

## **Dreams, Visions and a Taoist-Christian ‘Saint’ in the Seventeenth-Century Jesuit Records of the China Mission**

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In the course of their evangelical work in China, Jesuits came into contact with the oneiric universe, or dream culture, of Chinese society. As with other elements in their missionary work, for some Jesuits in China it played a part in the ‘cultural accommodation’ that is observable in the Society’s missionary work in the region. This article draws on seventeenth-century sources from the Biblioteca da Ajuda, in Lisbon, to analyse some of the key features of dreams among Chinese converts to Christianity, which were recounted to, then recorded by Jesuit missionaries in the field. It shows that these accounts displayed characteristics that were common to both local Chinese and imported Christian traditions, which created a kind of shared, “negotiated” space between these two worlds. This theme, it will be shown, functioned as a tool of intercultural dialogue while, in the hands of the Jesuits, and in terms of their specific objectives, it was also a basis for evangelization in the China mission.

By exploring, simultaneously, Chinese and European traditions on dream analysis, a key aim of the article thus is to identify, as far as the Chinese converts’ narratives of dreams are concerned, what belonged to Chinese tradition and what was related to a missionary strategy that sought to promote the efficacy of the sacraments and the veracity of the Christian mysteries. At the same time, the study seeks to establish the significance of these narratives for the Christian converts in one of their inner-most spheres of existence – their dream life; it explores, too, how their dream accounts functioned as a tool to solve inner conflicts resulting from their adherence to a new faith whose origins and historical development belonged to such a different cultural milieu from their own.

The article includes a case study that draws on records left by

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the Jesuit Jacques Motel about a Christian convert whose dreams and visions are markedly different from those pertaining to the general Chinese tradition of oneiromancy. A close look demonstrates that these dream accounts belong to a Taoist framework. From this example, another scope of this study is to determine the limits as well as the possibilities that Christian-Taoist dialogue might have had.

In doing so, the research presented here is intended to assimilate and build on previous studies of dreams in the Chinese Christian mission, especially two seminal articles by professor Ronnie Po-Chia Hsia, comparing Christian and Buddhist dreams.<sup>1</sup> It extends these findings by taking the theme into the Taoist realm by using documents almost entirely written in Portuguese, and which therefore have remained almost unknown to a non-Lusophone audience and scholarship.

### **Dreams: China and the West**

The Ajuda records about the Jesuit China mission in the seventeenth century show that, for Chinese, dreams were considered one of the most important forms of supernatural manifestation, along with spirit possession. This was possibly the result of an evolution that had taken place in China concerning the interpretation of dreams. In fact, according to Richard Strassberg, during the medieval period a literary genre emerged in China, which was particularly suitable for an approach to the problem of how *yang*, the world of the living, and the universe of *yin*, the supernatural realm, related to each other. This genre, which can be translated as “anomaly account” (“*Zhiguai*”), was preceded by a long tradition of collecting and categorizing strange phenomena as part of a “cultural process of defining the normal and domesticating the threats of the unknown, foreign and uncontrollable”.<sup>2</sup> These accounts were written, normally, by officials and *literati*, and concerned near-death experiences, travels to Heaven and Hell, meetings with gods and goddesses, demons, ghosts, etc. In fact, this is the raw material that one finds in accounts of Chinese converts’ dreams, under a Christian garb.

There were several theories on the interpretation of dreams in China, ranging from the most religious and spiritual to the most sceptical and naturalist. Therefore, it is impossible to speak of a

1 Two articles, Part 1 and 2, with the same title, “Dreams and Conversions”, were published in the *Journal of Religious History*, in 2005 and 2010.

2 Strassberg, *Wandering Spirits*, 17.

"Chinese theory" of dreams. One of the most widespread ideas was that a dream is a journey of the soul, leaving the body during sleep.<sup>3</sup> Such an idea was intimately related to the Taoist concept of the human soul, in which a higher part ("hun"), separates itself from the lower part ("po"), and starts an out-of-body journey.<sup>4</sup> Taoists believed that evil spirits, invited by the lower part of the soul, could cause these dreams. Consequently, this led Taoists to have a negative opinion of dreams, at least in the earlier times, as a lower and corrupt form of contact with the spirits. As such, not to dream was considered the most elevated stage of self-cultivation.<sup>5</sup> Buddhism, in its turn, had a twofold influence regarding dreams. Some schools introduced more complex visions of the afterlife, which were highly influential in popular images concerning Heaven and Hell. On the other hand, in a more apophatic Buddhist tradition, dreams could be seen as metaphors of the illusory nature of reality.<sup>6</sup> This was the expression of a double nature displayed by Buddhism, which led the Jesuits to consider it as a kind of atheism with a face of idolatry. Notwithstanding, in the perspective of Chinese culture there existed also sceptical and rationalist theories concerning dreams from earlier times. The most ancient of the sceptics is perhaps Wang Chong (29–97 CE), from the Han dynasty, who questioned the immortality of the soul. Despite being a minority, this current started by Chong seems to anticipate an approach to dreams that came into being in contemporary western culture.<sup>7</sup> Besides this, one should also note the importance of incubatory dreams in the Ming and Qing dynasties.<sup>8</sup> People slept in caves and sacred places, in order to communicate with and be inspired by the gods. In the early Ming era, high officials were expected, when entering in a walled town, to sleep in the sanctuary of the local god, for his instructions and will to be transmitted. The ritual implied fasting and libations.<sup>9</sup>

The final period of the Ming dynasty, with its emphasis on subjectivity and self-awareness, was the period when interest

3 Eberhard, *A Dictionary of Chinese Symbols*, 86.

4 Lin, "Religious Taoism", 103.

5 Strassberg, *Wandering Spirits*, 10.

6 Strassberg, *Wandering Spirits*, 14.

7 Bulkeley, *Dreaming in the World's Religions*, 73.

8 *Ibid.*, 73.

9 Laufer, "Inspirational Dreams", 210.

in dreams peaked. Jesuits faced a whole oneirological culture to which they had to respond. The missionaries possessed, as well as the Chinese, a theory on the matter. Christianity had inherited its oneirology from Antiquity, structured upon the dichotomy whereby dreams were either false (inspired by the demon) or true (inspired by God). Nevertheless, there remained a general distrust towards dreams, whose interpretation was often difficult, and sometimes impenetrable. In the twelfth century, European Theology adopted Aristotle, who had written three works in which he displayed a rational criticism towards dreams.<sup>10</sup> This enhanced the naturalistic view of dreams.

The Jesuits read Aristotle through the lenses of Thomas Aquinas. In other words, they assimilated the Stagirite's naturalism under the perspective of Revelation.<sup>11</sup> This led them to develop a balanced and intermediate point of view. As far as the China mission is concerned, the two missionaries of the Society of Jesus who wrote the most on dreams were Giulio Aleni SJ and Francesco Sambiasi SJ.<sup>12</sup> Aleni, for instance, embodies a perfect example of this synthesis of naturalism and Revelation, by adopting a dichotomy between internal dreams — whose origin is considered to be physiological — and external dreams, whose source could be divine or demonic. However, Aleni considered that divinely inspired dreams were extremely rare.<sup>13</sup> Thus, he refuted the Chinese idea of dreams because of a separation that he saw between the lower and higher parts of the human soul.

