

Chinese Christians in North America

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*The following article consists of excerpts from Part I and Part II of Mary Roberts Daban's PHD dissertation entitled **Harmony, Identity, Pragmatism: Chinese Christians in North America**. The dissertation, was originally written in French for the American civilisation department at the Université de Pau et des Pays d'Adour (southwest France). The sections below, were translated by the author and edited and considerably shortened for inclusion in Tripod by the Tripod staff. The study itself was interdisciplinary and involved the use of sociological methods, questionnaires, focus groups, and in-depth interviews, as well as research into the intellectual history behind the identity construction process.*

Chinese Christian Identity Construction in North America

Today we estimate that there are more than 300,000 Christians (both Protestant and Catholic) among the over 3 million Chinese belonging to the diaspora in North America. At least 10 % of this population is Christian. However, some estimate the number of Chinese Christians to be much higher. Several hypotheses seek to explain the growing number of conversions to Christianity within the diaspora. One hypothesis suggests that the Church in its "familial" role assists immigrants in forming healthy social and cultural identities in North America. Another hypothesis posits that Chinese Bible study groups on university campuses help immigrants by providing a setting where existential questions including convergence between Christian and Chinese, particularly Confucian, concepts are welcome.

According to Yang Fenggang,¹ Christian faith is not an



obstacle to Chinese identity construction; it is rather a help for those Chinese in the diaspora who are looking to assist and even save their fellow immigrants. In the process, they are seeking to revitalize Chinese culture. However, for some immigrants, the specific difference between Chinese and Christian concepts is in the lack of a precise concept of God in posterior Confucianism. These Chinese Christian Americans refer to the concept of God (*Shangdi*) present in ancient Chinese culture in Classics such as the *Odes* and the *Documents* (and in the rites of the Shang and Zhou dynasties, rites Confucius tried to promulgate.):

Precisely because Confucianism failed to provide consistent answers concerning God, death, and the spiritual world, these Chinese Christians argue, various human-invented wrong religions have filled China ever since the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220), when Confucianism became the orthodoxy (...) these Chinese Christians call for a restoration of ancient Chinese culture prior to Confucius. They see that the pragmatic rationalism after Confucius blocked Chinese people from the transcendent or Shangdi (God).²

Concept of God

Many Christian (Confucian) Chinese in North America hold to a concept of God which takes into account the Confucian notion of *ren* (humanity). They also hold to concepts which reflect axiology as it is lived out in relationships in the family and in the Church. Chinese seminary professors in California also put forward aspects of God mentioned by certain sinologists, such as Julia Ching. They also mention the notion of the transcendent *Shangdi* found in the *Odes* and reflect the theist aspect of Chinese thought. This concept is in opposition to the arguments of certain sinologists which put forward the atheist version of Confucianism, rather than the theist version. It is helpful to understand the approach of these Chinese intellectuals who are seeking a renewal of Chinese culture through a spiritual renewal (that of the soul). What is at stake for them is the survival of humanity. This was often mentioned by the participants in our study as being of utmost importance. This involves a search for values which guide human existence (and a

search for *Tian xia Guanxi*: harmony between Heaven and earth). Many Chinese Americans in our study emphasized a need for renewal of the soul.

For Benoît Vermander (Ricci Institute: Taipei), renewal can be found in convergence³:

Peter Chen Main Wang speaks of the contextualisation of concepts similar in Christianity and in Chinese culture; concepts such as: xiao (filial piety), ren and Christian love, the relationship between tian (Heaven) and man as expressed in tianDao (the Way of Heaven) and renDao (The way of man), similarities between Christian meditation and zen, between fuxing (the restoration of nature) and devotion. He also sees cultural adaptation in the Catholic liturgy following the Mass during Chinese New Year, respect paid to ancestors where flowers, incense, and wine are incorporated into the rite, or in the Catholic funeral rites (where one prays to God to welcome the souls of the departed).

The meaning of both Christian and Confucian values is elaborated by many in our study. The above comparison of ideas was systematically given by the majority of participants. Many also mentioned the similarity between the first chapter of Genesis and the *Yijing* as written by Confucius, (or even portions of Laozi).

Chinese Identity and Filial Piety

Important to the Chinese (Confucian) identity in North America is the notion of filial piety. In order to examine how the notion of filial piety, (*xiao*) becomes integrated into the larger church “family” and into the concrete practices of church members, we polled pastors and priests and Chinese scholars.... They reminded us of practices which involve Christian and Confucian notions as they are lived out in parishoners' daily lives. One example is the justification for the ceremony of the remembrance of ancestors which finds common ground with the concept of the communion of the saints in the Catholic church. Offerings were mentioned as being made to express thankfulness and love; to show respect toward their ancestors and also express their thankfulness to God. The liturgies used by the Chinese Catholic church in the

U.S. expressly state that the Catholics of Chinese descent do not consider their ancestors as idols; but rather pray to God for them and for their families, thanking God for them, and praying for mercy.

