advocated by the Jesuits, anti-concubinage was deemed a threat to the existing social order and to Confucian orthodoxy (Zürcher 1997, p. 646). The prohibition of concubinage offered a new challenge to the practical reality of gender problems in Confucian culture. To some extent, the Jesuits changed the moral order of the Chinese tradition, criticizing and transforming the Chinese custom of concubinage and advocating monogamy.

#### 4. Confucian Catholic Wang Zheng and His Concubine

Another famous case is that of Wang Zheng 王徵 (1571–1644), a well-educated man and inventor from Shanxi Province who served in a government position. In his early years, Wang Zheng was influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism. In 1615, he was deeply touched by Christian teachings when he read Pantoja's *Qike* 七克 and the Jesuits' works on mechanics. In the following year, he had his first personal discussion with Pantoja in Beijing, which resulted in his decision to become a follower of the Lord of Heaven (Tianzhu 天主). He was baptized Philippe (Y. Huang 2006, p. 133; Z. Wang 2011, pp. 384–85; Gernet 1985, p. 142). In 1622, at the age of 52, after taking the civil service examination ten times, he finally passed the Jinshi 进士 exam and received the highest imperial degree offered by the civil service examination system. At that time, he had already been baptized. He and his wife, Madam Shang (尚氏 Shang Shi), had given birth to several sons but tragically lost them all to smallpox, and only two daughters eventually survived (Z. Wang 2015, p. 323). Some encouraged him to take a concubine to produce male heirs, but he did not agree, saying that he had been given grace by the Lord of Heaven, who helped him pass the examination, and he could not violate the Lord of Heaven. This story was recorded in Aleni's preaching work, *Kouduo richao* 口铎日抄 (*Diary of Oral Admonitions*) (Aleni 2002b, p. 106). The missionaries highly praised Wang Zheng for this. However, he changed his mind around 1623/1624 due to family pressure. His wife, daughter, and brothers wept and pleaded, and his father firmly ordered him to take a concubine so as to produce a male heir and extend his family prestige. The act by which a wife persuaded her husband without a son to take a concubine was considered a female virtue (Y. Huang 2006, p. 137). Consequently, he took a young concubine in secrecy, a girl known as Madam Shen (申氏 Shen Shi), who was only 15 years old, even younger than his daughter. By yielding to family and social pressure and taking a concubine, Wang Zheng risked being excommunicated (Zürcher 2006, p. 125). Wang Zheng, the "Pillar of the Faith" in Shanxi (Zürcher 1997, p. 646), knew that he had violated the Sixth Commandment, "you shall not commit adultery", which prohibits taking a concubine.

In 1625, Wang Zheng invited Nicolas Trigault 金尼阁 (1577–1629) to spread Christianity in Shanxi. He assisted Trigault in editing a Latin-Chinese dictionary titled *Xiru ermu zi* 西儒耳目资 and became one of the earliest Chinese scholars who learned Latin (Y. Huang 2006, p. 136). He confessed his sin to Trigault, who told him that he could not be forgiven unless he got rid of his concubine. He considered letting his concubine marry another man to atone for his sin. However, his concubine refused to remarry, his legitimate wife urged her to stay, and the concubine eventually promised to convert to chastity, swearing not to remarry. For a virtuous woman from a lower class who desired social identity, it was honorable to be recognized as a respectable man's chaste concubine, even just by a name (Hsieh 2014, p. 83). After that, he never entered the concubine's room again, separating from her in order to avoid making his sin worse. In 1631, because of his military and technological abilities, Wang Zheng was appointed Secretary of Shandong and Military Supervisor of Liaohai to join the battle against the Manchurians (Z. Wang 2011, p. 393). He had to leave his hometown in Shanxi to report to the official post and thus leave behind his concubine.

By taking a concubine, Wang Zheng violated the commandment prohibiting adultery. Consequently, Trigault and the other Jesuits refused to offer him absolution. In 1634, Wang Zheng started to live in seclusion to remedy the sin of concubinage. He promised to "always observe and meditate on the Ten Commandments in utter silence 永遵十诫清修". When he recalled how he discussed the Ten Commandments in his work *Weitian airen ji*

lun 畏天爱人极论 (*the Awe of Heaven and Care of Human Beings*) and how Aleni praised his promise to avoid concubinage in *Diary of Oral Admonitions*, he was thoroughly ashamed (Z. Wang 2011, pp. 135–36). In 1636, at the age of 66, he was determined to completely dissociate himself from his concubine and issued *Qiqing jiezui qigao* 祈请解罪启稿 (*A Draft of Confession Request*). His moving public confession goes:

