

## Article

# The Reception History of *The Seven Victories* and the Localization of *The Seven Victories* Spiritual Cultivation

Siyi Han <sup>1,\*</sup> , Chen Liu <sup>2,\*</sup> and Yaping Zhou <sup>3,\*</sup><sup>1</sup> School of Philosophy and Religious Studies, Minzu University of China, Beijing 100081, China<sup>2</sup> School of English and International Studies, Beijing Foreign Studies University, Beijing 100081, China<sup>3</sup> School of Philosophy and Sociology, Lanzhou University, Lanzhou 730000, China

\* Correspondence: hsiyi@hotmail.com (S.H.); liuchen@bfsu.edu.cn (C.L.); ypzhou@lzu.edu.cn (Y.Z.)

**Abstract:** *The Seven Victories* is one of the most influential works in Catholic literature from the late Ming and early Qing dynasties. *The seven victories* spiritual cultivation contained therein is the result of the localization of the practice of the Christian faith in the West. It is still a living tradition in the Christian religion and even in Western culture. Since the end of the Ming Dynasty, *The Seven Victories* has aroused significant repercussions in the ecclesiastical and academic worlds. Some scholars converted to Catholicism because of *The Seven Victories* and wrote preambles in response to it; some scholars wrote essays criticizing the ethical ideas of *The Seven Victories*; and some scholars were inspired by *The Seven Victories* to write about Confucian ideas of sin, the work of reform, and the liturgy of repentance. Together, these constitute the history of the reception of *The Seven Victories* in China. Through Confucian culture integration, Chinese Christian scholars have developed a localized interpretation of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation, resulting in a localized Chinese spiritual cultivation of sin.

**Keywords:** *The Seven Victories*; Seven Deadly Sins; The Seven Holy Virtues; *The Seven Victories* Spiritual Cultivation; localization



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Among the works written by Catholic missionaries in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, the most widely influential are Matteo Ricci's (利瑪竇) *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (天主實義), *Twenty-Five Sayings* (二十五言), and *On Friendship* (交友論), and Diego de Pantoja's (龐迪我) *The Seven Victories* (七克), which were all included in the *Siku Quanshu Congmu* (四庫全書存目). Compared to the impact of *The Seven Victories* on Chinese society since the end of the Ming Dynasty, contemporary Chinese scholars have a limited understanding of the text and its 'the seven victories spiritual cultivation' (七克靈修) tradition within Christianity. Currently, no monographs are dedicated to the study of *The Seven Victories*, which is only briefly covered in some related works. For instance, Zhang Kai's (張鎧) *Diego de Pantoja and China* (龐迪我與中國) briefly discusses the concept of *The Seven Victories*; Lin Zhongze's (林中澤) *The Encounter of Western and Chinese Sexual Ethics in Late Ming* (晚明中西性倫理的相遇) (Lin 2003) focuses on the sexual ethics related to *The Seven Victories*; and in *The Division between Western Learning and Late Ming Thought*, He Jun introduces the ethical thought of *The Seven Victories* and its framework, and discusses its influence on the development of Late Ming thought. However, there is insufficient discussion of its theoretical background. In his book *From the Debate on Sin and Fault to the Path of Overcoming Sin and Transformation*, Han Siyi systematically discusses the theory of sin and the spiritual cultivation of overcoming sin. However, he does not delve much into the spread of *The Seven Victories* and its subsequent influence in China. Several papers have been written on *The Seven Victories*, including Kim Seong-Hui's *A Study on The Seven Victories* (1993), Zhu Youwen's *Analysis of Diego de Pantoja's The Seven Victories* (2002), *The 'Moral War' and Cultural Exchange* (2001), *Examining Diego de Pantoja's Self-Cultivation View from The Seven Victories'* (2007), Chen Dezheng's *Greek and Roman Classical Culture in Ten Articles on Abnormal People and The Seven Victories* (2008), and Li Cuiping's *A Study of The*

*Seven Victories (Qi Ke Zhen Xun): A Comparison between The Seven Victories (Qi Ke Zhen Xun) and 'The Seven Victories'* (Li 2013). However, the subsequent influence of *The Seven Victories* in China and the localized development of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation have not been thoroughly explored. Therefore, this paper will briefly discuss theological ideas and spiritual cultivation traditions embedded in the text of *The Seven Victories* to interpret the spiritual cultivation ideology and ethical narratives present in the text. The reception history of *The Seven Victories* in Chinese society since the end of the Ming Dynasty is illustrated by describing the different reactions and responses to *The Seven Victories* inside and outside the Chinese Catholic Church. On this basis, the study of the inheritance and development of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation by Chinese Christian scholars will shed light on the localization of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation in China, as well as its characteristics and unique contributions.

### 1. Spiritual Cultivation Tradition, Theoretical Basis, and Basic Content of *The Seven Victories*

Diego de Pantoja (1571–1618) was a Spanish Jesuit missionary who arrived in China during the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties. He introduced Western technology, established churches, befriended the gentry, and actively preached. Diego de Pantoja is a significant figure in Matteo Ricci's missionary line, particularly in the 'bending with Confucianism' approach.

*The Seven Victories* is a spiritual work<sup>1</sup> on victory over the 'seven deadly sins'. Diego de Pantoja briefly describes the basics of the book before the main text.

The Catholic Church refers to the 'Seven Deadly Sins': pride, jealousy, stinginess, wrath, gluttony, lust, and sloth. It is believed that seven holy virtues can help overcome these sins. These virtues include humility to overcome pride, kindness to overcome envy, charity to overcome stinginess, patience to overcome wrath, temperance to overcome gluttony, abstinence from desire to overcome lust, and diligence in the works of God to overcome sloth. (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 521)

As per Catholic doctrine and the spiritual cultivation tradition, a person's 'capital sins' are attached to their behavioral patterns and habits. These sins become the cause of all other sins the person commits and can be considered the essence or dominant factor of the other sins. (Thomas Aquinas 1974, vol. I–II, pp. 84, 3) *The Seven Victories* aims to aid individuals in their spiritual journey by helping them overcome the 'seven deadly sins' that stem from human nature's 'original sin'. The book encourages the cultivation of the seven holy virtues to conquer these sins.

#### 1.1. The Spiritual Cultivation Tradition of *The Seven Victories*

The spiritual tradition of *The Seven Victories* of ascetic repentance has a deep and long-lasting vitality in the ecumenical tradition of the Christian religion. The spiritual tradition of *The Seven Victories* of ascetic repentance can be traced back to the time of John the Baptist and the Apostles. (Bruce 2004, p. 128) It was formed in the spiritual practice of the Desert Fathers. The origin of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation is uncertain. However, a set of monastic traditions for curing evil thoughts and overcoming sins has been summarized through the spiritual experiences of the Desert Fathers, such as St. Anthony the Great (251–356), Evagrius Ponticus (345–399), and John Cassian (360–435) (Tilby 2009). The concept of 'the seven holy virtues' triumphing over the 'seven deadly sins' was first introduced in the narrative poem *Psychomachia*, the spiritual combat by Aurelius Clemens Prudentius (Aurelius Clemens Prudentius 1962, pp. ix–xxv) and *The Ladder of Divine Ascent* by John Climacus (John Climacus 1982). *The seven victories* spiritual cultivation does not derive directly from the Bible, and some scholars have traced its origins to Eastern astrology, mystical soul journeys, demonology, and even Stoic philosophy. What is certain is that the prevailing cultural milieu of Hellenistic conciliationism was the nurturing parent and that the experience of the monastic ascetic life of the Christian religion developed the concept.<sup>2</sup>

In Western medieval culture, on the one hand, theologians such as Pope Gregorian the Great (540–604) and Thomas made a systematic discussion of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation and the seven deadly sins. On the other hand, the social and cultural traditions of the time also gave birth to a rich and colorful artistic imagination. For example, Dante's *Divine Comedy* depicted that the souls of those who had been converted but were still sinful were to undergo purification in purgatory, where the souls were to be purified from the seven deadly sins in order to prepare for their ascension to heaven (Dante 2002, p. 58). In purgatory, man's seven deadly sins of pride, envy, anger, etc., are systematically purified, as in the confession and absolution of sins of the mass rite (Homes 1990, p. 80). Ignacio de Loyola (1491–1556) and his divine exercises are most closely associated with *The Seven Victories*.<sup>3</sup> *The seven victories* spiritual cultivation is an obligatory exercise for Jesuits who participate in the divine exercises (Saint Ignatius 2003, p. 245).

