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**To Be Harmonious with the Heaven,  
the Others and the Self:  
Late-Ming Christian Literati Li Jiugong's *Meditation*  
and His Comparative Scriptural Interpretation<sup>1</sup>**

Abstract

From the perspective of comparative scripture, this paper is using the *Shen si lu* (Meditations) by Catholic Literati Li Jiugong as a case study to investigate the dialogue and interaction between Confucianism and Christianity in the late-Ming period. Li's theology, incorporating the three aspects of being in harmony with Heaven, other people, and oneself, is expressed in Confucian terminology. It represents the late-Ming Chinese theological understanding of God, human nature, and society. The paper analyses Li's strategy of comparative scripture by which Confucian scriptural resources were reinterpreted, appropriated, and intertwined with the Christian meaning system. Finally, the paper also discusses the significance of using the methodology of comparative scripture in interreligious dialogue and in furthering the indigenization of Christianity in China.

Key words

comparative scripture, interreligious dialogue, Catholic literati, Li Jiugong

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In studying the history of Chinese Christianity and Chinese-Western cultural communication, much emphasis has been laid upon the collision and merging between Chinese and Western cultures raised by the Catholic missionaries during the late Ming and early Qing dynasty. However, both the focuses and perspectives of the Chinese and Western scholars are far away from each other. The Western scholars tend to do more research on the acts and achievements of those missionaries, while the Chinese ones pay more attention to the reception of Christianity among Chinese people. (Sun 1994, Gernet, 1991, Li 1998)<sup>2</sup> Therefore, two different scholarly views on the Christianity around this era in China are developed: the former often unintentionally sighs for the Chinese Christians who stick to their cultural and ethical tradition, while the latter believes that Chinese people received Christianity just as 'an absorption of western knowledge into Chinese tradition and a solution to their own intellectual or practical predicament.'<sup>3</sup>

Needless to say, the tension between Christianity and Confucianism is most prominently reflected through those Chinese who accepted Christianity. Hence the research in Chinese local Christians' lives and works had been the greatest scholarly field of the history of Chinese Christianity in the late Ming and early Qing dynasty in recent decades. (Standaert et al. 2002; Standaert 2004: 1-59, Liu 2005)<sup>4</sup> That Chinese Christians how to deal with the tension between the two traditions both inherited by them has now become the focus of both the Chinese and Western scholars.

This paper attempts to analyze the work of *Shen si lu* (Meditation) 慎思录 by a Fujian Christian literati, Li Jiugong who lived in the middle-low stratum of late Ming Dynasty society, from a comparative scripture perspective, to see the way he dealt with the Christianity and Chinese traditions, in order to retrieve the experience for building Chinese theology in contemporary context. It tries to answer some questions as follows: 1. What is the comparative scripture as an inter-religious dialogue? 2. How it could be play as a research method in analyzing the Christian literati like Li Jiugong in the late Ming dynasty? 3. How these theological doctrine like 'be harmonious with the Heaven' (和天), 'be harmonious with the

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<sup>2</sup> Some recent studies, see *Pneuma and Logos: Chinese Journal of Theology*, vol. 33 (2010) under the theme of 'Sino Christian Theology: Following after Matteo Ricci.'

<sup>3</sup> The former one see Gernet 1991, while the latter one see Sun 1994.

<sup>4</sup> Some case work, see Liu 2004; Li 2006.

others' (和人) and 'be harmonious with the self' (和己), as the titles for the three chapters in his *Meditation*, had expressed the effort made by the early Chinese Christians to do with the tension between Christianity and Chinese traditions, especially the Confucianism, in a way of doing comparative theology? 4. What inspiration can we get from the theological experiment of Li Jiugong for building a Chinese theology in a comparative way today?

## 1. Comparative Scriptural Interpretation as an Inter-Religious Dialogue

It is claimed that religious diversity, every religion in everywhere, did become a main feature of modern culture. Nonetheless, religious diversity had always been a culture context for Chinese intellectuals who exposed to two or three religious tradition since Han Dynasty. They were always wandering in-between the three religions, Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. The tension of the three religious identities had been an existential dilemma for most of them. When the Catholicism, as one of the successors of Abrahamic monotheism, was introduced to China in the late Ming Dynasty, though it surely shown a strong inclination of exclusivism, under the Matteo Ricci's policy of 'excluding Buddhism but complementing Confucianism' (排佛补儒), it did not cause an either/or tension among the religious identities of the Chinese intellectual coverts.