“Once an evil thought sprang up in my mind, I could not observe the commandments. After this, I really realized the seriousness of my sin, so I confessed to the missionaries, who all said: ‘Your sin is hard to remove unless you can eradicate it!’ In consequence I felt remorseful for myself, and decided that my concubine should get married in order to atone for my crime. My wife wept and begged me to keep the concubine, and we nearly had a quarrel. The concubine too was so distressed that she expressed her wish to become a Christian and observe chastity. She would rather die than remarry..... Throughout the whole night I reflected that I am nearly seventy, and my behaviour is no better than that of a youth of seventeen, moreover, I boasted falsely about not taking a concubine, which truly violated the sin of committing adultery and was hard to confess..... Furthermore, the Lord of Heaven blessed me in living through hundreds of dangers. Even if I made strenuous efforts, and broke off all earthly things, what contributions can I make to repay the Lord’s kindness? And why not part with my concubine? Indulging in the sea of desire speed up grave punishment. Now, I promise before the Lord of Heaven that in the future I will treat the concubine as a friend and abjure sexual desire for her in order to cut off my sin of adultery. If afterwards I again commit sin with her, the angels will be my witness that I am willing to face the penalty of death. I prostrate myself and hope you missionaries will look on me with compassion, and rid me of my previous sin. I am also praying wholeheartedly for absolution from the Lord of Heaven. 一旦邪念遂兴，不能坚守诫规矣。自是以后，极知罪犯深重，数请解罪于诸铎德，咸曰：“非去犯罪之端，罪难解也！”不之许。于是痛自追悔，己曾立意嫁妾以赎我罪，乃室人哭恳勉留之，几至反目；而妾因痛苦，几殒厥生，愿言进教守贞，誓死不肯改适。。。。。。终夜思维，年将七十，反不如十七少年功行，且虚传不娶，而实冒邪淫之罪于莫可解。。。。。。又况百危百险中，赖主佑而生还。纵及时苦修，断绝一切世缘，能有几许功行，报答从前公恩私恩？禁何不自割舍？日堕欲海中，以速重罚。今立誓天主台前：从今以后，视彼妾妇，一如宾友，自矢断色以断此邪淫之罪。倘有再犯，天神谕若，立赐诛殛。伏望铎德垂怜，解我从前积罪，代求天主之洪赦。罪某不胜肯祈之至。” (Z. Wang 1972, pp. 835–37).

Thus, in order to have a son, Wang Zheng secretly took a young concubine, who lived a reclusive life in the sizable Wang residence, their union remaining merely nominal for decades. Wang Zheng sacrificed her well-being for the purpose of his own atonement. He only made her existence known when he openly admitted to the sin of taking a concubine. He asked for absolution so he could treat her as a friend. He broke off sexual relations with the concubine and then led an ascetic life with his heart devoted to reading (Y. Huang 2006, p. 152). Wang wrote down the ascetic deeds of the desert fathers and mothers as told by Johann Adam Schall von Bell 汤若望 (1591–1666) and compiled them with his comments into his *Chongyi tang riji suibi* 崇一堂日记随笔 (*Dairy Record Made at the Chongyi Church*) (Z. Wang 2011, pp. 163–76). In 1643, Li Zicheng 李自成 (1606–1645), a rebel leader who overthrew the Ming Dynasty, captured the city of Xi’an, and he sent his subordinates to invite Wang Zheng to join his group. Wang Zheng refused to serve the new ruler, and bringing his sword into the church, he refused Li’s demand, defending his loyalty to the Ming Dynasty in the face of extreme physical torture. The following year, Wang Zheng went down with the Ming Dynasty as the new Dynasty was established by starving to death in seven days, in the tradition of the Confucian male virtue of political integrity (Z. Wang 2011, p. 397). From a Christian perspective, his suicide violated the fifth commandment, “you shall not kill”. Two weeks later, during the turmoil, the last Ming emperor hanged

himself on a tree in the imperial garden outside the Forbidden City when the rebel army rampaged throughout the capital, Beijing.

These earth-shattering events once again left Wang Zheng's concubine, Madam Shen, devastated. In an age of sacrifice and martyrdom, she was faced with Wang Zheng's heroic death in "defending his political dignity" (Lu 2008, p. 50). After Wang Zheng's death, she tried to sacrifice herself and follow Wang Zheng into death through fasting. However, Wang Zheng's wife had her force-fed so that she could remain alive to assist in caring for the two adopted sons (Y. Huang 2006, p. 155). Ironically, her status in the Wang family was not recognized until after Wang Zheng's death, and the recognition brought only complete loneliness in the 35 years afterwards. She really had no choice. On her 70th birthday, she fell to pieces thinking back on her pains and sufferings over the past 55 years. For the first time in her life, she made an important decision for herself: as a silent protest, she took her own life by fasting, despite the Christian sanction against suicide, and thus ended her sad life in the same manner as Wang Zheng (Y. Huang 2006, p. 169).