In modern times, the Catholic Church has continued this tradition. The seven deadly sins are clearly defined in the Catechism of The Catholic Church. On March 9, 2008, the Holy See published an article promulgating the "new seven deadly sins", which include pollution of the environment, drug abuse, genetic modification, causing social injustice, being too rich, abortion, and pedophilia, and pointed out that while the old seven deadly sins focused on the individual, the new seven deadly sins focus on society. This can be described as a new development in the Catholic tradition of the seven deadly sins (Joanna 2015). *The seven victories* spiritual cultivation and seven deadly sins are still living traditions in the Christian religion and many areas of contemporary philosophy of religion and social sciences. The seven deadly sins have been used to reveal the evils of modern society, such as in investment, management, business, culture, and entertainment (e.g., Ellis 2003; Wiseman 1957, etc.). Many cultural phenomena related to the seven deadly sins exist in contemporary popular culture, such as the movie *Seven Deadly Sins* directed by David Fincher.

### 1.2. The Theoretical Basis of The Seven Victories

In the *Preface to The Seven Deadly Sins*, Diego de Pantoja theorizes about *the seven victories* sins and the seven deadly spiritual cultivation. In *The Seven Victories Zixu*, Pantoja vividly describes the process of the original sin and the continuous derivation and development of the seven deadly sins caused by it:

All evil behavior stems from desire. However, desire is not inherently evil but rather a tool God gives to assist in pursuing justice and righteousness. The reason why individuals sin and fall into evil is due to selfishness. This root of evil resides within the human heart, and the desire for wealth, power, and pleasure are its outward manifestations. These outward manifestations branch out, and the desire for wealth leads to greed, the desire for power leads to arrogance, and the desire for pleasure leads to gluttony, lust, and sloth. These desires can lead to sinful thoughts, worries, words, and actions. These seven branches are like leaves on a tree. The fire of hell fuels this tree, so removing selfish desires can naturally extinguish the fire of hell. (Diego de Pantoja 1995b, p. 520)

This means the following: Sin exists due to desire, but desire is not a sin. God grants man desires to fulfill the needs of the flesh and aid the soul in comprehending the truth and practicing righteousness. However, if man solely seeks to satisfy his desires, then desire can become the root of all evil. When individuals turn away from God to fulfill their selfish desires, it resembles a tree that slowly takes root and grows, resulting in original sin. This sin then branches into the seven deadly sins, leading to many transgressions. This concept is similar to Thomas's argument in the *Summa Theologica*:

The formal cause of original sin is the loss of the original righteousness, which involves surrendering one's will to God. The material cause of original sin is disturbances in other soul aspects. These disturbances primarily stem from the inclination towards non-ultimate and unchanging goods, generally referred to

as excessive desire or partial lust. Therefore, original sin is characterized by an excessive desire for material possessions and a lack of the original righteousness in form. (Thomas Aquinas 1974, vol. I–II, pp. 82, 3)

The discussion of original sin in *The Seven Victories* is inherited from the *Summa Theologica*. *The Seven Victories* discusses original sin from the perspective of its formal cause, which rebelled against God, and its material cause, excessive desire. This approach is more easily understood and recognized by Confucian scholars familiar with the cultivation of curbing desire and preserving justice.

Diego de Pantoja inherited from Thomas the thesis that original sin is a “natural infirmity” (Thomas Aquinas 1974, vol. I–II, pp. 82, 1). Due to the existence of original sin, people leave God, the root of all goodness, and do not know clearly that the direction of overcoming sin and building virtue is to return to God, and do not follow the right way of moral cultivation, which leads to the failure of people to overcome sin and cultivate virtue (Diego de Pantoja 1995b, p. 520). The ultimate solution to “sin” lies in the grace of God. Once the sinner is moved by grace to return to the divine law and the light of reason, the stain of sin is removed (Thomas Aquinas 1974, vol. I–II, pp. 86, 1, 2). It is only through grace, through union with God, and by constantly overcoming desires and cultivating virtue, that a person can ultimately overcome the seven deadly sins. The sin of pride will be eliminated if one overcomes it by going to God in faith, in full union with him (Diego de Pantoja 1995b, p. 541). In the Catholic spiritual tradition, Diego de Pantoja describes *the seven victories* spiritual cultivations in terms of discernment and victory. To examine means to discern, under the light of faith, the nature of the seven deadly sins, their concrete manifestations and harmful effects, as well as the ultimate judgment of God and the end of the world, and to consciously avoid committing the seven deadly sins and their related sins. The seven deadly sins are discussed by quoting both positive and negative aspects of the Bible, the teachings of the sages, and moral stories, and discussing the specific ways to overcome the seven deadly sins. As the seven deadly sins are the habits that are formed in the human body after the sin of the patriarchs, and virtue is also a habit. When a person is born again by God’s grace, sharing the divine nature and living under God’s rule and guidance, he or she can cultivate the seven deadly sins and the seven holy virtues, which are the opposite of the seven deadly sins and will eventually become the seven virtues. The seven holy virtues will eventually overcome the seven deadly sins with the seven virtues. In the following section, we will explain how *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation unfolds by introducing the basic contents of *The Seven Victories*.

### 1.3. Basic Elements of *The Seven Victories*

In the text of *The Seven Victories*, Diego de Pantoja clearly defined the seven deadly sins and the seven holy virtues, citing the teachings of the Bible, the teachings of the sages, and moral stories both positive and negative to help readers examine the ugliness of the seven deadly sins, consciously rectify all of their seven deadly sins habits, and to overcome the seven holy virtues by building them up.

#### (1) Humility to overcome pride

Diego de Pantoja defined pride as the excessive pursuit of honor and considers it to be apostasy from God and disobedience. The proud person believes that their goodness is solely due to their own efforts and fails to acknowledge God’s role in it. As a result, they take pride in their wealth, beauty, and virtue, and may even boast about themselves to gain a good reputation, while looking down on others and considering themselves superior (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 522). By God’s grace, recognize the dangers of pride through introspection, and overcome the sin of pride through denial: (1) Do not be proud of riches and longevity. (2) Do not boast in virtue and beauty. (3) Do not think that one is different from others. (4) Do not chase after fame and fortune. (5) Do not make a name for oneself and deceive the world. (6) Do not listen to flattery. (7) Do not seek riches and honor. On the positive side, Diego de Pantoja advocates overcoming pride by cultivating

the virtue of humility. Humility, he says, is the abasement of the self, which stems from the knowledge of God and the understanding that everything one has comes from God (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 534). In order to cultivate the virtue of humility, it is necessary to deepen one's knowledge of oneself, i.e., to recognize one's own shortcomings, to realize that one is a sinner, and to be willing to repent deeply, to depreciate oneself, and even to proclaim oneself to the world, inviting shame, in order to be humbled (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 539). In the end, humility overcomes pride.

#### (2) Kindness to overcome envy

When it comes to envy, Diego de Pantoja said that envy is the friend of pride, it is a state of mind that is saddened by the happiness of others and gloats over their misfortune. The envious person enjoys counting the sins of others, even denigrating them, and, therefore, enjoys hearing the denigration of others (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 541). There are three ways to overcome the sin of envy, namely, (1) by not counting the evils of others, (2) not speaking ill of others, and (3) not listening to the slander of others. On the positive side, Diego de Pantoja points out that envy is to be overcome by the virtue of kindness. The Bible teaches that the two greatest commandments of God are to love God above all things and to love others as oneself. Kindness is to regard all people as sons of God, hoping that others will also receive God's blessings, be delivered from hell, and enjoy the blessings of heaven. At the same time, it cares for the needs of others, gives alms to the needy, and helps them to avoid evil and build up virtue (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, pp. 548–549). Ultimately, the habit of envy can be overcome.