Hence, the comparative scripture, which lays stress on the border crossing dialogue between two religious traditions, is suitable for the analysis of the Chinese Christian literati's attitude towards both Christianity and Confucianism. A comparative scriptural study is not a simple finding of difference and similarity between different religions; it serves the idea that 'being committed to one religious tradition, meanwhile being sincerely persuaded by another religious tradition.'<sup>5</sup> Doing comparative scripture can help one to building its meaning system of his own tradition by bringing or learning from the scriptures of other religions.

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<sup>5</sup> The similar methodology and cases study, see Li 2007. For the proposal of comparative scripture as a method of doing Sino-theology, see You 2011: 255–271. To do interreligious dialogue by comparative scripture, see Ford 2006 and Clooney 2010.

Differing from the American or African areas of no rich written scriptural traditions when Christianity entered into, China in late Ming Dynasty was very rich in terms of written scriptural resources. While Christianity owns the Bible as scripture, Confucianism the *Four Books and Five Scriptures* (四书五经); Christianity had built a profound system of theology, Confucianism a systematic science of *Li* (Principle, 理). For the Chinese literati with whom Matteo Ricci and Giulio Aleni were confronted, the Confucian works were the main cultural resources to apprehend the world and human beings. After accepting the Christianity, their minds committed to the Christian interpretation of the world through reading the writings of both missionaries and local Christian literati. So to speak, when those Chinese literati wrote down their theological works, or even do some theological translations, they were starting a comparative theological experiment with the Confucian and Christian Scriptures, though they might be not aware this by themselves.

For those being in-between the two traditions, it is difficult to decide to which tradition believers were committed, while to which one they 'truly persuaded.' In his landmark analysis of Li Jiugong, Eric Zurich held that '[we] came to see that the Catholicism needs to find its position in his complex context of Confucianism.' (Zürcher 2003: 73) But, on the contrary, this paper will argue that, in Li Jiugong's work, the Confucianism ought to find its own position in the fundamentally Christian meaning system. In other words, it's the Confucianism that Li Jiugong are persuaded but the Christian he committed. In his theology Christian messages play a dominant role, while the Confucian tradition had been manipulated, transferred, and re-interpreted into his Christian system, and it had become a good resource for him to build Chinese theology.

In analyzing Li Jiugong's work, as he had been soaked in the Confucian tradition since childhood but late committed fully to Christianity, the Confucian understanding of 'Scripture' may be a good analogy. In using scriptures to building their cultural identities, Christianity understand the scriptures as the 'rule of faith,' while Confucian understanding of the role of scripture much softer as an ongoing project of 'weaving' (经), a metaphor coming from the weaver. The work of *Meditation* in which Li Jiugong set forth his Christian faith, is like a piece of fabric of a weaver, and the Confucian thoughts were weaved at any moment into his Christian religious system.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For the metaphor of 'weaving' in cross cultural study, see Standaert 2009.

## 2. The Life and Works of Li Jiugong

Compared with those famous upper-class Chinese Christian literati, like the ‘Three Pillars’ 三柱石, Li Jiugong represents the middle-low class Christian intellectuals. His birth date is unknown. In 1628, after met with Giulio Aleni, less than three months, he and his elder brother Li Jiubiao were baptized. Afterwards he went back to his hometown Fu-Tang in Fu Jian Province to do missionary work, write and publish books. Since then, he never attended the imperial examination, nor discussed the public policies, but only devoted to serve the local church. During this period, he helped his brother Li Jiubiao compile the work of *Daily Dialogue between Giulio Aleni and Chinese Followers* (《口铎日抄》), while he himself also wrote another book *Reflection of Spiritual Exercise* (《励修一鉴》) in 1639.