Nevertheless, not all Jesuits shared Aleni's scepticism. In Jesuit records, the accounts of dreams reveal some kind of appropriation. The same is evident with the accounts of exorcism, for instance. In both dreams and exorcism, we can identify the application of Christian discourse to an alien cultural environment. By the accounts of exorcism in the China mission (a rich subject for further research), we can observe that the Jesuits were implementing a method of indoctrination through action, as was the case in Europe, for example the public exorcisms in Louviers, Aix and Loudun in seventeenth-century France. The method was intended to ritualize and domesticate a wild phenomenon, by

10 Cheymol, *Les empires du rêve*, 115.

11 Hsia, "Dreams and Conversions...Part 2" (2010), 229.

12 Giulio Aleni, \* 1582 Brescia (Italy), SJ 1600 Rome, † 3.VIII.1649 Namping (China); Francesco Sambiasi, \* 1582 Cosenza (Italy), SJ 30.IV.1603, † I.1649 Canton (China), see Pfister, *Notices biographiques*, 126–43

13 Hsia, "Dreams and Conversions...Part 2" (2010), 231.

subjecting it to a familiar, recognizable framework.

In the case of dreams, however, because of their specific nature, there was no ritualization with which to deal. Instead, missionaries heard accounts of dreams directly from their Christian members of the faithful, with no mediation whatsoever. Many of these accounts seemed doubtful to the Jesuits and far from worthy of being noted. Nevertheless, from the beginning of the China mission, the Jesuits were aware of the importance of dreams in Chinese culture, up to a point where one can speak of a "dream culture". As far as the Jesuit records are concerned, there were several moments where the fathers commented on the subject, with a wide variety of responses, from annoyed scepticism to apologetic enthusiasm. In between these positions, there were moderate and cautious responses, such as that of a Jesuit father at Hangzhou regarding one of his converts' dreams that had been reported to him: "even considering that the Chinese are superstitious, since it has good effects, one must consider that it comes from God".<sup>14</sup> Instead, in 1627, in Ningbo, Rodrigo de Figueiredo SJ could not disguise his annoyance towards the subject.<sup>15</sup> An old woman had told him in confession that she dreamt of a tiger that came to devour her. When she made the sign of the cross, the tiger disappeared. Figueiredo annotated at the end of his narrative: "however, leaving these stories behind, whose number is such that one cannot count, I shall speak of more solid things".<sup>16</sup> In 1632, in the province of Jiangxi, a missionary reported the following: "the Chinese recount everything that they dream, and many believe more than they dream, and they all see themselves as men and women of visions and revelations, in order to be heeded to a level that their works would not justify".<sup>17</sup> Reports from Christian converts about supernatural marvels and miracles were treated in similar manner. For example, an unidentified Jesuit missionary wrote from Beijing in 1693: "In this letter, I am not recounting marvels or cases of reported miracles, otherwise it would be a tiresome and endless task, and because I do not know how to make miracles and I do not pay much attention to some things that the Chinese tell me".<sup>18</sup> Another Jesuit,

14 Biblioteca da Ajuda (BA), 49-v-10, fl. 401v.

15 Rodrigo de Figueiredo, \* 1594 Coruche (Portugal), SJ 17.II.1608 Lisbon (Portugal), † 9.X.1642 Kai Fong Fu (China), see Pfister, *Notices Biographiques*, 158–60.

16 BA, 49-V-8, fl. 217r.

17 BA, 49-V-10, fl. 120r.

18 BA, 49-V-22, fl. 163v.

in Nanjing, in 1657, reported: “I have not discovered any miracles up to now, nor shall I spend time telling of some cases, because, besides being identical to many others from other [Jesuit ] houses, I do not have the time or patience, and I am not sure about the people who told me”.<sup>19</sup> We can conclude from this that the accounts we find in the Jesuit records are only a small fraction of the reality that the Jesuits dealt with.

There were, however, those who opted for an apologetic position about dreams, like Fr André Ferrão, writing in Shanghai in 1656:<sup>20</sup> “you will see in this report other cases of dreams and visions, and some will laugh about it, as if who wrote them was some kind of an idiot unable to discern between what is probable and what is certain, between human belief and divine faith. It seems to me that if these critics had bothered to shake the dust of the books, they would be surprised to find many similar types of stories to have been approved by the Church and the Holy Inquisition. And if they do not censure these, because they are written in print, neither should they censure those”.<sup>21</sup>

A particularly significant case of relevance concerns Michel Trigault,<sup>22</sup> at Jiangzhou, Shanxi province, who recorded a dream of his own, where his companion, Alfonso Vagnone,<sup>23</sup> who had recently passed away, appeared to him. Trigault had assisted father Vagnone during his disease. According to his record, the constancy, compliance and resignation of his friend had left a deep impression on him, to such an extent that “for many days I could not rest”. One night, he wrote, “the father presented himself before me, in a natural way, with the appearance of when he died, sitting in bed with his head falling to the side. Suddenly, he raised his head in a rush, and asked for a crucifix”. Then, Trigault recounted that Vagnone said: “were it not for the merits of Christ crucified, I do not know what would happen to me”. Trigault then asked: “Your Reverence, where are you?” Vagnone then answered: “for the first three days I have

19 BA, 49-V-14, fl. 165r.

20 André Ferrão, \* 1621 (Portugal), SJ 1639, † 1661, Fuzhou (China), see Pfister, *Notices biographiques*, 315.

21 BA, 49-V-15, fl. 83v.

22 Michel Trigault, \* 1602 Douai (France), SJ 1617 Douai (France), † 30.IX.1661 Canton (China). see Pfister. *Notices biographiques*, 85–95.

23 Alfonso Vagnone, \* 1566 Trofarello (Italy), SJ 1584 Milan (Italy), † 16.IV.1640 Kiang Tchou (China), see Pfister. *Notices biographiques*, 211–13.

been through excessive torments, but also excessive consolations". Trigault then described how the father disappeared, and there came "a large well into which a great fire was descending, and if I were asked how were it possible that such a fire did not consume the house, I would respond that 'this is the fire of Purgatory, its use is for torment only, it doesn't consume' ". At the end of his account, Trigault commented: "this dream remained so impressed on me that, after many months, it still seemed like it happened last night. And, to me, what makes it more probable is the great calm that pervaded it".<sup>24</sup> At that time, Michel Trigault was thirty-eight years old, ten of which had been spent in the China mission.<sup>25</sup> It is possible that, in this account and the experience it described, the cultural environment in which he lived, China's "dream culture", had played its part.

### Chinese-Christian Dream Accounts

As mentioned above, dreams were different from possession cases because they were not subjected to a ritualistic framework. Therefore, the accounts of dreams were less exposed to cultural mediation by the Jesuit missionaries, and, thus, closer to its original cultural milieu. We can see evidence of this through an analysis made by Lin Fu-shi on an eleventh century compilation of dreams with origins in religious Taoism. Fu-shi identifies five main characteristics connected to dreams: 1) dream as an extraordinary experience following a period of disease; 2) dream as a journey to the world of the dead; 3) spirits punishing and correcting the person who dreams; 4) spirits rescuing the soul from Hell; 5) the god or goddess makes a request, orders something or gives instructions.<sup>26</sup>

Interestingly, this is also the pattern followed in the accounts of Chinese Christians, many of whom had recently been converted. Normally, each of the cases described in the Jesuit sources displays two or more of the characteristics listed above. For instance, the theme of the near-death experience, resulting from a period of disease, and leading to a journey of the soul, is a very common one.