#### (3) Charity to overcome stinginess

Greed is an unknowing desire, and an inordinate stinginess for wealth (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 551). Diego de Pantoja cited the Biblical saying that "Stinginess is the root of all evils", which vividly describes the dangers brought about by stinginess: stinginess leads to disputes, which in turn lead to anger and fighting; stinginess leads to fraud and theft; stinginess leads to the exploitation of laborers; stinginess leads to the amassing of money to satisfy the desires of stinginess, lust, and slothfulness, etc. In short, stinginess nourishes the generation of sins and corrupts the cultivation of virtue (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 551). There are three ways to overcome stinginess: first, to dissolve the greed in one's heart by thanking God; second, to cure the stinginess in one's heart through charity; and third, to free oneself from the bondage of greed and stinginess by being contented with one's poverty and happiness (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, pp. 552, 554, 557). On the positive side, Diego de Pantoja points out that God is the source of the virtue of charity and that many sages throughout history have set an example of generous charity. According to the teaching of the Bible, to give alms to the poor for the sake of God is to give charity to God, and in this way one will surely receive his mercy, be able to erase one's past sins, and be able to be with him in heaven. By practicing the virtue of charity to stinginess in imitation of God, one can overcome the sin of stinginess.

#### (4) Patience to overcome wrath

Diego de Pantoja pointed out that wrath is a desire for vengeance, as well as angry emotions and behaviors such as bad language and overkill (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 563). The terrible thing about wrath is that the devil can use human anger to induce people to sin, e.g., wrath can develop into rage and lead to murderous behavior; wrath can also build up and turn into guile, inspiring more people to give vent to their anger and brutalize others (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 564). To overcome wrath, one must first recognize the foolishness and danger of the emotion of wrath through wisdom; secondly, one must resolve the emotion of wrath through the love that comes from God; and lastly, one should recognize the help of suffering in the cultivation of virtue, and accept suffering with courage (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, pp. 564, 567, 576). Wrath burns like a blazing fire, and can only be extinguished by the virtue of patience (ibid.). Diego de Pantoja believed that there are three stages in the development of the virtue of patience: first, the

forced endurance of hardship; second, the willing endurance of suffering; and third, the expectation of encountering difficult trials as a ladder of virtue. He saw it as an attempt to follow the example of God in order to increase the capacity of his virtue of patience (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 570). If one can willingly endure woes and sufferings and promote the virtue of patience, one will naturally be able to overcome momentary feelings of wrath.

(5) Temperance to overcome gluttony

Diego de Pantoja described the various sins caused by gluttony. Due to excessive gluttony and drunkenness, one cannot help but talk too much, make a lot of noise and clamor, eat and drink excessively, and stimulate desires, which can either cause one to be irritable and wrathful, or to be lustful, or to be idle and lax. These are all sins caused by gluttony (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 579). In order to overcome the sin of gluttony, it is necessary to fundamentally change one's mind to think more about the goodness and perfection of God and the beauty of being with him (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 579). Moreover, by abstaining from food and drink and giving up the enjoyment of proper food and drink, man turns fallen man to God (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, pp. 579, 585). The virtue of temperance includes the following aspects: (1) eating and drinking on time and in accordance with the amount of food, but seeking to be full, not seeking to enjoy delicious food; (2) eating and drinking with good manners and demeanor (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 586). The term 'fasting' refers to abstaining from excessive desires, including avoiding seeing evil, hearing slander, speaking slander, committing crimes with one's hands, and thinking criminal thoughts with one's heart (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 587). In this way, it is possible to overcome the ego's gluttony and habits.

(6) Abstinence from desire to overcome to lust

Diego de Pantoja thought lust was indulging in filthy pleasures without control. He summarized the sins that may be caused by lust: the pursuit of delicacies and pleasures, the love of gorgeous clothes and the satisfaction of the lust of the eyes, idleness, laziness, sleepiness, mixed thoughts, slothfulness, cowardice and vulgarity, and the interplay of sins such as being lazy, slackness, and being complacent, which will lead people to pursue perishable goodness and the feasts and pleasures of the world, and to depart from the right path of God. Other sins associated with lust include lustful thoughts, adultery, polygamy, and homosexuality. Diego de Pantoja thought that the essence of lust was also the pursuit of the perishable goodness of the world over the pursuit of the eternal God. In order to overcome lust, one needs to turn one's will to God. Such a turn includes both the ultimate pursuit of God and the thought of sublime morality and the goodness of a beautiful heaven as a means of minimizing the temptation of lustful thoughts, and the thought of the horrors of the judgment of hell as a means of warning oneself to forgo the enjoyment of lustful pleasures (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, pp. 597–98). Diego de Pantoja described lust as a flood of desire that can only be prevented by building a dam with the virtue of abstinence from desire (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 593). The virtue of abstinence from desire has three levels: The first is to be monogamously chaste, and not to transgress the norms in body, mind, speech, or action. The second is to be chaste for the widow and to remain faithful to her. The third is to keep virginity, from life to death, not to engage in the affairs of men and women, and to cut off the idea of lust (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 600). Diego de Pantoja I guided man to overcome the sinful habit of lust by cultivating the virtue of abstinence from desire.

(7) Diligence in the works of God to overcome sloth

Diego de Pantoja, by using the term "sloth" mainly meant slackness in good deeds. He explained that the slothful man gives up even that which is good for the soul in order to avoid the pains of physical labor. In order to satisfy the desires of the flesh, such as the pursuit of lust, the pursuit of the desire for food and drink, once they cannot satisfy it and do not want to work, they have to steal; all day long idleness, they will make a

fuss over nothing, the jesting and wagging in their mouths, loose, laughing and cursing, ridiculing and slandering, and scheming for evil, etc., are all related to the “sloth” (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 606). In order to overcome the sin of slothfulness, one needs to trust in God, fear his rewards and punishments, look forward to the goodness of heaven, and fear the punishment of hell in order to overcome slothfulness. Diligence refers primarily to diligence in the works of God and the cultivation of virtue. The lord of heaven is extremely honorable and beautiful, full of love and wisdom, and man should do his best to serve him. Only through diligence in the works of God can one gain God’s favor and receive the rewards of heaven (Diego de Pantoja 1995a, p. 606).

With the above brief introduction, we can realize that the moral edification story in the text of *The Seven Victories* is based on the theological philosophy of the Christian religion. The seven deadly sins theory clearly explains the partiality and selfishness that arise after the commission of the original sin and the series of sins that result from it. *The seven victories* spiritual cultivation is based on the practice of faith in the Christian religion, and at the same time it absorbs and transforms many cultural traditions to form the spiritual cultivation tradition of the Christian religion for overcoming sins. Therefore, when we discuss the reception history of the text of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation and the localization of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation, we must not leave the basic doctrines of the Christian religion. However, it is important to recognize that *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation is a cultural tradition that has emerged from the absorption and transformation of the Christian faith in other cultures. Similarly, the concept of ‘seven-gram spirituality’ has also been formed through the incorporation and adaptation of other cultural practices into the Christian faith. However, it is important to recognize that *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation is a cultural tradition that has emerged from the absorption and transformation of the Christian faith in other cultures.