It was the time when Ming Dynasty was falling and Qing Dynasty rising. He couldn’t maintain a peaceful life of reading, writing and publishing. In 1645, the Qing army attacked the South China and South Ming Dynasty was collapsed. In 1646, Zhu Yujian 朱聿键, the king of Tang, was captured and killed by Qing army in Fu-zhou city. In 1647, the Fu-Tang where Li Jiugong was living in was taken by Qing army, his brother Li Jiubiao might die in this war. Giulio Aleni escaped and died in 1649. The aftermath work of Li Jiugong was closely related to the missionary work in Fu-zhou city. During this time, many of his books were published, one of them was *A Collection of Acts of Saints* (《主行粹抄》) in 1678, it mainly concerned the Catholic Hagiography and was divided into three volumes titled as ‘advocating the virtue,’ ‘amending the vice,’ ‘correcting the error,’ trying to provide a catholic ethical system for daily behaviors. Another unpublished manuscript *Questions and Answers* (《问答汇抄》) was also completed in this period. Thereafter, the Dominican aroused the ‘Controversy of Rites.’ Due to this controversy, Li Jiugong was invited by the Jesuits to attend the discussion of Chinese rites. He wrote two articles, *Discernment of the Rites* (《礼俗明辨》) and *A Basic Introduction to the Chinese Rites* (《证礼刍议》) for defending Matteo Ricci’s policy toward the Chinese rites. He claimed that both the sacrifice and worship to Confucius and ancestors are for ‘remembering and respecting for the ancestors,’ and not superstition or worship to heathen gods. In 1681, Li Jiugong passed away over this controversy in Fu-zhou City.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>7</sup> For the life of Li Jiugong and his works, see Zürcher 2003: 72-95.

Among all his works, *Meditation* is a very special one, because it is not for publication, nor an apology asked by believers, but a collection of his understanding of Christian faith and practices. He wrote for himself, or rather for the 'drawer.' His son Li Yifen described the formation of this book as follows:

My father was almost eighty years old and always sleepless in bed at night, enjoying the consideration of the godly knowledge learnt in day. He prayed for the Lord's revelation and earnestly prayed Him to lead human to know the Heaven and Nature. He wouldn't relax until got some comprehensions. Once in the morning, he wrote down what was kept in mind. Those notes increasingly formed a booklet entitled with *Meditation*. However, they were written down freely by hands and not arranged in order. (Li 2002: 141-142)

This book was given the title of *Meditation* by his son when he edited it, and this name indicates the solemn attitude when his father probed into theology, although the name 'Random Thoughts' might be more suitable in terms of its purpose, style and background. After being edited and published, it was divided into three parts, namely 'be harmonious with the Heaven,' 'be harmonious with the other,' and 'be harmonious with the self,' yet each one overlapped with others in fact, and thus any of them was not able to be independent.

If the book were a random collection in that case, how could it help us understand the spiritual world of Chinese Christian literati in Late Ming Dynasty? On the one hand, while it was an informal record, many works of Matteo Ricci and Giulio Aleni were frequently quoted. The frame and premise of Li Jiugong's way to deal with problems was consisted of Jesuits' cultural strategies; on the other hand, those apothegms were left freely, without a purpose of publication, hence they are also his personal understandings about Christian faith, which could be called a sincere thought of middle-low class Christian intellectuals when they accepted the faith.

### **3. Heaven and Heavenly Lord: A Strategy of Proving Christianity with Confucianism and Transcending Confucianism**

No doubt that the discussion of God is the starting point of Christian Theology. Nevertheless, to those Christians living in late Ming Dynasty, the argument about God was not with philosophy but with Chinese cultural resources. For those Chinese Christians, the first strategy is to appropri-

ate or re-interpret the Chinese scriptural tradition to prove the Christian concept of God.

When it comes to the ultimate reality, the Confucianism traditions had always been plural and complex. The Heaven 天 is both the Heaven of natural or ethical. However, both of these two explanations were not discussed by Li Jiugong, he selected some parts of Confucian works to point out that there is a personal Heaven in Confucian tradition, that's the Heavenly Lord (天主):

The Confucius said, 'Being punished by the Heaven', and at other places said, 'A man of virtues serves the Heaven as his parents'. The Mencius said, 'Preserve the heart and cultivate the nature', in order to serve the Heaven. And at other places said, 'The Heaven didn't want to govern this world with peace'. Thus, we do not need to esteem the corporeal blue heaven as the Heaven. When the 'Heaven' is claimed, the meaning of 'Lord' had been implied. (Li 2002: 148-149)

That's to say, the Heaven in Confucianism are same as God in Christianity. He quoted the Chinese custom as well that this is just an honorable and ineffable way to avoid using the name Heavenly Lord:

In Confucius works, somewhere refers to Heaven is a metaphor of Lord. As people who respect the Emperor, they fear to call him directly, and then employing the metaphor of Court instead. This is just because of the grammar. (Li 2002: 148)