Some features of these visions reveal a Shamanic background. One of them is the fact that the person whose soul leaves the body remains in lethargy for three days, while the soul travels throughout the world of the dead. "Some of them", a Jesuit missionary from the

24 BA, 49-V-12, fl. 570.

25 Michel Trigault arrived in China in 1630, see Tang, *Setting Off from Macau*, 32.

26 Lin, "Religious Taoism and Dreams", 108–11.

province of Jiangxi wrote, “nearing death, remain for three days without consciousness, after which they wake up and tell visions of Hell, Purgatory and Glory”.<sup>27</sup> Jiangxi is a province close to Fujian, where Shamanism was more widespread. In Fujian, a Jesuit account from 1637 tells us how: “a Christian remained speechless for three days, after which he spoke and asked his sons to pray for him to God, because he was destined to go to Purgatory and Heaven, and asked that his burial ceremony be made in accordance to what is stipulated by the Holy Church. Having said this, he died”.<sup>28</sup> The spirit journeys recorded in Jesuit sources always fulfil the purpose of stating Catholic doctrine and the efficacy of Sacraments, especially those related to the dramatic moment of death. In Beijing, 1623, there was in a case where a young woman apparently died but remained unable to enter Heaven, because her parents, who were not Christians, had made “superstitious” ceremonies on her burial:

she had a long period of disease, for eight or nine months, with much suffering, confessing many times and hearing from God with great consolation when the fathers visited her. She had a major rapture that led people to believe her dead. They dressed her with a shroud in order to put her in the coffin. Her parents, who were gentiles, began to perform the ceremonies of their sect, against the will of her husband. Suddenly she moved, and woke up, with the name of Jesus in her mouth and great joy on her face. Her brother and husband asked her how this was possible, and why she was so joyful. She said that she died and went to Heaven where she saw Our Lady with the Child in her arms, and the Baptist close to her, also as a child. The Lady told her: ‘my child, you must go back, when the time comes I shall call you to my presence’. Someone asked, then, whether the ceremonies performed by her parents were of some use or not. ‘They were of no use’, she said, ‘other than to cause me pain, so I ask my parents, do not do that again’. Three or four days later, she died with the same joy, and with great consolation of her Christian husband and brothers.<sup>29</sup>

In Shanghai, in 1641, we find a case where the dying person came back to life for not having confessed:

27 Lisbon, Biblioteca Nacional de Portuga (BNP), Códice 722, fl. 204v.

28 BA, 49-V-12, fl. 46v.

29 BA, 49-V-6, fl. 179v–80r.



a Christian boy became seriously ill and soon came to the gates of death. He had a rapture and remained speechless, people believed him dead. Soon he came back to life and said that he had been taken to a place where he saw a beautiful ladder to Heaven, on the top of which he saw his mother and sisters, who had been good Christians, and had already died. The Christian desired to ascend Heaven on the ladder but his mother told him that he was not allowed and should come back. Understanding that he had not confessed, the Christian asked for a priest, confessed, and, soon after, had a rapture and saw the same vision. His sisters told him, 'soon you will climb this ladder, and will share the Glory with us'.

Two days later, he died, "with such a beautiful face that caused admiration to everyone. Respectfully, they kept him unburied for a few days, which is at odds with the custom of this country".<sup>30</sup>

The threefold pattern defined by apparent death, resurrection, then death, included some variations. In a case from Hangzhou, in 1632, soul travel was preceded by a demonic vision, caused by the omission of a sin during confession. What is peculiar in this case is that there was, allegedly, a 'somatization' of the experience. That is, the person displayed on the body the marks of the out-of-the-body journey. When the devil appeared, he told him that he had missed a sin in confession, and:

the impression this made on him was so strong that he started to bleed profusely from the mouth, falling unconscious for two hours, in such a hideous figure that no one could even look at him or stand the smell, causing everyone to leave the chamber. After a while, the man came out with a joyful face and changed appearance, inviting people to hear the 'things from the other life'. He then recounted: 'I saw myself in great pains, when a demon appeared to me and wanted to take me to Hell, because of a sin that I left unconfessed, but in this situation I was helped by the Virgin, who rescued me and took me to see the severity of penance in Purgatory and the joys of Paradise, and she cheered me up, and urged me not to fear, but to trust in the merits of her Son, Jesus Christ, as a means to reach the Glory and enjoy His delightful presence'. He said that he saw there some people that he knew in life, and showed his arms full of scratches and wounds after the fight with the demon who tried to take him to Hell.<sup>31</sup>

30 BNP, Códice 722, fl. 14v.

31 BA, 49-V-10, fl. 400v.

We can see here some elements repeating: the guide, who leads the soul in its out-of-body journey; the soul being rescued when the demons try to drag it to Hell; and contact with the souls of people that the traveller knew in life. A fine example of an initiatory journey of the soul under the guidance of a supernatural figure was recounted about a woman in the province of Fujian in 1639. This woman had given a great amount of jewellery in order to finance the construction of a church in the city of “Him Hoa” (Jinhua?). One day,

she had a dream, in which a beautiful woman, with a rich and resplendent dress, appeared and took her by the hand, and they both climbed a hill. The way was so full of thorns that it seemed to her that her dress was being torn apart and the rings were falling from her fingers, and when she feared to move on, the woman urged her to keep on going to the top of the hill. There, she saw a field carpeted with roses and gardens full of lovely flowers, surrounding some stunning houses whose walls were made of fine gold, inlaid with precious stones and diamonds. At this moment, the woman disappeared, and she woke up in great consolation, considering that this was a mysterious dream, whereby the Virgin Our Lady showed to her how narrow is the path to salvation, and how thorny and difficult it is.<sup>32</sup>

The image of thorns comes up in another description of Hell, from Shanghai, 1656, in an account where we also find the “rescued soul” topic. It is the story of a man who was a reluctant convert, delaying the moment of becoming a Christian: “he came sometimes to the church, impelled by some visions he had in his dreams. He meant well, but his actions were wrong. One night, with his eyes sleeping and fantasy working, he saw a crowd of demons trying to drag him to Hell”. When he was escaping the demons, he saw a Jesuit father pointing his finger to a church.<sup>33</sup> It is worth noting, however, that the author of this account used a sceptical tone.

Although their adversaries often accused the Jesuits of laxity, we find in these records a very clear preference for the idea of a narrow path to salvation: the thorns in these dreams represented that narrowness. The moralist trend, which was anthropologically pessimistic and marked by an Augustinian tone, pervades each of these accounts. In this sense, it is very interesting to read an account of soul travel coming from the remote province of Sichuan, near Tibet, written in 1640:

<sup>32</sup> BA, 49-V-12, fl. 337r.

<sup>33</sup> BA, 49-V-14, fl. 83v.

a Christian became seriously ill, and when he reached the final moment, an angel from God appeared to him, summoning him to judgement on behalf of God. He feared and trembled, and he saw Christ Our Lord judging the souls, with Saint Michael performing the office of examiner. Each one of the examined was carrying a book, in which was written in detail the good and evil that was done in life. He saw that, out of more than a thousand men and women who had died and in that hour and had been brought to judgement, only one soul went straight to Heaven; two were sent to Purgatory; the rest went to Hell, where they were immediately tormented by the demons. They were subjected to such cruelties that the demons looked like meat-hungry wolves. When the demons came close to him, Saint Michael helped him.