## 2. The Seven Victories’ Reception History in China

*The Seven Victories* is a spiritual book with roots in the internal traditions of Catholicism during the late Ming Dynasty. Its influence, however, transcended the confines of the Church and had a broad and lasting impact on Chinese society. Missionaries who arrived in China during the late Ming Dynasty propagated it as a fundamental catechism of Catholicism:

Siduo said, “God desires certain scriptures for humanity. The first is the *Scripture of Faith*, the second is the *Ten Commandments*, the third is the *Fourteen Aspects of Compassion*, and the fourth is *The Seven Victories*. However, one must ultimately receive God’s grace through the seven stages of sacrifice and preparation in Sacre-Coeur-Montmorency. The fifth part is a test established by the Lord to see if humans can abide by it completely”. (Aleni et al. 1912, p. 42)

Due to the prevalent emphasis on ethical and moral values in Chinese society, devout scholars regarded *The Seven Victories* as the core doctrine of the Catholic faith.

According to this doctrine, God personally descended to Earth to teach humanity to always be prepared to face death. The doctrine includes the Ten Commandments’ rules, the Eight Beatitudes’ teachings, and the requirements to uphold the Seven Holy Virtues. Additionally, it provides methods to practice the Fourteen Acts of Compassion. (Zhang 2015, pp. 63–64)

*The Seven Victories* had a significant impact, but Confucian scholars who were anti-Catholicism considered it to be one of the more harmful ‘cult’ books. They extensively criticized it, revealing its wide dissemination and profound influence during that time.

### 2.1. The Scholars of Catholic Worship’s Understanding of *The Seven Victories*

*The Seven Victories* is a work on spiritual cultivation to overcome the seven deadly sins. The book’s name is likely a cultural adaptation in the context of the mission of merging Con-

fucianism. Chinese scholars of the religion agree in the preface that *the seven victories* align with Confucius's practice of restoring oneself to propriety, which involves self-restraint:

For the sake of goodness, Confucius and Yan Hui praised this idea. Every day, one should strive to guide the world toward benevolence by practicing virtuous deeds. This represents the utmost spiritual achievement. The essence of this practice is to adhere to propriety by refraining from engaging in improper words and actions. No lofty words or extravagant claims are needed; the accumulation of genuine and enduring efforts establishes a connection with the divine. Therefore, Confucius' teachings aim to achieve harmony with Heaven, while Yan Hui's doctrine is the path of integrity. Thus, the Four Prohibitions and Seven Victories share the same principle. (Chen 1995, p. 519)

Chen Liangcai believes that the “克” in “七克” (*The Seven Victories*) refers to the teaching of Confucius to Yan Hui, “克己復禮” (self-restraint and return to propriety), which means restraining one's desires in order to align with the principles of heaven, neither exceeding nor falling short. The specific approach is described as “非禮勿視，非禮勿聽，非禮勿言，非禮勿動” (do not observe what is improper, do not listen to what is improper, do not speak what is improper, do not engage in what is improper). Xiong Mingyu pointed out that although Mencius acknowledges the pursuit of pleasures such as good food, beauty, music, fragrance, and physical comfort, whether these desires should be satisfied depends on whether they align with the heavenly mandate and principles. This is performed to overcome excessive personal desires. Therefore, he associates *the seven victories* spirituality cultivation with the Confucian concept of “upholding heavenly principles and restraining human desires” (Xiong 1995, p. 519). Zheng Yiwei believes that the origin of evil in the world is due to human beings' inherent self-awareness and self-will. When external things stimulate the human mind, it generates knowledge and preferences, leading to the emergence of self-desires. The fundamental principle of “克己” (self-restraint) lies in “主靜” (mastering stillness), which involves restraining one's body and mind, not relying on external sources, and overcoming personal desires. Zheng Yiwei responds to the “七克靈修” (*The Seven Victories* spirituality cultivation) in “七克” by using the Confucian concept of “主靜遏欲” (mastering stillness to restrain desires) as a means of practice (Zheng 1995, pp. 515–56).

Wang Zheng is one of the Confucian scholars whom *The Seven Victories* most influenced. In his work *Extreme Discourse of Revering Heaven and Loving Humanity*, he elaborates on his journey of embracing Catholicism after reading *The Seven Victories*. While studying Mencius, he grasped the concept of the ideal state of being described as “looking up to heaven without shame, bowing down to people without disgrace”, which aligns with the aspirations of Confucian scholars in the Song and Ming dynasties known as the “joyful abode of Confucius and Yan Hui” (Wang 2011, p. 119). However, prior to encountering *The Seven Victories*, Wang Zheng had not established a criterion for living without shame or disgrace. Only after reading *The Seven Victories* did he discover the standard for living without shame or disgrace while deeply regretting his various sins that he could not eliminate. It was not until he met the author of *The Seven Victories*, Diego de Pantoja, that he realized the fundamental principle of overcoming sin and restraining desires lies in revering God and loving others as oneself. When God binds one's heart and spirit, one naturally does not lose one's true self, and one's actions are conducted with integrity and a clear conscience. *The Seven Victories* had a significant impact on Wang Zheng's decision to convert to Catholicism. *The Seven Victories'* detailed delineation of human sins gave Wang Zheng hope for the construction of an ethical order. Wang Zheng was inspired by *The Seven Victories* to write *The Fear of Heaven and the Love of Man*. He consciously converted from traditional Chinese religious beliefs to Catholicism. He wrote *The Fear of Heaven and the Love of Man* for missionary purposes to guide more people to believe in the religion (Wang 2011, pp. 119–20).

## 2.2. Criticisms of *The Seven Victories* by Anti-Catholic Scholars and Drawing on *The Seven Victories*

The spread of *The Seven Victories* during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties elicited positive and negative reactions. The negative responses were mainly aimed at defending Chinese cultural traditions such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, and rejecting the Catholic faith through criticisms and refutations of *The Seven Victories*. It is important to note that these evaluations were subjective and not necessarily based on objective evidence. Huang argued that *the Seven Victories* spirituality cultivation only superficially studied Confucianism's cultivation of the body and was not aligned with the fundamental purpose of restoring oneself to the rites. The purpose of 'denying self and returning to propriety' is to promote benevolence and rites. If all rites are followed, incorrect virtues will be eliminated. Cultivating the body with benevolence and virtue will eliminate unkind and partial desires. Additionally, Catholicism is based on the belief in God and encourages blessings through repentance and prayer. However, these beliefs are not in line with the teachings of Confucianism (Z. Huang 2003, pp. 178, 179). Xu Dashou criticized Catholic writings such as *The Seven Victories* as mere adaptations of ethical ideas from Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, while not mentioning filial piety, the most valued principle in Chinese culture. He used the fact that without filial piety and respect for parents, one could not honor and love others to deduce the impossibility of Catholicism's honoring God and loving others (Xu 2003, p. 152). Xu Dashou further concluded that the Catholic Church did not speak of filial piety but of honoring God instead of one's teacher. This was contrary to the teachings of Confucianism and Buddhism, confusing the norms of male and female, as well as ruler and subject, and inverting China's ancient truths (Xu 2003, pp. 152–55). Huang Zichen criticized Ai Ruliao's doctrine that "to overcome nature is called the Way". *The Golden Mean* said that "naturally destiny is called nature", indicating that nature is inside but not outside, that it is not to be overcome, and that all that can be overcome is the habits of the acquired nature. The cultivation work of Confucianism lies in connecting with the root of human nature, the mandate of nature, through prudence and fearfulness to realize the essence of human nature through the emotions of joy, anger, sadness, and happiness that are not yet sent and have already been sent; and to show the utility of human nature through the status of nature and the cultivation of everything that results from the neutralization of human nature (W. Huang 2003, p. 176). Wang Chaoshi criticized the Catholic Church for ostensibly using books on moral cultivation and ethical commandments, such as *The Seven Victories* and *Ten Commandments*, to attract scholars pursuing moral cultivation but covertly stealing Buddhist doctrines of nature and hell to strengthen its beliefs and to wipe out the ordinary people of the world, whether they were wise or foolish (Wang 2003, p. 108). Therefore, in his *Words of Sin*, he concluded that Catholicism deceived nature, insulted the saints, seduced the people, deceived the scholars, resisted the law, broke prohibition, and jeopardized the country. This kind of apologetic argument cannot help but be characterized by a heartfelt condemnation and a lack of academic rigor.