For Madam Shen, her virtue was displayed through actions of enduring lifelong celibacy, self-disfigurement, and suicide. Her chastity and final martyr suicide became an honor for Wang Zheng's family. Huang Yinong mentioned the record that Madam Shen once cut her hair and destroyed her appearance 断发毁容 after Wang Zheng's death (Y. Huang 2006, p. 155). Consequently, she was praised and recorded in the family history of Wang Zheng as a reward for her chastity, perseverance, self-sacrifice, and tolerance. Moreover, she was listed as the first name in a local shrine dedicated to chaste and martyred women, which Wang Zheng's descendants donated to build (Y. Huang 2006, p. 169). As Hsieh Bao Hua concludes, "it was the authorities' patriarchal responsibility, as the guardians of their women's sexual chastity, to honor a good woman and to protect the moral reputation of good families, for the stability of social control and political order" (Hsieh 2014, p. 307). Wang Zheng dreaded punishment for his sin of concubinage, and his story, filled with personal struggle and suffering, ended tragically. His concubine endured an even more tragic life under the suffocating Confucian moral code, a dramatic change of dynasties, the fall of the family fortune, and drastic conflict between Eastern and Western cultures.

## 5. Conclusions

This story and those of Xu Guangqi, Yang Tingyun, and Li Zhizao clearly illustrate the conflict between the Sixth Commandment and the traditional morality of Confucianism, as well as the acculturation of the Sixth Commandment into the Chinese social and moral order. The Three Pillars of Christianity in China "approached Christianity in different ways, with different needs and questions, but they each found in it a moral discipline based upon an external, universal source" (Peterson 1988, p. 147). In the sphere of moral practice, they gave up their original lifestyle of big families with concubines and accepted the "one male one female, one husband one wife" model of monogamy. It is obvious that Christian culture and biblical teaching influenced the marriage practices of the small number of converts in feudal China. Therefore, to some extent, the moral notions of Christianity transformed the Chinese way of life, manifesting in their attitude towards concubinage. However, by abandoning their concubines, early Chinese converts experienced struggles within and social pressure without. Moreover, concubines themselves were the most tragic victims. They were forced into separation and expulsion, with no social standing, no autonomy, no name, and always at the disposal of patriarchal society.

In the moral philosophy of Confucianism, female chastity was politicized and interconnected with male loyalty, as illustrated by the saying "a loyal minister does not serve two rulers, a chaste woman does not marry two husbands 忠臣不事二君，贞女不更二夫". (Lu 2008, p. 41; Si 1959, p. 2457). Intriguingly, in the Hebrew Bible, a woman has to be faithful to her husband alone and is expected to be a virgin until she gets married (Deut. 22:13–21). Moreover, the relationship between God and Israel is represented by the imagery of marriage. Israel is, metaphorically, a faithless wife. YHWH, the metaphorical male coun-

terpart, is depicted as a faithful husband. Consequently, an adulterous woman metaphorically condemns the people of Israel who have been unfaithful to YHWH by worshipping other gods (Hosea 1–3; Ezekiel 23; Jeremiah 3). The monogamy/monotheism metaphor and adultery/idolatry analogy present political and religious concerns in the androcentric discourse. As Foucault points out, the marriage relationship is the most intense focus of constraints established to govern the order of things and the plan of beings. The Sixth Commandment, condemning adultery, became a powerful mechanism in the field of sexuality (Foucault 1984, pp. 317–21). From a cross-cultural perspective, the relationship between religion, sexuality, and gender is highly complex, as can be seen in the different notions historically and culturally embodied in responses to the Sixth Commandment in late Ming.

In his groundbreaking study of sexuality, *The History of Sexuality* (1976–1984), Michel Foucault contests the stability of our concept of sexuality and argues that sexuality is historically defined and contextually determined. In other words, sexuality is a construct created by discourse. Foucault explores the domains of sexuality in Greek and Roman antiquity through a rigorous examination of specific configurations of knowledge, power, and agency (Foucault 1997b, p. 200). In the first volume, when he discusses the development of sexuality, he explores four sources of knowledge and power that have greatly contributed to the historical construct of sexuality (Foucault 1990, p. 103). One is the “hysterization of women’s bodies”, which has led us to view women as objects of medical knowledge. The female body has come to be considered a matter of public control (ibid., p. 104). Another is the “socialization of procreative behavior”, which maintains that the fertility of couples is an important matter for society and disapproves of non-procreative sex (ibid., pp. 103–104). The most important consequence of Foucault’s perspective is an awareness of our knowledge and rules regarding sexuality as a social and cultural phenomenon. Exploring the introduction, transmission, and practice of the Sixth Commandment and investigating the relationships among sexuality, gender, and religion will not only strengthen our understanding of the interactions between Chinese culture and Christianity but also offer a better picture of the social conditions of women and gender in Late Ming China.

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