The angel said then: "This man, despite having three vices — greed, avarice and wrath — has, however very good works, because he paints many things in the church without any salary. He is very constant in his everyday exercises of prayer and sacraments and for this reason he is allowed by Our Lord to return to life, to make penance for his sins".<sup>34</sup>

One of the most persistently mentioned subjects concerns the suffering soul who calls for suffrages (intercessory prayer). In most cases, the travelling soul plays the role of a messenger between the living and the dead, allowing the souls of the dead to ask for suffrages to alleviate the sufferings of their relatives and friends. There is, however, a case in which it is the very suffering soul that manifests itself to loved ones. The motif for this apparition is similar to others seen above: that of burial without the sacraments of the Church. A dead man appeared in dreams to an ill daughter and said:

I am your father; after I died, I was taken before the court of Christ, Our Lord. On the way, I met four demons that tried to take me to Hell, but the holy angel intervened and said: 'this man is a Christian, and a brother of the Confraternity of the Passion. He does not belong to you'. The Lord Jesus gave me a merciful sentence, sent me to Purgatory and allowed me to come to torment you, as a punishment for the sins committed in my burial ceremony. If you love me, please offer the regular suffrages in church, so that, with it, I can enter Heaven.<sup>35</sup>

34 BA, 49-V-12, fl. 513v-14r.

35 BNP, Códice 722, fl. 403r.

Two common issues that surface in the dream accounts assume centrality in this last case: the efficacy of the sacraments (which seems to reveal some anxiety concerning burial rites), and Purgatory (which is mentioned persistently). A superficial view might lead us to conclude that the Jesuits were engaged in an effort to impose the concept of Christian Purgatory on their converts. Yet, a closer look shows us that this theme of the returned soul that saw and spoke with other souls in Purgatory is also a common feature of the visions of afterlife in China.<sup>36</sup>

In fact, there is no such thing as a definitive state of afterlife in China, as Christian Theology conceives it. That is, the idea of a Purgatory embodies the proper essence of life after death in Chinese thought.<sup>37</sup> Since the tenth century, at least, this “Purgatory” began to be conceived as a set of courts, influenced by the image of imperial bureaucracy.<sup>38</sup> In this sense, the image seen above, of Christ and Saint Michael measuring souls, is quite significant. However, as Stephen Teiser has pointed out, “Chinese Purgatory” differs from the Christian one in terms of eschatology. In the monotheistic creed, the idea of an intermediate state is related to the expectation of reward and final resurrection, something unthinkable in the Chinese context, where the afterlife is seen as a potentially endless cycle of reincarnations, and the actions of past lives are more important than faith or the Grace of God.<sup>39</sup>

Besides these “soul travels”, one finds in Jesuit records dreams in which a given figure wishes to transmit a message. In most cases, this figure is the Virgin Mary. Undoubtedly, this is owed to the decisive influence of goddess Guanyin, whose iconography is very similar to the one of the Virgin holding a child in her arms. One of the accounts makes express reference to this similarity, from 1688, in a family from Nanjing divided between Christians and gentiles. A Christian woman dreamt of the Virgin Mary surrounded by women who were praying the rosary. This woman’s sister, who was a gentile, began to dream of a monster who wanted to suffocate her. One of her brothers-in-law was summoned — a Christian named Francis. This man took the gentile girl to church “where she saw Our Lady with the child in her arms, and the girl asked if that was the image of *Guon*

36 Teiser, “Having once died and returned to Life”, 440.

37 Orzech, “Mechanisms of Violent Retribution”, 112.

38 Shahar, “Introduction: Gods and Society in China”, 5.

39 Teiser, “The Ten Kings of Purgatory”, 624.

*In Pu Sa* (which is an idol that the Chinese, in their paintings, make very similar to the Holy Virgin)".<sup>40</sup> Francis answered that the woman was not Guanyin; instead, she was the Mother of God. Since then, the girl began to have dreams of the Virgin Mary.

This case helps us to understand why the Virgin Mary is such a common figure in Chinese Christian's dreams. This is such a widespread pattern that the missionaries started to make only very brief references to the theme, mostly with two or three lines. Nevertheless, this acculturation of Guanyin iconography by Chinese Christians may not be as obvious as it seems. In a recent work, Jeremy Clarke suggested that the iconographic type of the woman with the child might have been transmitted by Christianity to Buddhism. Clarke's hypothesis sustains that this transmission would have occurred during the period of Franciscan missions, in the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, which marked the second stage of evangelization in China.<sup>41</sup> Furthermore, Glen Dudbridge has pointed out the connection between the figure of Guanyin and gender-based hierarchy in Chinese society:<sup>42</sup> unlike bureaucratic male Chinese deities, Guanyin and the Virgin Mary are figures attached to the role of intercession, because of their connection both to the human and divine realms.<sup>43</sup>

### **Conversion, Harassment and Conflict**

The above examples may be the key to understanding a recurring situation mentioned in Jesuit sources, up to a point that it becomes almost as a stereotype: the woman harassed by her husband after conversion. In fact, dreams of Chinese Christian women with the Virgin can help us to explain this gender-based conflict that comes up in Jesuit sources, time and again.

These were, as a Jesuit missionary wrote in 1692, the "private persecutions" taking place, even in periods when Christianity enjoyed generally peaceful conditions: "at this moment the whole mission enjoys peace, yet private persecutions are not unusual to some Christians, because of their relatives, and in women's case,

40 BA, 49-V-19, fl. 673v.

41 Clarke, *The Virgin Mary and Catholic Identities*, 24.

42 Dudbridge, *The Legend of Miao-shan*. Still on this matter, see Sangren, "Female Gender", 6-8.

43 Reis-Habito, "The Bodhisattva Guanyin and Virgin Mary", 67.

because of their husbands".<sup>44</sup> In the Chinese context, dreams, as well as exorcisms, seemed to function as a way to solve conflicts resulting from these power struggles. In addition, in seventeenth-century Chinese society, these power struggles were deeply connected to gender and generational matters. A good example of an inter-generational conflict solved by dreams concerns a granddaughter of Xu Guangqi, the famous "Paul Xu", one of the "pillars of the Chinese church".<sup>45</sup> This woman was rather unhealthy, "almost feverish, and bleeding in the mouth". Her mother-in-law, a gentile, urged her to make offerings to the idols, begging for health. Several other women pressed her to do the same. Despite all the pressure, she resisted, but her strength weakened daily. One night she had a dream:

she saw a dark and frightful room, surrounded by statues, and a voice said: 'take care of these statues, restore them, and you will be given health and benefits'. She saw an awful figure who said the same thing. Full of fear, she made the sign of the cross and prayed the Pater Noster and the Holy Mary, and the vision, caused by the evil angel, disappeared. Believing being already awakened, she found herself in the middle of a beautiful and resplendent room, where she saw the Virgin Lady surrounded by light and clarity, in the company of many angels. The Lady took a sprinkler and sprayed her with holy water, leaving her in great consolation.<sup>46</sup>

The converts' renunciation of many past practices and beliefs was often accompanied by an inner struggle, in that it entailed recurring filial disobedience, which was viewed a major fault according to Confucian culture. The dream may have functioned as a way of legitimizing such an attitude, allowing her to solve the inner conflict.

In Fuzhou, capital of the southern province of Fujian, in 1638, a case was reported of a recently converted woman whose husband opposed her choice. One night, "in dreams the woman saw a most beautiful Lady surrounded by resplendent light, who showed her a place of extreme beauty and radiance, and who soon disappeared. The woman woke up believing that the Virgin had shown her the place of Glory; she had great consolation and started to burn with

44 BA, 49-V-22, fl. 113v.

45 On Xu Guangxi, see Liu, "The Complexities of a New Faith".

46 BA, 49-V-12, fl. 28rv.

desire for baptism".<sup>47</sup> In Henan province, also in 1638, there was a case involving an announcement from the Virgin of a woman's impending death. The woman in question was willing to be baptized, but her husband did not allow it. One night, she dreamt of "the holy birth of God in the cave in Bethlehem. Our Lord gave her the chance to receive baptism with great affection. Soon after, she got seriously ill, and said that two young women had taken her to a beautiful room where she saw the Virgin face was full of joy. The Virgin ordered the two young ladies to show her a chamber of excellent architecture, all decorated with flowers of gold and silver, where she saw plates of gold engraved with prayers she used to say to the Virgin".<sup>48</sup> The Lady told her that this was the chamber where her soul would rest. A few days later, she died.