From the criticisms of *The Seven Victories* by anti-Catholic scholars mentioned above, we can see its influence during the Ming and Qing dynasties. Even critics of religion regarded it as representative of Catholic thought and refuted it accordingly. While some of the criticisms from anti-Catholic scholars may be based on misunderstandings and biases driven by their agenda to protect their beliefs, they reveal profound differences between Jesuit and Confucian perspectives on metaphysics, human nature, and practice. However, despite the profound differences in beliefs, doctrines, and ethics between Jesuit and Confucian teachings, they are not entirely incompatible. They can be mutually understood and even learn from each other. As mentioned above, scholars of the consecrated religions have developed a syncretic understanding of the spiritual practice of Yerushalayim and the work of reformation. Some anti-religious scholars also drew on the spiritual practice narratives of *The Seven Victories* to develop the Confucian practice of self-cultivation. For example, Xie Wenjian, a Confucian scholar of the early Qing Dynasty, abridged *The Seven Victories* to make *The Seven Victories of Ease*. Although he accused the Catholic view of God

of “insulting God”, he appreciated the self-cultivation of *The Seven Victories*. In his *Preface to The Seven Victories*, he said the following:

As far as I can see, the self-cultivation efforts of Western missionaries. There are quite a few allusions to our Confucian doctrine of self-cultivation. *The Seven Victories*, a book written by them, depicts the subtle changes of emotions, portrays a wide variety of situations, expresses them to the fullest extent, and is good at using peculiar similes and metaphors, which every time, amid humorous games, make people, as if doused with cold water, suddenly wake up. ... I take their strengths and avoid their weaknesses, which is also considered to be the maintenance of moral righteousness. Regarding their celestial studies, the words of Zhang Zai Ximing are already subtle and extensive, and there is no need to add to them. How can their absurd and clumsy views be compared with it?

*The Seven Victories*, compiled by Xie Wen Shujiu, was highly regarded by himself and often placed on his desk as a reference for his honoring God and reforming himself (Wu 2010). *The Seven Victories* not only had a far-reaching influence in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, but even in the late Qing and early Republican dynasties *The Seven Victories* still had a vast influence in China’s religious and intellectual circles. During the Republican period, Wu Leichuan, a Protestant scholar and president of Yanjing University, published *The Seven Victories* in *Life Monthly*, quoting resources from the Chinese Confucian classics to elaborate on the idea of *The Seven Victories* and *The True Teachings of The Seven Victories* in vernacular language were popular inside and outside the Church (Diego de Pantoja 1904, 1962a). In recent years, the mainland has published a treatise combining *The Seven Victories* with elements of moral cultivation and contemporary Chinese characteristics, human tendencies, and cultivation (Wang 1985).

In conclusion, through the brief introduction above, this paper discusses the localized understanding of *The Seven Victories* made by Confucian scholars on the one hand and the criticisms of anti-religious scholars of *The Seven Victories* on the other. Some Confucian scholars have been converted by the influence of *The Seven Victories* and anti-religious scholars who, though opposed to the Catholic faith, have appreciated the works of cultivation and moral narratives recorded in *The Seven Victories* and transformed them into reference books for self-cultivation. The Chinese Christian religious community has also inherited and carried forward the tradition of *The Seven Victories*. Accordingly, we can have a more complete picture of the spread and reception history of *The Seven Victories* in China.

*The Seven Victories* not only had a significant influence during the late Ming and early Qing dynasties but continued to hold widespread influence in China’s religious and intellectual circles even into the late Qing Dynasty and early Republican years. During the Republican era, Wu Leichuan, a Christian scholar and the president of Yenching University, published a series called *Broad Interpretation of The Seven Victories* in the magazine *Life Monthly*. In this series, he utilized resources from Chinese Confucian classics to elaborate on the concept of *the seven victories*.<sup>4</sup>

### 3. Chinese Localization of *The Seven Victories* Spiritual Cultivation

The dissemination of *The Seven Victories* in China has not only received responses from both proponents and opponents of religious teachings, but has also inspired Confucian scholars. It has led to the development of a theory of faults and the cultivation of self-improvement and virtuous practices within Confucianism. This has enriched the moral awareness and cultural thinking of Chinese society. Within the Christian community, *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation has been widely adopted and combined with Chinese cultural traditions, giving rise to a localized concept and practice of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation.

#### 3.1. Reflection and Contemplation on *The Seven Victories*

In the *Kouduo richao* (regarding the records of Western priests spreading the Catholic Gospel), there is a record of a sermon by Giulio Aleni during the Good Friday liturgy fo-

cusing on the seven deadly sins. He said that it was not Pontius Pilate or the Jewish priests who nailed Jesus to the cross, but our own seven intimate companions, starting with pride. It was pride that placed the Lord Jesus on the most despised and humiliated form of punishment, the cross, subjecting him to countless insults and humiliations. Secondly, there was greed and lust, which put Jesus in a state of extreme pain and distress and made him suffer from the world's imprisonment, whipping, and bleeding from his wounds. Thirdly, there was wrath and gluttony, which put him in a place of extreme mutilation and debasement and made him drink bitter gall in his thirst. Lastly, there was envy and laxity, which caused Jesus to carry his cross in great agony, with great love and perseverance. Therefore, we were to break with these seven sins without associating with them. Everyone was ashamed and bowed their heads, unable and unwilling to look up at Jesus Christ nailed to the cross (Aleni et al. 1912). This excerpt from the sermon by Giulio Aleni connects the suffering and death of Jesus Christ on the cross with the seven deadly sins. Furthermore, it associates them with every individual's inherent inclinations and desires. In this way, he establishes a connection between the death of Jesus Christ and every individual. When people realize this, they become aware that they are the actual perpetrators who killed Jesus Christ. It is precisely because of their pride, jealousy, anger, greed, gluttony, lust, and laziness that Jesus Christ endured suffering and death.

In their spiritual practice, Chinese Christians also integrate the traditional thoughts of *The Seven Victories* with China's moral and cultural traditions. For instance, the earliest Chinese priest, Wu Li, blended his mortification experiences and shaped his life with Chinese culture, creating a five-character poem titled *The Seven Victories* (Father Madachin 2005). The content of this poem broadly encompasses a summary of the ideas from *The Seven Victories*. However, its vivid descriptions are inseparable from Father Wu Li's contemplation and introspection on the seven deadly sins in the context of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation. It emphasizes the endeavor to self-mastery with the phrase 争如勤自克 (strive to overcome through diligence). The focus is cultivating the seven holy virtues to overcome the seven deadly sins. He expresses the spirit and sentiment of his *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation using poetic language and incorporating unique allusions and imagery from Chinese culture.

### 3.2. Social Indoctrination of *The Seven Victories*

*The Seven Victories* is regarded as a guiding principle for spiritual cultivation by scholars and has also been promoted in moral education within society. In an event called "The Village Compact",<sup>5</sup> Held by Han Lin in Jiangzhou, Shanxi, he was entrusted to deliver *The Imperial Edict in Six Words* (聖諭六言) by the first emperor of the Ming Dynasty. Using the framework of *The Imperial Edict in Six Words* (filial piety, respect for elders, harmony in the community, teaching and guiding descendants, self-preservation, and refraining from wrongdoing), and based on the foundation of Catholicism, Han Lin employed an interpretive approach that transcended texts. He blended Catholic ethical ideas with the broader tradition of Chinese ethics, including the elite theory of Confucianism and the influence of Buddhism and Taoism on virtuous literature theory. Through this approach, he sought to promote the cultivation of public order and good manners and uphold the moral order of society (Sun 2008).