He followed the Matteo Ricci's strategy toward Confucianism, raising the ancient Confucianism against his contemporary Confucianism. He believes the real Confucians are very close to the believers of Heavenly religion (天教, namely Catholicism). But the contemporary Confucians had gone astray from the teachings of the ancient sages:

Both the Confucius and Mencius, they had never complained the Heaven. In my private opinion, as any true sage, one must know the Heaven well. So in their life, they serve, fear and are thankful to the Heaven, except for complain it. [...] Therefore any legitimate system of knowledge must base on the knowing of Heaven, which had been ignored by the succeeding Confucians. How hard is that! (Li 2002: 156-157)

He thought the contemporary Confucianism had distorted its original teaching. As long as it could go back to the time of Three Dynasties (Xia, Shang and Zhou, 三代, 指夏商周) and Confucius-Mencius, the Confucian system of faith and ethics could be restored and must be alike to Catholicism. We can see that he was trying to judging Confucianism with the

standard of Christianity, yet he adopted the 'panegyric for the ancient' as a detour strategy. By using the ancient Confucianism which he had proved to be very similar to Christianity as standard, he said:

When the three Dynasties were of prosperity, the knowledge was still pure; and it was from Qin Dynasty 秦朝, the heresies had been rising through the later five Dynasties till today. The errors were hidden subtly within, to deceive those fools. [...] The noble man bearing the ambition to educate the world should be able to see far. Once the 'panegyric for ancient' is applied as a standard of judgment, it is like sitting inside the court to discern the outside of court, the borderline of right or wrong is clear thereby. (Li 2002: 154)

Hence, he brought forward such a system of judgment, the top is Heavenly religion (天教, Catholicism), next is the ancient Confucianism, and next is the contemporary Confucianism, the Buddhism is placed at last being regarded as an error.

I ever read the books of Heavenly knowledge, as human life is just a journey, the Heaven our home, the hardness helps the virtue and the ease breeds the complaints, etc. I wondered at those new messages. Now it is known that 'To live is like being a pilgrim in the world, and to die is like returning home' is from Great Yu (大禹). To get exercise in hard time, to perish in comfort, was discovered by Mencius. Although the Confucians know that well and practice daily, the heavenly writings are more correct and exact. The Buddhists discuss Cause and Effect wrongly, and then the true knowledge of the Lord is disturbed hugely. I'd plan to be here, make it known to people, the only one possessing the true knowledge of life and death, without the Heavenly religion, with whom can I resort to? (Li 2002: 165-166)

When describing the Heavenly Lord (天主) of Christianity, he adopted two other metaphors of Chinese cultural background instead of God, the Great Father (大父) and the High Sovereign (上君). This was an adjustment to Chinese cultural background, because in Chinese traditional society where holds to the *Three Cardinal Guides* (三纲), the sovereign 君 and father 父 are the authorized symbol of dignity. The name of God is called 'The Great Father and the High Sovereign,' though being borrowed from Confucian terms, it adopted a higher value than the Confucian *Three Cardinal Guides* for God was behold as the highest and greatest, more respectful than father and sovereign. As Li Jiugong said, the Heavenly Lord is the Master of the world just as a family has its master, a country its emperor, even though both of the two kinds of master are ruled by this Master. (Li 2002: 149)



He explained the reason why he calls the Heavenly Lord with the name of 'the Great Father and the High Sovereign.' According to the properties of God, it helps reveal the God's two properties, namely majesty and kindness, as in 'honoring the parents.' According to the human's attitude to God, this is also the two basic virtues, fear and love, toward God. He then even developed a special Christology centered upon the cardinal virtues, because the Heavenly Lord as 'the Great Father and the High Sovereign' is mostly concentrated and reflected through the Crucifixion of Christ:

The Heavenly Lord is the Great Father, the High Sovereign. He wishes the human not to commit the sins, but can't simply spare the sinners. So he came down to be the incarnated and suffered from death, in order to redeem us by abandoning himself, this event shows the greatest Charity and Righteousness. To the Charity, we ought to return with love. To the Righteousness, we must fear. The fear should pair with the thankfulness, and then even the slightest sins shall be cut off. While living, shall be blessed, when die, shall be exalted after death. This is the grace of redemption from my Lord, and greater than the birth grace from parents. Be grateful to the grace and hoping to repay him shall always bear in mind. (Li 2002: 174-175)

What he quoted here is from the classical understanding of redemptive Christology started from St. Anselm, although it was transferred into the view of Confucian *Three Cardinal Guides* which refers father and sovereign. However, based on this theory, he gets the conclusion that 'the grace of redemption is greater than the grace of birth from parents' and the relationship between Christ and human is greater beyond any other ethical human relationship. This is his creativity. His focus on the redemptive grace of Christ had made a radical change to traditional value system of Confucianism, that the grace of Christ is the fundament of all human relationship. It does not only transcend over the birth grace from parents, but also the cosmological understanding of Confucianism that human get his birth from the heaven and earth. This insight is both of theological creativity and of cultural relevance.