In both cases, there is an internal conflict solved by means of a dream. In the case of Henan, however, the solution is radical, involving the death of the woman. In fact, death announcements are not rare in visions and dreams recorded by the Jesuit missionaries in China. In the dream of the granddaughter of Xu Guangqi, for instance, there is a death announcement of her husband, who was living in Beijing at the time. In 1642, in the Shaanxi province, one finds a dream account in which the Virgin appears to a young person. People believed her to possess special gifts, since she was heard crying when she was still in her mother's womb. One night, in a dream, "she saw Our Lady, who said to her 'I want to take you with me, to the place of the Sun and Moon, because I'm very pleased by your candidness, are you willing to come?'"<sup>49</sup> Death announcements could have a dubious meaning. It could be a reward or a punishment. As we have seen in some of the above cases, they brought punishment to those who did not obey an order or a request to convey specific messages from a dream. It happened, for instance, where the woman confused the Virgin Mary with Guanyin. After she was exhorted to convert and the girl refused for fear of her husband's reaction, she finally died.

Interestingly enough, the feminine dreams of the Virgin seem to be balanced by a Christological pattern for the men. That was the case for a boy from Shanghai, in 1649, raised by a grandson of Xu Guangqi, who, after receiving baptism, "was allowed to see Christ

47 BA, 49-V-12, fl. 22v.

48 BA, 49-V-11, fl. 542r.

49 BNP, Códice 722, fl. 442r.

Our Lord, in the church, and His face was more resplendent than the Sun, in a way that His light pervaded the whole house, which became like crystal. This, he understood, was a sign for the clearness of the soul required of His servants". A dying man, in Hangzhou, in 1631, had a vision of Christ. This man had sheltered some Jesuit missionaries during the Nanjing persecution, in 1617: "falling ill, and afflicted by severe pain, he showed less patience than he should. However, due to his past merits, God turned him into a different man, he couldn't say how, and despite his illness, he began to praise Our Lord, for the great hope He gave him of obtaining the forgiveness of his sins, and for the grace of seeing Jesus Our Lord, who had pierced his hands and feet, penetrating his heart".<sup>50</sup> In Fujian, in 1644, a boy was heavily beaten by his relatives because of his conversion to Christianity: "he stood as if he were dead, and when he recovered consciousness, he was in such a frenzy that seven men could not hold him. Staying in his chamber, he saw an extraordinary light, displaying the Holy Crucifix in the form of rays of light. When the light vanished he became quiet and in better health".<sup>51</sup>

Like the Virgin's dreams, Christological ones could also have a dubious meaning. In Hangzhou, 1632, a man dreamt of a divine punishment: "he dreamt that the city was being invaded by the Japanese, a people that the Chinese fear above anything that one can imagine, and he was so frightened that he went to his oratory asking God for help in such a risky situation. Suddenly, he saw water coming in from all sides, rising to his shoulders, and the image of the Saviour told him that He wanted to judge him, and His anger would fall upon him".<sup>52</sup>

The above examples have provided a selection of cases representing a small number from the profusion of Jesuit records that mention converts' dreams from the China mission. As noted above, many of these records constitute only very brief notes. Notwithstanding, it is worth noting this trend for separation between male and female dreams, in which women tended to dream of the Virgin and Child, and men recovered the figure of Christ in their dream accounts. In two of the men's dreams, it is possible to discern a call for personal transformation; in the third dream Christ comes as a judge. In women's dreams, one sees conflicts arising, both external

50 BA, 49-V-10, fl. 20v.

51 BA, 49-V-13, fl. 249r.

52 BA, 49-V-10, fl. 401v.



and internal. In the women's case, dreams could be beneficial, and even some death announcements were benign. Furthermore, some form of acculturation of the Virgin to the motherly figure of Guanyin might have occurred.

Finally, a type of dream can be discerned in these records whose cultural marks are very clear, in which a given object is seen in the dream before being seen in real life. This kind of dream dates back to ancient times. In a work from the Zhou dynasty (1046–256 BCE), entitled *Shujing* ("book of documents"), one finds an account of the dream of a ruler who needed to replace one of his ministers who had died. He saw the face of a man and described it to a painter. The painting was disseminated across the whole country, so that the man could be found. A man who lived in a cave was identified as being the man of the dream, and was appointed as prime minister.<sup>53</sup> In Jesuit archives, we find two dreams with the same pattern. In one, from 1638, a woman from the Imperial Palace dreamt of a eunuch:

one night, in a dream, a solemn and grave eunuch was presented to her, and a voice was heard, 'respect him, hear him, follow him, if you wish to find the truth', and the vision disappeared. The following day, she saw eunuch Joseph coming into the palace, in the very form she had seen in her dream. She understood that God was calling her to become a Christian. She spoke to Joseph, telling her story, asking him that she be instructed in the things of God and to receive Holy Baptism. Joseph became full of joy and thanked God for the mercy He had given to that lady.<sup>54</sup>

The other case concerns a boy who dreamt of an angel "in the way they are usually painted". The account states that, one day he passed in front of a church and saw an image of the Guardian Angel with a cross made of paper above the angel. He recognized the image as the one he had seen in his dream and realized that God was calling him.<sup>55</sup>

### **Paul, a Taoist-Christian 'Saint'**

Thus far, we have seen how the records of dreams left by Jesuit missionaries are the result of the confluence of several connected threads that emerge in the dreams. The three most important ones

53 Bulkeley, *Dreaming in World's Religions*, 55–6.

54 BA, 49-V-12, fl. 280v.

55 BA, 49-V-10, fl. 19r.

seem to have concerned the solving of generational and gender-based conflicts, the evangelical purpose of Jesuits and, finally, a very strong cultural tradition. Jesuits used the cultural and psychological aspects of these threads for the writing of stories of personal edification and biographies. As Nicholas Standaert pointed out, Chinese Christian biographies written by Jesuit missionaries seemed to follow the example established in relation to Buddhist lay people, who were presented as being above role models and where edifying themes assumed great importance.<sup>56</sup>

Five biographies of Chinese converts and three of Jesuit missionaries written in Chinese are extant.<sup>57</sup> The most famous Chinese Christian biography written in a European language is, perhaps, Philippe Couplet's account of Candida Xu, granddaughter of Xu Guangqi, an important benefactress of the Christian mission in China. This work contains a small section on dreams, in which one finds a case of a death announcement very similar to those seen above.<sup>58</sup>

Along similar lines, the Ajuda Jesuit records contain an unpublished account of the life and virtues of a Chinese Christian. Although far from being a biography, these papers recount in some detail the life of a Chinese man, whose Christian name was Paul, as well as his oneiric and visionary experiences. We learn from the account that Paul caused a great impression on the Jesuit author, Jacques Motel SJ.<sup>59</sup> Another Jesuit involved in the recording of the story, José Monteiro SJ<sup>60</sup> remarked of Paul's account of the afterlife that, despite being "deprived of any sort of literacy whatsoever", "he described it as John did in the book of Revelation".<sup>61</sup> It is interesting to see that the very same expression had been used by another Jesuit missionary many decades before, in 1628, about an illiterate Chinese Christian from Hangzhou named Peter: "he spoke of the things of Heaven in such a high manner, describing the beauty of the celestial city almost in the same terms as Saint John had done in the book of

56 Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity*, 619.