In the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, Catholic scholars often summarized the essence of Catholic beliefs as reverence for God and love for humanity. Based on this foundation, Han Lin sought to bridge Catholic and Confucian moral teachings. He believed that throughout history the moral teachings of sages and emperors all had a divine origin, and their core principles were centered around reverence for God and love for humanity. *The Imperial Edict in Six Words* by the emperor of the Ming Dynasty, Zhu Yuanzhang, also reflected this idea (Han et al. 2008, pp. 56–57). In Han Lin's view, the foundation of self-cultivation and learning lies in revering God and loving humanity, and deviating from this principle goes against the will of heaven and harms others (Han et al. 2008, p. 146). The phrase "refraining from wrongdoing" in *The Imperial Edict in Six Words* refers to refrain-

ing from wrongful acts, including those specified in the *Great Ming Code*, and sins such as greed, lust, and murder. It also encompasses the seven deadly sins in Catholicism.

Moreover, the seven deadly sins arise from different aspects of human desires. Pride arises from the love of honor and leads to arrogance. Avarice arises from the love of wealth and gives birth to greed and miserliness. Gluttony and lust arise from the love of the body, leading to excessive indulgence in food, sensual pleasures, and laziness in doing good. When one's desires are unfulfilled, it gives rise to wrath; when others attain what one desires, envy breeds. These are the seven roots of sins and the seeds of countless calamities. Therefore, it is said, "Sins are interconnected like links in a chain, and once one sin is committed, it does not stop at just one". (ibid.)

In the previous passage, Han Lin briefly introduced the primary content of *The Seven Victories* and revealed the Catholic understanding of sin based on his spiritual experiences. Sin originates from selfish desires, and its consequences lead to moral degradation and downfall. The seven deadly sins are not only the roots and commanders of various sins and vices but are also interconnected, interlocking, and constantly generating with no end in sight. Furthermore, Han Lin integrated the cultivation practices of Song-Ming Neo-Confucianism and developed a localized approach to *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation. According to Zhu Xi, the fundamental distinction between attaining sanctity and wisdom and falling into sin lies in individuals' choices in the struggle between heavenly principles and human desires, and the resulting dynamic and ever-changing situation. In cultivating one's virtue, the key to becoming a sage or a sinner lies in examining one's faults, overcoming selfish desires, nurturing one's innate moral nature, and expanding the virtues of benevolence, righteousness, propriety, and wisdom. The crucial aspect of this cultivation lies in the following practices: Making a firm resolution to be a sage, humbly restraining oneself from emulating the sages, and refraining from consciously engaging in shameful acts. Feeling deep remorse and repentance for one's sins, hating one's wrongdoing, and actively seeking to make amends, thus transforming one's behavior for the better (Han et al. 2008, pp. 147–53). Han Lin cited passages from *The Four Lessons of Liaofan* that discuss "changing oneself and cultivating goodness". He pointed out two ways to bring about change: from a rational perspective and from within the heart. Once one truly understands the principles, sins naturally cease, and impure thoughts will not contaminate the mind (Han et al. 2008, pp. 153–54). Based on these principles, Han Lin combined the "discipline of suppressing anger and curbing desires" from Lu Xiangshan's theory of self-cultivation with the practices of overcoming the hearts of pride and envy, as well as the desires of greed, gluttony, and lust in *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation.

According to the quoted text, the most critical aspect of self-restraint is controlling the two minds of jealousy and gluttony. Doing so can effectively restrain the four desires and accumulate knowledge, like shooting an arrow to subdue a horse or capture a king. One can establish the foundation for progress and advancement by controlling these desires. The quote emphasizes that scholars must clearly understand principles and knowledge before they can effectively discipline and restrain desires. (Han et al. 2008, p. 154)

He stated that within the seven deadly sins, both sensual and rational biases and desires exist. Different methods are required to address and overcome these different biases and desires. Rational biases, such as pride and jealousy, need to be exposed and overcome from a rational perspective by recognizing their fallacies and absurdities. On the other hand, sensual biases, such as greed and lust, need to be addressed at the level of one's heart and will by changing one's desires and affections. The ultimate goal should be cultivating reverence for heaven and love for humanity, seeking to emulate the sages, and conquering sensual biases such as greed, lust, and laziness. Han Lin extensively quoted Yuan Liaofan's *The Four Lessons of Liaofan* to guide personal transformation and the accumulation of virtue based on karmic retribution. This integration of religious ideas about

respecting heaven, loving humanity, and the ultimate judgment of heaven and hell promotes moral education and individual spiritual cultivation within local social contexts.

Han Lin's *Duoshu* introduced some elements of *The Seven Victories* in terms of social indoctrination, and in terms of cultural diffusion, it can be said to have broadened and deepened the influence of *The Seven Victories* in Chinese society. Further, the application of *The Seven Victories* in *Duoshu* was based on the fusion of Catholicism and Confucianism at that time, i.e., the basis of social indoctrination in *Duoshu*, i.e., "do not do anything wrong", was also to love and serve God. In his moral education of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation, Han Lin introduced the cultivation practices of Song Ming philosophy, which can be said to have contributed to the localization of the seven deadly sins. Of course, Han Lin may have lacked an understanding of Thomas's theology, and his understanding of original sin, seven deadly sins, and *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation was not comprehensive enough, and, therefore, the *Duoshu* lacks the seven virtues as the basis for the moralization of the seven deadly sins. The seven deadly virtues overcome the seven holy sins, which is a problem in the *Duoshu* in citing the *Seven Victories* for social indoctrination.

### 3.3. Moral Cultivation of *The Seven Victories*

During the Republican era, Professor Wu Leichuan, a Christian educator and president of Yanjing University, published *Broad Interpretation of The Seven Victories in Life Monthly*. He drew upon views from ancient Chinese classics to expound on *the seven victories* of spiritual cultivation. In each of the seven articles in *Broad Interpretation of The Seven Victories*, Wu Leichuan began with a quotation from the original preface of "Fu Ao" in *The Seven Victories*, such as "Pride is fierce like a lion, but it can be subdued by humility" and "Anger is blazing like fire, but it can be extinguished by forbearance". As an introduction, he then quoted moral proverbs and stories from Chinese classics to present ancient Chinese's relevant discussions and experiential stories regarding the seven deadly sins and the seven holy virtues. For example, he wrote the following:

Heaven's way diminishes the excessive and enhances the humble; Earth's way changes the excessive and flows with humility; spirits and deities harm the excessive and bless the humble; human affairs distance excess and appreciate humility. Humility is revered and radiant; lowliness cannot be surpassed. It is the ultimate attainment of the noble person. (*Qian hexagram of the Book of Changes*)

In matters of skill, if others possess it, one should consider it as one's own. In virtue and wisdom, if others possess it, one should wholeheartedly admire it as if it came from one's mouth. This is the way to accommodate others. (*Book of Documents, Oath of the State of Qin*)

The way of temperance is that nothing harms all things. (*Guanzi, Internal Cultivation*)

A noble person restrains anger and curbs desires. (*Diminishing hexagram of the Book of Changes*)

It is asked: "Between the realm of eating and drinking, what belongs to the principles of Heaven, and what belongs to human desires"? It is answered: "The act of eating and drinking belongs to the principles of Heaven, while the pursuit of delicious flavors belongs to human desires". (*Zhu Xi*) (Wu 1924–1925)

In the state of Lu, a man had a private room for himself. Next to him lived a widow who also had a separate room. One night, a violent storm struck, causing the widow's room to collapse. She hurriedly sought refuge in the man's room. However, he closed his door and refused to let her in. Through the window, the widow spoke to him, saying, "Why, out of lack of benevolence, do you not let me in"? The man replied, "I have heard that men and women should not live together unless they are over sixty. As you are young, and I am also young, I dare not let you in". The widow said, "Why don't you follow the example of Liu

Xiahui? Although I am not as virtuous as the women of high families, the state's people will not criticize your behavior as improper". The man replied, "Liu Xiahui may do so, but I cannot. However, I will learn from Liu Xiahui's virtue, even though I cannot imitate him". When Confucius heard this story, he praised it, saying, "Excellent! Those who desire to emulate Liu Xiahui, none have come as close as this man. He aspires to the highest goodness without simply imitating others. This can be called true wisdom!" (*The Family Sayings of Confucius*)