When it comes to the attitude towards 'the Great Father and the High Sovereign,' as titled as 'being harmonious with the Heaven' by his son Li Yifen, he tried to syncretize the Confucianism and Christianity, to incorporate Confucian virtues into Christian practices. But he also put the sacraments and spiritual meditation a very central place. The virtues are fundamental. He believed that the right attitude towards God should be 'serving, fearing the Heaven.' There are two basic virtues correspondingly, namely, fear and love. He said:

We serve God, only with two virtues, fear and love. They are two wings of exaltation, two ladders to the Paradise. Keep the justice of the Lord in mind, and then the fear rises. Keep the grace of Lord in mind, and then the love rises. (Li 2002: 158)

To take fear and love as the two basic virtues of people towards God is long standing tradition of Judeo-Christianity. However, Li Jiugong endeavors to incorporate the Confucius' idea of 'fear the Heaven and love the people' into the Christian system indicated his efforts to transform and transcend the Confucian tradition.

Next, he laid stress on the meditation in loneliness. His approach is very close to the Confucian theory of 'being cautious when out of supervision' 慎独.

The godly effort should be made every day, whether it's in morning or evening. When business doesn't come yet, and your mind is clear; then pray and meditate, or confess the sin to prevent commit any sins. Or thank the Lord's grace so that you will be sincerely grateful to your origin. (Li 2002: 163)

In another place he believes that God is supervising everyone in everywhere.

Believe the God is everywhere. My thoughts, speeches and actions, both in day and night, as if they are being shown before the Heavenly Lord, who you watch but not seen, you listen but not heard, this is the top rule of withdrawing the human desire and perfecting his Providence. (Li 2002: 156)

As God in Christianity is omnipresent, the Confucian theory of 'being cautious when out of supervision' could be strengthened and transformed for those Chinese Christian literati.

At last, he deemed that in the way of people's being harmonious with the Heaven, the sacraments shall be regarded highly too. This point is a new one compared to the Confucian tradition, but Li Jiugong did not hesitate to manifest this in his *Meditation*. Among these seven Catholic sacraments, the baptism and confession were especially important to him. He reckoned the importance of baptism as below:

Everyone since the birth has been infected by the original sin. Only the Bible is indubitable. The youths are more likely inclined to the evil than to the virtue, hence they must be taught strictly by the teachers. Not everyone can reach the achievement [...]. Well, that's the reason why the baptism was established in Heavenly Religion; Therefore to those who convert to the Lord firmly, the holy water is given, and their sins are wiped off. Then it could be seen that even the stubborn could

perceive, the coward could be encouraged, because the holy grace of the great Lord is given out in baptism. The root of goodness has been planted since the day of baptism. Compared with other graces, this one is first and foremost. (Li 2002: 160–161)

As to the spiritual and moral effects of confession, he said that,

Great is the rule of confession! That may let those who practice it more and more cautious in every day, and the sins are less and less. It must be known that, the rule of cleansing the sins is to guide people from surface into depth. The first confession is to correct the big errors; the next confession is to correct the small mistakes. Increasingly, there is no room for any flaws and the heart should be polished as the sleekest one, this makes people feel comfortable. The confession shall be done frequently. As the heart is more and more cautious, the sins become less and less. (Li 2002: 163–164)

His understanding of the spiritual and ethical function of confession could be compared with the view of a contemporary great Confucian Liu Zongzhou 刘宗周, who also pointed that repentance and confession as a moral practice of Confucians.