57 Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity*, 620.

58 Couplet, *Historia de una Gran Señora*, 142–46.

59 Jacques Motel, \* 1618 Compiègne (France), SJ 1637 Champagne (France), † 2.VI.1692 Ou-Chang-Fu (China), see Pfister, *Notices Biographiques*, 301–04.

60 José Monteiro, \* 1646 Lisbon (Portugal), SJ 17.XII.1661 Lisbon (Portugal), † 31.XII.1718 Macao, see Pfister, *Notices biographiques*, 394.

61 BA, 49-V-15, fl. 157v.

Revelation, using such elegant phrases of his language, that those who knew and heard him said that this could not be possible unless he had had many years of study".<sup>62</sup> In both cases, the expression is used to illustrate a figure-type of seventeenth century mystical and spiritual literature, the "enlightened illiterate". Michel de Certeau, who coined the term *illetteré éclairé*, identified its diffusion in Europe from 1630 on, through the letters of the Jesuit Jean Joseph Surin SJ.<sup>63</sup> However, as we have just seen, the figure existed already in China in 1628. According to Nicholas Paige, this figure had its roots in the Pauline allusions to the strength of weakness.<sup>64</sup> Whatever the case, at least since the fifteenth century, Antonio Guarneri of Padua ( had developed theories concerning spiritual inspirations of poor illiterate peasants, who suddenly found themselves in possession of knowledge of the most profound mysteries.<sup>65</sup>

Unfortunately, the 1628 records of the Hangzhou convert did not survive. This makes the Ajuda account even more valuable; it is titled, *Report of visions, raptures and conversion to Our Holy Faith of a Chinese Christian named Paul* (c.1681–83).<sup>66</sup> The work was handwritten by José Monteiro, based on a previous version written by Jacques Motel. In his letter, Monteiro recounts that Motel had known the visionary Paul personally; it was Motel who had recorded the story, and had sent it "two or three years before, to father visitor Sebastião Almeida SJ.<sup>67</sup> Almeida held the position of visitor between the years 1677–80. Therefore, it is possible to date Monteiro's account between 1681–83.

The facts dated back as long as twenty years, in 1661–64, when Jacques Motel started a new mission in the province of Huguang, which at the time included the provinces of Hunan and Hubei.<sup>68</sup> José Monteiro describes how "the raptures and ecstasies of this Christian were so admirable and recurrent, that when he came to

62 BA, 49-V-6, fl. 595r.

63 Certeau, *La Fable Mystique*, 280.

64 Paige, *Being Interior*, 73.

65 Klībasnys et alii, *Saturne et la mélancholie*, 160.

66 The original portuguese title is *Relação das visões, raptos e conversão a nossa Santa Fé de um cristão china por nome Paulo*, BA, 49-V-15, fl. 156r–60v.

67 Sebastião de Almeida, \* 1622 Lagos (Portugal), SJ 1637, † after 1682, see Dehergne, *Répertoire*, p. 10.

68 On the work of Jacques Motel in Huguang see Gubbels, *Trois siècles d'apostolat*, 17–48.

this church to receive baptism, he told father Motel about it. Despite many persecutions, illnesses, tasks and all the works the father had to open the new mission, he made a close examination of the matter". Using the Pauline teaching of strength in weakness, manifested in the pre-modern period and described by later historians in terms of the "illiterate enlightened" (as discussed above), the Jesuit author observed: "even if one intends to think that this is a simulation, one can hardly believe this, for, how could a rustic boy, who had never heard the name of God, know so many and so recondite things of our Faith, that even many literate Christians could not know. Besides, he had no gain other than the *upadas* he took and the forty *taels* he spent to be delivered from prison, not to mention the expenses with his followers".<sup>69</sup>

In fact, Paul suffered in consequence of his conversion. The *upadas*, a form of flagellation with bamboo sticks, the expenses he had, all that concurred to lead the fathers to believe that his revelations were not simulation. For the Jesuits, this criterion is relevant in the sense that it excluded personal interest. If there was no personal interest, then what was Paul's motivation? What led him to a conversion that had cost him bodily and financially? This was the question that we find behind Fr Monteiro's discernment of the matter.

First, it is not impossible that Paul exerted some sort of charismatic influence as a sectarian leader. One finds several cases of this sort in the Ajuda Jesuit records. One of the most interesting is from the late 1650's, which tells of five men from Shandong province who went to Beijing to meet father Johann Adam Schall. They were attracted to Schall because they heard that the father preached a new doctrine. These sectarians "had no idols and observed no fasts nor any other precepts from the usual sects. Their deity, who they worshipped without images or effigies, was called *Lao Cu Vu Sem Um*, which means a great primordial father and a woman who was not born from another woman".<sup>70</sup> This was not an isolated case, according to the Ajuda records.

In his text, Monteiro recounts that Paul was converted by father Motel. This Jesuit had started his mission in the city of Wuchang in the early 1660's. This was the capital of Huguang province, subsequently divided in two, Hubei (North) and Hunan (South). Paul had come from a town from Hunan, named Chenzhou (mentioned in the documents as Jin Cheu Fu). His parents were farmers. At the

69 BA, 49-V-15, 160v.

70 BA, 49-V-14, 640v.

age of thirteen, he had a dream: "it seemed that the sky was ripped and a man of grave appearance and venerable beard came down, coming close to him, waking him up and asking if he wanted to go to Heaven. He answered: 'I wish I could'. The man took him by the same hole from where he came. After a long time spent in Heaven, he was brought back to his bed, and he woke up, full of joy".

A few days later, Paul was working in a field when he saw the sky being ripped open, the same way he had seen in his dream:

and the same man came down, asking him if he wanted to go to Heaven. Then, he fell unconscious, lying on the ground, as if he were dead, and his soul, *sive in corpore, sive extra corpore nescio* (he said), was taken to Heaven by the man, and was presented before the Virgin Our Lady. The Virgin opened a desk drawer, took a pill, put it in his mouth and said: 'from now on, you shall be wise on the matters of the soul'. I cannot say how elevated this wisdom was, but I am sure it was the best and truest one, for he started to know the true name of God, the Virgin Lady, the path to Heaven and the blindness of the gentiles, and when he recovered consciousness he went home and wrote the four sinic letters *Tien Chu, Tien um*, Lord of Heaven, Mother in Heaven, the names we use in China for the True God and His Holy Mother, whose letters he hung in front of his house, following the sinic way.

When compared to the visions and dreams seen above, this story shows some anomalies. True, there is a dream where an announcement is made. In this, it is similar to others; however, this is where similarities end and some strange elements arise. These include the sky being ripped by a hole, the ascents and descents of a mysterious character and, finally, the story of a "wisdom pill" given to Paul by the Virgin.