Confucius (Kongzi) diligently studied and recited during the day, and at night, he visited King Wen of the Zhou Dynasty and the Duke of Zhou to seek guidance from them. He could understand and achieve anything he wanted with such dedication and profound determination. (*Lv's Spring and Autumn Annals*)

Based on the previous quotation, we can roughly understand the general framework and content of the *Broad Interpretation of The Seven Victories*. In the preface of *Broad Interpretation of The Seven Victories*, Wu Leichuan points out that traditional Chinese philosophies, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, all emphasize moral cultivation and the importance of restraining wrongdoing, particularly emphasizing self-restraint. The formation of the great character of Jesus Christ is also related to his triumph over his desires and the temptations of the devil in the wilderness. He criticizes the missionaries who came to China then for overly emphasizing the divine power of God's redemption while neglecting their responsibility for spiritual cultivation. Wu Leichuan believes that Diego de Pantoja's *The Seven Victories* can help Chinese people improve their moral cultivation and correct their evil thoughts. However, he believes that the sacred and philosophical quotations and anecdotes cited by Diego de Pantoja are mainly from Western and Church cultural traditions. He suggests that if the virtuous sayings and moral teachings of ancient Chinese sages can be included, it would align with the Chinese people's psychology and promote their spiritual practice of overcoming sins and cultivating virtues (Wu 1924–1925). He hopes that the *Broad Interpretation of The Seven Victories* can help Chinese people integrate spiritual cultivation in the Christian religion with the moral cultivation of Chinese culture. This would enable them to have a more comprehensive understanding of Christianity and deepen and broaden their spiritual practice of overcoming sins and cultivating virtues. Ultimately, this would contribute to the moral development of Chinese society.

Under the influence of the New Culture Movement, the May 4 Movement, and the Anti-Christianity Movement, Wu Leichuan sought to merge Christian theology with Confucian concepts in search of unity. He advocated for the harmonious integration of the teachings of ancient sages and Christian principles, believing that this integration would greatly assist in reconstructing Chinese politics and society (Lin 1980, p. 123). In his view, the methods of self-cultivation practiced by Chinese sages align with the spiritual practice of understanding Christianity.

Seeking the Holy Spirit and seeking benevolence, being urgent and persistent, avoiding recklessness and turmoil, humility and preserving chastity, quietude, and emptiness leading to tranquility—how do these concepts differ in their meaning? Just as it is said that faith will indeed receive what is sought, how is it different from seeking benevolence and obtaining benevolence? It is said that prayer must be accompanied by fasting, how is it different from saying that nurturing the heart is best achieved through contentment and emptying desires for the divine to enter one's being? (Wu 1998, pp. 457–58)

According to the related discussions, Wu Leichuan, deeply influenced by Chinese traditional culture, must have practiced and deeply understood the cultivation practices of Confucianism and Taoism. Therefore, it is easy to understand why he incorporated traditional Chinese cultivation practices into his seven victories spiritual cultivation. Building upon the historical development of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation, as discussed earlier, which originated from the cultural environment of universal Greco-Roman syncretism and was influenced by the monastic asceticism of Christian religious life, Wu Leichuan's

*The Seven Victories Spiritual Cultivation* can also be seen as its localization and development in China. In terms of its characteristics, *Broad Interpretation of The Seven Victories* cited more extensively the positive teachings and moral guidance from traditional Chinese virtues, a consistent Confucian moral education tradition. Regarding this point, Shen Qingsong once used *The Seven Victories* as an example to point out the issue of Jesuit missionaries in the late Ming and Qing dynasties emphasizing “repressive virtues” while neglecting “creative virtues” (Shen 2004, pp. 48–51). The emergence of the *Broad Interpretation of The Seven Victories* can rectify this imbalance.

Compared to other works that have localized *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation, the *Broad Interpretation of The Seven Victories* lacks a systematic philosophical discussion of the seven deadly sins at the theological level. It does not delve into the methodology of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation. This is probably because, as a Protestant scholar, Wu Leichuan did not understand the Catholic spiritual tradition and lacked a rational understanding of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation and simply equated it with the moral practices of the Confucian tradition. In order to adapt to the cultural psychology of the Chinese people and to be more familiar with the cultural background, Wu Leichuan used the classical quotations of the Chinese tradition to explain and interpret the moral cultivation that overcame the seven deadly sins. *The seven victories* spiritual cultivation of *Broad Interpretation of The Seven Victories* can only be regarded as a pioneering attempt to localize *The Seven Victories* in China, and it is still necessary to explain how to solve the problem of original sin and *the seven victories* spiritual practice from the perspective of the spiritual practice of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation, based on the basis of the Christian faith. There is still a need to use Chinese cultural elements on the basis of the Christian faith to explain how to solve the problems of original sin and seven deadly sins from the perspective of sin-control spirituality, and how to overcome sins and build up virtues in the course of returning to the faith of God.

Cultivating “self-power” is another characteristic of Christian faith and life. Whether it is Shenxiu’s “dusting off the mirror day after day”, the Confucian values of sincerity, rectitude, cautious solitude, and respectful conduct, the Daoist pursuit of utmost emptiness and deep stillness, or the Christian concepts of awakening and after receiving five talents<sup>6</sup>He immediately went to engage in business with them and earned five more talentum. All involve a gradual process of self-realization. Through this process, one can truly understand the nature of the mind, restore one’s original self, and rebuild the temple of the Holy Spirit. This process of self-power is akin to the transformative journey of sharing in Christ’s personal experience of death and resurrection. (Zhang 2002, pp. 63–64)

Zhang Chunshen drew upon Confucius’s cultivation practices from *The Analects*, specifically the quote, “A gentleman must not act without thinking, not insist on one’s way, not cling stubbornly to opinions, not consider only oneself.” (*The Analects of Confucius—Zihan*). From this, he developed the Chinese method of overcoming sins and cultivating spirituality. He pointed out that Chinese Christians who follow the path of self-cultivation in China aim to reach a state of non-intention, non-necessity, non-rigidity, and non-self in the negative aspect. This involves discerning between the personal self and the greater self, discerning whether one’s thoughts and intentions align with the will of God. Through practices such as “sitting in Christ” in a state of stillness and through the process of self-transcendence involving concepts such as “non-self”, “emptiness”, and “nothingness”, they seek to return to the “root love” through the transformative power of the “unity of love”, and to constantly experience the dynamic presence of “Christ’s self” in their lives (Zhang 2002, pp. 103–7). Influenced by Zhang Chunshen’s *The Enlightenment of Chinese-style Spiritual Cultivation*, the author believes that *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation should encompass the redemptive aspect of overcoming sins and include self-cultivation practices for transformative change. In this sense, it can be said that the *Broad Interpretation of The Seven Victories* initiates a localized approach to the transformative practice of overcoming sins within the framework of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation.

### 3.4. *The Sin-Overcoming and Virtue-Building of The Seven Victories*

Since the 20th century, a book combining contemporary ethics and psychology has been published in mainland China. It is written by Father Wang Shukai, based on *The Seven Victories (Qi Ke Zhen Xun)* during the Republican era, and is titled *Human Nature Inclinations and Cultivation*.<sup>7</sup> In the introduction of the book, Father Wang systematically discusses the theoretical foundation of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation and the psychological methods of overcoming sins. Based on the account in *Genesis*, Father Wang expounds on the shared view of human nature between Catholicism and Confucianism, namely, "At the beginning, human nature is inherently good". He then addresses the universal presence of evil and the problem of all criminal inclinations in human nature from an ethical perspective, explaining Catholicism's doctrine of original sin. At once, he explains from the perspective of human nature that although individuals may be influenced by evil, they still retain the inherent goodness of their nature, thus making it possible for individuals to reform and strive for goodness through cultivation.