In discussing the state of being harmonious with Heavenly Lord, Li used the metaphor of ‘the vine branches and the vine tree’ in Bible to express the unity of human and the Heavenly Lord:

Who has been blessed and harmonious with the Lord, is like a branch with tree and the God is more approachable to us. Therefore in my heart, there shall be somewhere warm as fire, obedient as doves, where is loved by God. Where the heart cold as water, proud as lions, it would be like a branch cut off from tree. Once the grace is lost, the eternal death shall come. Consider it and keep it, why not being cautious? (Li 2002: 170)

In Li Jiugong’s theological arguments about being harmonious with the Heaven 和天, it can be seen that, the Confucian scripture, metaphor and ethical principles were a resource to elaborate his Christian faith. For example, he interpreted that the Heaven that had been heavily described by the ancient Confucian sages was the personal God. He used the Confucian metaphor of father and emperor to describe God as ‘the high sovereign and the great Father.’ The Confucian virtues of fear 敬 and love 爱 were regarded as an ethical manifestation of being harmonious with God. However, he is essentially a committed Catholic. The virtues of fear and love could be developed out of the gratitude to the redemptive grace of Christ, which is even higher than the Confucian essential grace of giv-

ing birth. He believed that an intimate relationship with a personal God is indispensable to developing the Confucian practice of 'being cautious in loneliness' 慎独. He even boldly praised the effects of sacraments in cleansing the sins. All of these are the new elements brought by Christianity to Chinese culture.

#### 4. Being Harmonious with the Others: A Christian Ethics Centered upon the Universal Love

The second part of Li Jiugong's *Meditation* was titled as 'being harmonious with the others' 和人, it is a discussion about the relationship between humans. Generally speaking, he followed the order of Confucian *Five Constant Virtues* 五伦, discussing those relationships consequently, with parents, wife, heirs, friends and neighbors. As to those conflicts between the Catholicism and Confucianism, he insisted up the Christian moral standard, and didn't mean to avoid to criticize fiercely the unlawful habits such as concubinage and sutteeism. One of the most prominent features of his treatise of 'being harmonious with the others' 和人 is his reinterpretation of Confucian scriptures to suit for the Christian ethical principles.

In the first place, he proclaimed the equality of humankind. He frequently quoted a passage from *The scripture of Shang Shu* 尚书, one of five Confucian scriptures, 'Oh God, bless all man,' to prove the equality of everyone.<sup>8</sup> In Confucian late tradition, the word that God bless all people was usually interpreted as a political principle that the sovereign should follow the Goodness to govern. But he transferred it to the ontological foundation of his fraternalism. He said,

Everyone is created by the Heavenly Lord and blessed by Him. I treat the strangers as the Lord, and then everyone is worth of love. (Li 2002: 177-178)

When the sages discuss the human destiny, there are two main viewpoints. The first one is that God bless all human being. Therefore all human being has the same nature, and that is the reason why the scripture of Shang Shu (尚书) claimed that 'everyone is equal in their natural endowment'. (Li 2002: 160)

Secondly, this view of equality also drives him consider the way of forgiveness and giving 恕施 as the basic ethical behaviors in dealing with others. The ontological reason is that all are created by God.

<sup>8</sup> It is commonly quoted by Chinese Christian literati, see Zhang 2003.

Thinking of everyone, including myself, comes from the same origin, and then you can practice forgiveness and giving upon others. This is the keystone expressed by the sages both in past or recent. If you can practice these two, all the other virtues would be fulfilled. (Li 2002: 161–162)

He quoted the Jesus' teaching in the Bible that the enemies shall be loved as well,

The same rain is sent on the field of the righteous and the unrighteous; only a whole heart of kindness, why should you distinguish the enemies and friends. (Li 2002: 190)

Finally, he thought the fraternalism of Catholicism could truly fulfill the Confucian ideal of 'all people are of the same family, the whole Chinese as one person' (天下一家, 中国一人):

Of loving people there are three levels in Heavenly religion, the first is self-love 私爱, the second affective love 情爱, and the third charitable love 仁爱. If we practice the charitable love, then all the people under the heaven are of the same family, and the whole Chinese as one person. This is the love of sages, and was hoped by all the generations. How great it is! (Li 2002: 191)

In general, in his discussion of 'being harmonious with the others' 和人, with the background of an equal Chinese-Western communication, he neither gravely criticized the Chinese traditional ethics, nor evaded purposely the difference of Christian and Chinese ethics. The regular human ethical rules in Confucian tradition are mostly accepted by him; however, the fraternalism of Christian ethics, especially the idea of equality of all man, is also introduced into the late-Ming China. Therefore, though he still respected the ethical relationship of Confucianism, the theoretical foundation had been essentially changed.