In fact, the whole story makes sense when seen under a Taoist light. The main elements of this story are very common in the legends of the "immortals" of Taoism. For instance, in a tale published in the thirteenth century entitled "the legend of Han Xiangzi", two "immortals", Lu and Zhong, descend bodily from the sky. A given moment, Zhong says: "if they (the mortal men) do not get to swallow a golden elixir pill, they will find it hard to slip their mortal frame".<sup>71</sup> In Han Xiangzi's legend, one finds signs in the sky preceding descents of venerable characters. One finds also a "wisdom pill" that is swallowed by the main character, Han Xiangzi, becoming omniscient. The hero

71 Erzeng, *The Story of Han Xiangzi*, 19.

says, “ever since I swallowed the Daoist’s pill, I have understood the shrinking and growing of yin and yang, the waxing and waning of sun and moon, the prosperity and decay of ages, the successes and defeats of ancient and present times”.<sup>72</sup> The fabrication of the “immortality pill” became almost an obsession of the chemistry masters in China from the Tang dynasty (618–906 CE) on, when a distinction arose between internal and external alchemy. At the same time, imperial patronage to alchemy led some Taoist masters to devote themselves exclusively to the search for the famous pill.<sup>73</sup> One of the masters from the Han dynasty (25–220 CE), Wei Po-yang, was believed to have found and swallowed the pill. The legend said that Wei had fallen unconscious on the ground, as if dead, and regained consciousness by feeling his body being bathed in a light and floating to the sky. Thus, apparently anomalous elements in the story of Chinese Christian Paul can be easily explained. And this connection of the case with Taoism is important because it helps to understand some other elements.

### **A Christian-Taoist Dialogue**

One of the things that impressed Jacques Motel the most was Paul’s awareness of the ineffability of the things of the afterlife. As for this matter, the Jesuit was certainly being influenced by the development at that time of a unitive mysticism in Europe, especially in France, which led to a “mystical crisis” at the end of the century. In the eyes of the Jesuit, Paul emerged as an “experimental mystic”, a man who knew things beyond being able to acquire them through empirical means, whose experience was ineffable, far beyond word and speech. This idea of mysticism as “experimental science” had been developing since the sixteenth century.<sup>74</sup>

As already noted, this element of ineffability had strongly impressed Jacques Motel, who wrote: “when asked about the Glory and the blessed, he said ‘Who can tell? Who can explain? What can one compare with? These are not things of this world’”. When the Jesuit returned to the matter, he answered once more: “how can one explain something, when there is nothing similar in this world?” It is possible that the apophatic trend had a decisive weight on the authority that Paul acquired in the eyes of the Jesuit father.

72 Erzeng, *The Story of Han Xiangzi*, 40.

73 Wong, *Taoism. An Essential Guide*, 67–73.

74 Certeau, “Mysticism”, 13.

In fact, this element beyond speech, ineffable, is decisive in Taoism. Lao Tzu wrote that the "Tao" is infinite, boundless, and speechless. He said that when distinction arises, names arise; when this happens, it is time to stop. Chuang Tzu, a Taoist master, said that "the Great Tao" has no name and that it is "undifferentiated and nameless".<sup>75</sup> This means that the "Tao" cannot be defined by concepts, objects, things, or names. There is a "linguistic pyrronism or scepticism" that means that "Tao" could only be defined by paradoxes, such as a "formless form" or a "deobjectified object". At the same time, being the source from which everything emanates, "Tao" is everything, which means, "Tao" is nothing.<sup>76</sup> Paradox also has an important presence in Christian spiritual literature. Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite, an alleged disciple of Saint Paul whose work lies at the foundations of Christian mysticism, used expressions such as "bright darkness" or "silent word".<sup>77</sup> Certainly, this was a tradition that the Jesuit Jacques Motel knew well.

The idea of the ineffability of God can help us to understand some apparently strange features of Paul's case. After having been taken to Heaven (in body or spirit, he could not say), these raptures became recurrent: "this kind of rapture continued for twelve years, more or less". The villagers considered him possessed, because of his successive raptures and his preaching against the idols. He claimed to see "God Our Lord in a most high throne, surrounded by uncountable blessed, and said that he saw one God, although it seemed to him that there were three, one working in a higher level, the other on the middle, and the third on a lower level, and he saw that there was only one God, a mystery that he confessed he could not understand".

Paul was aware of the dogma of the Trinity, which is not surprising, since Taoism also has the idea of a threefold manifestation of "Tao". The Trinity that Paul claimed to have seen in Heaven had a particular characteristic: "one working on a higher level". There was a hierarchy, like in Taoism, where the first figure, the "Celestial Venerable of the Original Beginning" ("*Yuanshi tianzun*") constituted the purer and most inaccessible manifestation of the original pneuma. This being was distinguished from the others, and it was intimately related to the subject of ineffability. In fact, according to Anna Seidel, Taoism

75 Ch'ine, "The Conception of Language", 375.

76 Ch'ine, "The Conception of Language", 377.

77 Turner, "The Art of Unknowing", 486.

postulates an impersonal deity that is above the immanent gods of nature or ancestors to whom one pays worship. This is what makes such a deity unable to be represented by images.<sup>78</sup> This gnostic system of emanations is the reason why Paul spoke of a Trinity unfolding at different levels.

The gnostic background in evidence here is, perhaps, the reason why Paul strongly opposed the idea of the resurrection of the flesh that Jacques Motel introduced to him. When Motel asked him if he had seen the “glorious bodies” in Heaven, he answered: “ ‘how can such a dirty thing as the body enter in such a beautiful place? How can it assist before God and follow the purity of souls?’ And, as the father instructed him in the truths of the resurrection of bodies, and how bodies should be submitted to the same penances and rewards of the souls on the judgement day, he answered, in resignation ‘now I have learned, I knew nothing of bodies, only of souls’ ”.

Apparently, this devaluation of the body seems to be at odds with mainstream Taoist doctrine, normally associated with the preservation of the physical body and longevity. Yet, in the legends of immortals, we see a devaluation of bodily aspects of personality, because of enlightenment brought by the “immortality pill”. As one can read in the legend of Han Xiangzi: “thereupon I lowered my head and honoured them (the immortals), requesting from them a golden elixir pill, so that I might escape from my animal’s body”.<sup>79</sup> Besides, in many Taoist hagiographies, it is said that the pill allows access to immortality by “deliverance from the body” (“*Shih-chieh*”).<sup>80</sup>

In reading this account, it is important to bear in mind that of course Jacques Motel and Paul had different cultural backgrounds and philosophical perspectives. In Chinese thought, one finds no clear dividing line between immanence and transcendence.<sup>81</sup> In Taoism, the human body is seen as a microcosm of a territory, or even of the whole universe. There is, therefore, a symbolic and metaphoric approach.<sup>82</sup> The two Taoist concepts closer to some form of duality are *xing* and *shen*. Both are used alternately to refer to the body, but each one of them defines a specific reality. *Shen* refers to a “personal body”, a concept that goes far beyond the physical

78 Seidel, “Taoisme”, 17.

79 Erzeng, *The Story of Han Xiangzi*, 437.

80 Pas and Leung, eds, *Historical Dictionary of Taoism*, 73.

81 Liu, “The Confucian Approach”, 49 and Loewe, “Imperial China’s Reactions”, 193.

82 Schipper, “The Taoist Body”, 357 and Bell, “Acting Ritually”, 381.



idea of body, encompassing some psychological elements such as "identity" or "personality". *Xing* refers to a "symbolic body", the body as a symbol of cosmos. In some way, one can almost identify it with the concept of matter. *Shen* evolves within *xing*, developing an interaction between physical and psychological aspects in indivisible unity. As Lyvia Kohn has observed: "spirit perfects itself, it moves towards a new state of radiance and purity through, but ultimately free from matter. In the course of this process, physical bodies become spiritualized, lighter, purer, more radiant".<sup>83</sup>

This may be a strange way of approaching the relation between body and spirit, when seen from a western point of view. Nevertheless, it seems to suggest that the survival of the physical body is considered from a metaphorical or symbolic perspective. Michael Strickmann, who studied the subject of the "immortality pill" in Taoism using several hagiographies, has no doubts that the immortality depicted in the legends of immortal Taoists implies physical death. In these stories, Strickmann argues, the pill is poisonous and is taken after a call from the immortals to go and take a seat in celestial hierarchy. According to this author, immortality is considered there from a purely spiritual perspective.<sup>84</sup>

The lack of definition between body and spirit is well demonstrated in Paul's visions, who couldn't say whether he had gone to Heaven in body or spirit. We must be aware that these documents, left by father Motel and rewritten by father Monteiro, are the result of a cultural filtering. One cannot know with certainty how his Chinese audience interpreted the concepts of body and spirit introduced by the Jesuit. It was difficult to adapt Christian dualism to Chinese thought, in general, and Taoism, in particular.