In the introduction, Father Wang Shukai provides a systematic analysis of the psychological aspects of human goodness and the potential development of virtues and vices from a modern psychological perspective. He believes that God has endowed humans with seven aspects of inherent goodness: (1) self-esteem and a sense of pride, (2) a competitive mindset, (3) a sense of justice, (4) a mindset of conservation, (5) appetite, (6) sexual desire, and (7) the need for rest. However, due to the influence of original sin, undesirable habits have emerged, known as seven deadly sins. Firstly, everyone possesses standard psychological traits of self-esteem and a sense of pride. The foundation of self-esteem lies in the fact that humans are made in the image of God. Thus, everyone should respect themselves. However, this psychological state of self-esteem and pride can easily slide into arrogance. Secondly, another psychological trait that arises from a sense of pride is the competitive mindset, which is initially positive. However, if one fails in competition, it can easily lead to feelings of jealousy towards the victor. Thirdly, God has bestowed upon humans a conscience, namely, a sense of justice. However, if this sense of justice is misused, it can transform into anger. Fourthly, God created humans and endowed them with wisdom, allowing them to plan and moderate the accumulation of material possessions. However, extreme development of this trait leads to greed and stinginess. Fifthly, the natural inclination towards enjoying delicious food and drink is inherent in human nature. However, excessive indulgence in the desires of the palate becomes gluttony. Sixthly, the sexual desires of men and women are natural aspects of human nature, and sexual impulses are everyday physiological phenomena. However, without proper guidance, these desires can easily lead to indulgence in sexual misconduct. Lastly, the human body requires a balance of work and rest, but excessive rest becomes laziness. Since the original sin, although humanity retains a conscience and inherent goodness, in practical behavior, it tends to lean towards sin and misuses the physiological and psychological instincts bestowed by God to fulfill one's personality. This has transformed the seven holy virtues into seven deadly sins, resulting in individuals being plagued by the seven deadly sins at all times. The purpose of writing this book was to assist spiritual practitioners in overcoming seven deadly sins, restoring the seven holy virtues bestowed by God, and ultimately attaining righteousness and sanctity (Wang 1985, pp. 4–9).

In the main body of *Human Tendencies and Cultivation*, Wang Shukai combines modern philosophical, ethical, and psychological theories to provide a contemporary interpretation of *the seven victories* of spiritual cultivation in the book. At the beginning of each chapter, the author explains the definitions and manifestations of seven deadly sins. For example, he defines pride as excessively valuing one's talents and possessions and treating them improperly (Wang 1985, p. 10). The author quotes numerous wisdom proverbs and moral stories from different times and cultures to discuss the spiritual practices and moral cultivation methods for overcoming pride and exemplars who have conquered pride. For instance, he mentions that pride is more challenging to overcome than other sins, as other sins gradually fade over time, but pride does not diminish with age. People even want

to carry pride to their graves, as illustrated by the example of ancient Chinese emperors who built grand tombs (Wang 1985, pp. 18–19). He cites the story of the fox and the crow from *Aesop's Fables* to illustrate the practical harm the desire for vain glory brings (Wang 1985, p. 28). Simultaneously, he positively discusses the virtue of humility as the opposite of pride. He states that humility is the correct understanding of oneself. Wang Shukai quotes the saying from *The Book of Changes*: “Humility brings benefit, arrogance brings harm”. He also cites stories of humility from Saint Francis of Assisi and Saint Ignatius to inspire people to follow (Wang 1985, p. 31). In other chapters, the author adopts a similar approach, using a plethora of proverbs and stories to illustrate the different manifestations and harms of seven deadly sins, as well as the various methods of overcoming them. One notable feature of this book is Father Wang Shukai's use of many ordinary examples from contemporary Chinese life to discuss the dangers of seven deadly sins and the benefits of the seven holy virtues from both positive and negative perspectives. This summary of his pastoral experience resonates with the general public's understanding and awareness of moral living. It can be said that Fr Richard Wang has tried to promote the contemporary and localized development of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation in contemporary Chinese society. Although the structure of *The Seven Victories* is basically borrowed from *Human Tendencies and Cultivation*, Fr Wang, probably in order to make it easier for readers in contemporary secular society to understand, has borrowed from contemporary ethical and psychological theories as the basis of his theories, and ignored the theological and philosophical basis of the Catholic tradition of spiritual practice which relies on the grace of God and establishes the virtues for overcoming the seven deadly sins. The theological and philosophical foundations of the Catholic spiritual tradition that rely on God's grace and establish virtues to overcome the seven sins. Thus, to some extent the book transforms the Catholic tradition of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation into a moral indoctrination with the characteristics of Catholic culture. In my opinion, this may weaken the fruitfulness of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation in building up virtue and dilute the faith qualities of Catholic spiritual practice.

#### 4. Conclusions

The ideas of seven deadly sins and the tradition of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation contained in *The Seven Victories* are the accumulated experience of the long-standing faith practices of the early saints and sages of Christianity. Its roots lie in the fusion of Christian faith and Greek culture, although it is not devoid of elements of Eastern mysticism and has also been influenced by Greek philosophy. However, its inherent core remains the Christian faith. It is a cultural tradition of *the seven victories* spiritual cultivation that has developed in localizing Christian faith in the West. In the cultural atmosphere of the late Ming Dynasty, which emphasized moral cultivation, missionaries propagated it as a fundamental Catholic teaching. Chinese scholars regarded it as a moral cultivation work that supplemented the Confucian theory of self-discipline for restraining desires and preserving principles. Although critics from the anti-missionary camp criticized *The Seven Victories* from the standpoint of upholding the Chinese cultural tradition, Confucian scholars who truly cared about the state of the world and people's minds actively drew on the doctrine of sin and the spiritual exercises of overcoming sin in Catholic culture, developing their ideas of sin and repentance, and cultivating practices and ritual practices. In Chinese Christians' faith life and spiritual practice, they constantly promote dialogue and exchange between Catholicism and Chinese culture, blending their spiritual and cultural lives into practical experiences. *The Seven Victories* and its tradition of spiritual exercises as an open system of faith and culture can interact and blend with Western culture and communicate and learn from Chinese ethical and moral culture and cultivation practices. By continually assimilating and transforming, it forms a spiritual tradition of overcoming sin with Chinese characteristics, helping Chinese Christians gradually free themselves from the bondage of the seven deadly sins, cultivate virtuous conduct, and together embark on the path of goodness and beauty.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The Latin translation of the book’s title is *Les 7 Victories*, cited in (Kim 1993, p. 1). The English title of the vernacular translation of *The Seven Victories* (七克真訓) is also *The Seven Victories*, Diego de Pantoja (1962b): *The Seven Victories* (Taipei: Guangqi Publishing House).
- <sup>2</sup> *New Catholic encyclopedia* (Thomas 2002), s.v. “Deadly Sins”.
- <sup>3</sup> Ignacio de Loyola, a Spaniard, was the founder of the Society of Jesus and one of the saints of the Roman Catholic Church. Born into a Spanish noble family, he enlisted in the army and was permanently disabled after a shell blew up his right leg during the war. While recovering from his wounds, he read the *Biography of Jesus* and *The Words and Acts of the Saints*, and from that time on, he aspired to be an elite soldier of Christ.
- <sup>4</sup> For example, (Diego de Pantoja 1904, 1962a), and so on.
- <sup>5</sup> It refers to a form of benevolent governance established in response to various crises or emergencies in daily life. It encompasses five main components: the Baojia system, the Village Compact, the Community/Neighborhood Association, the Community Education, and the Community Warehouse.
- <sup>6</sup> In Protestant Christianity, talent is typically translated as “他連得”.
- <sup>7</sup> Fr. Wang Shukai (王書楷神父) (1925–2016), also known as Wang Shukai (王書凱), with the baptismal name Joseph, was born in Renqiu, Hebei. Ordained in 1956, he served as a missionary in various locations, including Hejian Dachao Market Village and Fanjiageda, within the Xianxian Diocese. Later, he worked as a missionary in the Chibi Cathedral of the Puyi Diocese in Hubei province and served as the administrator. He authored *Human Inclinations and Cultivation* and “An Overview of the Early History of Catholicism in China”.

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