## 5. 'Being Harmonious with the Self': An Understanding of Life from the View of Death

To Li Jiugong and his Catholic friends, the science of 'being harmonious with the Self' 和己 corresponds to the principle 'the most crucial science is how to perfect oneself' (学莫切于为己) of Confucianism. In the title note of third volume of *Meditation*, written by Li Xiyan who is a close Catholic friend of Li Jiugong, it says,

It's said that everyone must die, and the most crucial science must be how to perfect oneself. The way to perfect self is to fulfill the love to Lord and other human fellow, and then a good life and a peaceful death you shall have. The way to earn a peaceful death is thinking of death and practicing oneself when one is alive. (Li 2002: 203)

In another word, the science of 'being harmonious with the Self' 和己 was placed after 'being harmonious with the Heaven and the others' 和天, 和人, but it also the fundamental concern of Li Jiugong's theology.

In the science of 'being harmonious with the Self,' the most characteristic point is his discussion of death. This is the greatest difference from Confucian tradition. According to his view, 'being harmonious with the Self' starts from 'knowing oneself' 知己, but what is the true self?

The most crucial science is to know oneself. People are all selfish nowadays, but few truly know themselves. Therefore, what we see and want is all concerned with ourselves. Let me ask that all the busy worldly man want goods and treasure, power and fame, but what could truly belong to you? Only the spiritual part would persist after the death, why do not you cherish it most? (Li 2002: 219-220)

So, his definition of 'self' was different from the Confucian way that put individual within a social network or at most an ethical subject. Li Jiugong's definition of 'oneself' has two special points. On the one hand it is a spiritual reality, on the other hand an individuality approaching the death. In short, the self is defined from the perspective of an individual eschatology.

Human beings are spiritual reality. This is the key doctrine of the Heavenly religion, as Li Jiugong said. All the Heavenly science (天学, another term for Catholicism) could be reduced into two words: 1. Subordinate the body to the spirit; 2. Subordinate the spirit to the Lord. (Li 2002: 155) For the human being who consists of the spirit and body, the spiritual should be higher than the bodily. That leads people to pursue the knowledge of the Way (道) and to love the Lord faithfully, which are separated from the profane knowledge.

Those who follow the Way shall not fear the profane hostility. This is natural, not pretended. The secular cherishes the body; the people of the Way prefer the spirit to the body. The secular pursuit is the worldly happiness, and the people of the Way hope the heavenly bliss rather than the worldly happiness. The secular desires to be famous among people; the people of the Way hope to be known by the Lord rather than by people. (Li 2002: 165)

To explain how the soul effects for humanity, Li even appropriated the cultural resources of the Taoism. Human soul could be divided into three parts: spirit 灵魂, perceiving soul 觉魂, and living soul 生魂. When a man dies, the latter two disappear and the spirit is eternal. He said,

The spirit of human doesn't disappear after death. The evidences were already explained in another book carefully. I thought it deep again that the spirit is the essence that separate human from animals. Therefore it must essentially different from the perceiving and living soul. (Li 2002: 173)

He defined the human being as an existence 'toward the death,' and there is a higher, essential spiritual aspect over the bodily or social existence. This is distinctive from the Confucian tradition which holds the ideas like 'sacrifice to God as it is' 祭神如祭在 and 'without knowing the life, how can the death be understood?' 不知生焉知死. Therefore, Li Jiugong needs explain further by the Confucian cultural resources. At first, he believed that the Confucius and Mencius are not careless of death. For him, the death is actually the central topic of both Confucius and Mencius, but the contemporary Confucians of Song-Ming Dynasty had distorted it in purpose. He said,

Well, how important is the business of life and death! The contemporary scholars don't like this topic, and I don't know why. Try to consider all these sayings of Confucius and Mencius. They are mentioned death all the times. (Li 2002: 225-226)

He even used the Confucius distinction between 'end' 终 and 'death' 死 to prove that the Christian view of death corresponds to the Confucian classical view of death. The death is not the end of life, but a 'return to its root' 归根.

I had ever considered thoroughly the word of Zi Zhang, who had ever said the death of man of virtue is an 'ending', and the death of villain is a 'death'. Now I realized that an end and a death can't be confused. Because an end is the name of accomplishment of a start, but the death is the opposite of life. Only the man of virtues receives the nature from heaven, who is perfect on virtue and knowledge, so he can go back to heavenly homeland joyfully, and this is an end out of death. As to those villains, who never have the knowledge and never practice their virtues, they will be sent to hell, to suffering the eternal pain, and the eternal death, so it is called the real death after death. Can it be said as an end? (Li 2002: 210-211)

He tried to explain the Confucian understanding of death of sage as an 'end,' that means 'going back to the heavenly homeland.' For him, it is

the same as the exaltation to the Heavenly Kingdom in Christianity. On the contrary, the 'death' of villain, is for the virtue-less heathen. Thus, the Confucian understanding of death is actually the same as that of Christianity.