Undoubtedly, Motel interpreted Paul's case from a European perspective. The subjects of God's ineffability and Trinity are two clear examples, as well as the duality between body and spirit. Thus, one has to understand that this small "hagiography" emerges as a negotiated construction, in the sense that each party was trying to accommodate exotic concepts to a familiar framework.

This perspective of negotiation between Taoist and Christian worldviews makes it more difficult to interpret some salvific elements contained in Paul's visions: "on one occasion he saw that many blessed were entering Heaven coming from the West, and very few coming from the east, but later, in another vision he saw

83 Kohn, "Eternal Life in Taoism Mysticism", 638.

84 Strickmann, "On the Alchemy", 130-37.

that those coming from the east were as many as those coming from the west. He confessed he couldn't understand this. The father told him that this would mean that there were still very few Christians in China, and Christian doctrine was not very widespread, but a time would come when the law (doctrine) would be promulgated, and many would go to Heaven".

This kind of vision is much closer to Europeans ones. This could belong, for instance, to an account of visions coming from Portuguese, Spanish or Italian inquisition records. Nevertheless, this vision is ambiguous about the expectancy of the spread of Christianity in the east. In fact, the interest of this Chinese Christian in the new doctrine is reported as having been genuine, causing, on some occasions, popular anger to fall upon him:

after his first rapture, he not only broke the idols but spoke ill of them publicly, saying that only God was the True God and Lord of all; he attracted all the hate from the village, especially from two *literati*, whom the Chinese call *Sicu Cay*, who, supported by a retired mandarin, accused him before the village's mandarin as the leader of a new sect. He was arrested and interrogated, and he continued to deny all divinity in the idols, saying that only God was the true God. The mandarin sentenced him to be lashed, as is customary, but this good young man said, even under such a terrible punishment, that he preferred to die rather than refuse to recognize God as true and only Lord.

As noted previously, monotheism existed already in the abstraction of negative and ineffable theology, even before Paul's contact with Jesuit missionaries. In his visions, God is placed high above all other celestial entities. More importantly, God is essentially unspeakable, unpronounceable. This might have allowed a connection to Christianity that was not possible for some other doctrines existing in China, which were also close to negative and apophatic theology, such as Buddhism. In Buddhism's case, the main problem was that it was based on the doctrine of transmigration of souls, which was unacceptable to Christianity. What is more interesting in Paul's case is that it allows us to observe that, in the case of philosophical Taoism, a doctrinal bridge with Christianity might have been possible — or with Christian Mysticism, at the least. Furthermore, Mysticism seems to be at the very core of his conversion. It remains, however, to consider if one can speak of a "mystical conversion" for Paul, in the vein of Nicolas Standaert's

argument about Wang Zheng, and his "ethical conversion", or Xu Guangqi's "intellectual conversion"?<sup>85</sup>

Whatever the case, it is clear that Paul was closer to philosophical Taoism than to its popular version, which is something that does not fit with his alleged illiteracy. Might he have been self-taught? Would Jacques Motel have exaggerated the image of his *illetteré éclairé*? The elements we have do not allow us to go any further in answering these questions. What is certain is that Paul's case constitutes a fascinating instance of inter-cultural dialogue.

### Conclusion

This survey of dream accounts has provided the opportunity to consider the extent to which these accounts may function as a means to study the apprehension of the sacred. These records, in addition, have allowed us to explore how this apprehension may have resulted in a cultural construction that was, in large measure, a "negotiation".

The findings in this article, further, have shown how a comparison between Shamanic or Buddhist traditions on the one hand, and missionary action on the other hand, makes it possible to trace historically the compatibilities and incompatibilities between these traditions. For instance, the issue of reincarnation that emerged in Chinese converts' dreams was intimately connected with the idea of the purgation of souls. In their accounts, and no doubt their pastoral work, missionaries had to enhance the latter and depreciate the former, negating reincarnation, which was radically opposed to Catholicism. The result, it has been shown, is that dreams, as an object of interpretation, became a field for "negotiation". Such a negotiation was not simply imposed from the outside, externally, but also worked as a way of sublimation of inner conflicts, which resided in the most inner realm of the believers, who often found themselves in situations of grave dilemma.

Finally, the study of Paul, and his story as Christian-Taoist 'saint', follows the same "negotiation" logic. In terms of this logic, the conclusions that derive from it are somewhat surprising, in the sense that some points of affinity seem to arise from this dialogue between Christianity and Taoism: the ideas of Trinity, monotheism and God's ineffability traceable in Paul's story resemble, in some way, the Christian Mystical tradition, of which Jacques Motel was

85 For Wang Zheng, see Standaert, *Handbook of Christianity*, 410 and for Xu Guangxi see Standaert, "Xu Guangqi's Conversion", 185.

fully aware. Nevertheless, the story also revealed on the opposite side, the doctrinal incompatibility of the Taoist devaluation of the physical body. To this end, perhaps what all of these cases reveal the most is that the unconscious, on no rare occasions, was the missionary's battlefield.

### **Summary**

The interpretation of dreams has always been an important feature of Chinese culture, both learned and popular. This article aims to analyse how Jesuit missionaries in China approached this issue. In theory, missionaries from the Society of Jesus had their own oneirology, inherited from Aristotle, and some of them, such as Francesco Smbiasi and Giulio Aleni, wrote on the matter. However, Jesuit records show that this subject was far from unanimously treated within the Society. Jesuit archives in the *Biblioteca da Ajuda* (Lisbon) contain several accounts of dreams of Chinese converts, as well as some comments from missionaries on the subject.

This article also contains a case-study of dream accounts and visions of a Chinese convert whose biography was written by Jacques Motel SJ (1616–92).

### **Sumário**

A interpretação dos sonhos foi sempre uma característica importante da cultura chinesa, letrada e popular. Este artigo propõe-se analisar a forma como os missionários jesuítas na China abordaram o assunto. Em teoria, os missionários da Companhia de Jesus tinham também a sua própria onirológica, herdada de Aristóteles, e alguns deles, como Francesco Smbiasi e Giulio Aleni, escreveram sobre essa matéria. Contudo, os registos jesuíticos mostram que a questão estava longe de ser unânime no interior da Companhia. Os arquivos dos jesuítas no palácio da Ajuda, em Lisboa, contêm vários relatos de sonhos de convertidos chineses, bem como as perspetivas de vários missionários acerca dessa questão.

Este artigo contém também uma análise dos sonhos e visões de um convertido chinês, cuja biografia foi redigida por Jacques Motel SJ (1616–92).

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