

and the words they represent, cannot be retained in books, but must be delivered down from age to age by oral tradition : And how uncertain this must prove in such a complicated subject, is sufficiently obvious to those who have attended to the variation which all verbal relations undergo, when they are transmitted through three or four hands only. Hence it is easy to conclude, that the history and inventions of past ages, recorded by these perplexed symbols, must frequently prove unintelligible ; and consequently the learning and boasted antiquity of the Nation must, in numerous instances, be extremely problematical.

But we are told by some of the Missionaries, that though the skill of the *Chinese* in science is indeed much inferior to that of the *Europeans*, yet the morality and justice taught and practised by them are most exemplary. And from the description given by some of these good fathers, one should be induced to believe, that the whole Empire was a well-governed affectionate family, where the only contests were, who should exert the most humanity and beneficence : But our preceding relation of the behaviour of the Magistrates, Merchants and Tradesmen at *Canton*, sufficiently refutes these jesuitical fictions. And as to their theories of morality, if we may judge from the specimens exhibited in the works of the Missionaries, we shall find them solely employed in recommending ridiculous attachments to certain immaterial points, instead of discussing the proper criterion of human actions, and regulating the general conduct of mankind to one another, on reasonable and equitable principles. Indeed, the only pretension of the *Chinese* to a more refined morality than their neighbours