Therefore, Li Jiugong had put forward his idea of 'life is actually a journey.' To him, this life is a pilgrim to the eternal heavenly kingdom,

There is no eternal party of friends in this world, as well as no eternal beings. So when the sage was alive, he regarded those worldly things and people contemporary and was busy with practice of holiness, on the road to heavenly kingdom. He is just a pilgrimage, who merely pays attention to his road, neither enjoys the beautiful things nor have a rest. Only hope to arrive the homeland, then his heart can be relaxed. If regard this world only as a lodge place, what else can delay the step? (Li 2002: 190–191)

The Catholic faith, accepted by Li Jiugong, had exploded the Confucian view of life and death. For him, no more the Confucius saying of 'without knowing life, no knowledge of death' is valid, but on the contrary, 'without the knowledge of death, the life becomes unknown.' The relationship of death and life was greatly discussed by him, and he thought that the only way to practice the life is to study the death. Only the heart is full of idea of death, then the sins can be cured and life can be perfect. He said,

Everyone must die, so who avoids this topic is a fool. The death is not welcome to everyone, but those who study it hard are the wise people; as you have studied it, you already have a preparation. You prepare it, then you are not worried [...] Those who enjoy the pleasure of their life, will not enjoy their death; those who prepare for death, will have a good ending. Because the pleasure of life is the poison to virtues; and the study of death is medicine curing the sins. (Li 2002: 208–209)

In his view, the key for both 'knowing the self' and then 'be harmonious with the self' 和己 is 'learning to die':

Only those who learn to die could see against the death at every moment, and his heart is watching the death all the time like a soldier watch against the enemy. Then when the death finally comes, he just welcomes it, and what an enjoyment it is. (Li 2002: 209)

In general, although there were some commonplaces between the Confucian and Li Jiugong's method in Late Ming Dynasty, such as the cultivation of universal virtues, the withdrawal of desires, and the control of sensations and sentiments, the personal practice of Li Jiugong is essen-



tially of Christianity. And the most distinctive view is to ‘understand the life from the view of death.’ The heavenly kingdom is the ultimate destination for life, and the secular life is just a journey to heavenly kingdom. Hence, the cultivation of virtues, the distinction of holy and profane, the withdrawal of desire are all linked to his understanding of death, which is regarded as The end of this life and the beginning of the heavenly home. In one word, to Li Jiugong, the key of ‘being harmonious with the self’ is to have a Christian view of life and death, particularly to lead a life as a ‘pilgrimage’ in the world.

## 6. Conclusions

The key issue for the further development of Christianity in China is to build a Chinese theology which could develop a healthy and mutual learning dialogue with Chinese cultures. The possibility of its creativity should rely on the discussion of Christian faith through the Chinese religions and their scriptural resources. Therefore, on the one hand it is committed to the Christian tradition; on the other hand, it is sincerely soaked into Chinese religions as well, especially the Confucian scriptural tradition. In being compared with Chinese religions and their scriptural tradition, the ability to build a theology through the Bible and the understanding of Christian salvation can be re-discovered, rebuilt and reinforced.

When we trace back the history of Christianity in China, it has been discovered that some Chinese Christians had done a lot of inspiring attempts, and Li Jiugong, a Catholic Confucian 天儒 in late Ming dynasty, was one good example. The building of Chinese theology today should be ‘a creative continuity with Late Ming theology.’ Those Christian literati and their works represented by Li Jiugong ought to be one significant intellectual resource for modern Chinese theology. Before the explosion of ‘controversy of rites,’ the Chinese Christian could dialogue with the Western missionaries in a gentle conversation with comprehension and respect, and they didn’t have to evade the tension between the identities of Christian and Confucian. Those who have read the *Meditation* of Li Jiugong would be impressed by his easiness and calmness in his theological thinking. At the same time, he quoted expertly those Chinese scriptural passages, which were re-interpreted, appropriated and ‘weaved’ into his Christian system. Those writings should be a classical work both for Christian theology and Chinese cultural heritage.

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