Combining Faith and Filial Piety in the Liturgy

One particular example of combining Christian faith with Confucian notions of filial piety can be found in the liturgy used by Holy Redeemer Church in Philadelphia. The principal goal of the liturgical celebration in remembrance of the ancestors is to teach young people respect and esteem for their elders; including those who have passed away. These elders represent the roots of Chinese society, even in North America. With the exception of St. Theresa's Church in New York, most of the Chinese American liturgies analysed by Beverly Butcher in her PHD dissertation (University of Pennsylvania)⁴, use incense to symbolize the prayers of the church which are made to God the Father:

Oh God, bless the souls of our ancestors and give them eternal rest and peace; deliver each of us from all evil in this life.⁵

The tablecloth used for the liturgy is placed on a table used to remember the ancestors. It is embroidered with the characters: *Shen Chung Chui*. (We remember our dead and we look toward eternity). During the liturgy, prayers are offered in Mandarin and in Cantonese.

Mandarin:

Let us pray for our forefathers, and all those who have passed away. May God grant them reunion in Heaven.

Cantonese:

Let us pray for those who passed away, but had no one to pray for them. May God grant them reunion in Heaven, that they may share eternal happiness. Let us pray together.

Mandarin:

Let us pray for all the children (here). May they be grateful for their parents and show them filial piety and obedience. Let us pray.

Cantonese:

*Let us pray for all the families in our community. May the Lord grant that we be united to one another, and get along with each other peacefully in this world, that we may meet all our ancestors, relatives, and friends in Heaven in the days to come. Let us pray.*⁶

We note in the liturgy that the prayers often refer to harmony, peace, and unity. Prayers petition God for parishoners to remain close in spirit to those that have passed away. Other examples of prayers can be found in liturgies used in Chinese Catholic Churches on the East Coast:

Most merciful and heavenly Father, You are the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the God of our ancestors. We beseech you to hear the prayers of your family, and grant to our ancestors eternal rest in your bosom, forever sharing in your love. Through Christ our Lord. (...) Merciful Father in Heaven. God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, and of our forefathers, hear the prayer of your family here. Let those we remember today share your love and rest in your care...

Methodology Reveals Social Identity

In conducting our study, we sent preliminary questionnaires to Chinese Christians in North America (Canada and the U.S.), and we also had focus groups and in-depth interviews which employed Marisa Zavalloni's method for discerning the nature of the person's social identity.⁷ Our research tools enabled us to better understand the person's beliefs, concepts, and integration into daily life. The methodology also revealed the importance of the following aspects of Christian-Confucian thought and practice in North America: 1. The family, 2. The hierarchical structure of social life, 3. Culture and morality, as well as high self-control exercised by the participants, 4. Work and success, 5. Systematic convergence of Confucian and Christian notions, 6. Life in the Spirit.

Importance of the Family

During the statistical analysis phase, we discovered that a large portion of Chinese American (or Canadian) Christians live in

the major cities of the West and East coasts. A great number of those participating in our study came from the Los Angeles basin.

For the second and third phases of our study, we focused more particularly on the San Francisco Bay, and Greater Los Angeles Areas. We noted the importance of the family in these phases of our study. This confirmed what we had discovered in the preliminary questionnaire phase where 2/3's of the participants were married in church (sacramentally). Both Christian and Confucian ethics see family unity as being of primary importance.

Our participants' origins were diverse: PRC, Hong Kong, Taiwan,⁸ SE Asia, (some were American or Canadian Born Chinese). Our findings confirm the tendency toward immigration of highly educated Mandarin-speaking persons. The preliminary questionnaire showed that 98 of 149 respondents spoke English (as their second language); 125 were university graduates. Of this number, half had obtained a Masters or PHD.

In the first phase of our study (preliminary questionnaire), we were able to discover the values that our 149 respondents held most important:

- Monogamy (127)
- Firm attachment to the institution of marriage. (128)
- Family loyalty. (130)
- Chastity prior to marriage (114)
- Peaceful family relationships.(132)
- Obedience to parents (104)

For this population, personal identity affirmation is best achieved through Christianity. In terms of primordial identity, 103 of 149 chose "Chinese" indicating that cultural equilibrium is achieved through Chinese cultural forms:

I am a Christian first in terms of my identity, I want to express my faith with Chinese cultural forms.

Our findings indicate that Confucian traits are greatly valued in the Chinese cultural identity, and were quite compatible with Christian identity.

Chinese Culture and Family Values

Questions nos. 34 and 40 of the preliminary questionnaire dealt with the value of filial piety. Participants perceive family values and respect for elders as aspects of Confucianism (traditional Chinese culture) and something they cherish. This was exemplified by:

- humility
- loyalty in the family setting,
- service toward others,
- family interdependence,
- honoring/obeying parents,
- Less emphasis on personal choice.

Catholics (and some Protestants) mentioned that they continue to remember their ancestors and to honor them by praying to God for them and for their families.

Many participants have the sense of self-sacrifice which is found in both Confucianism and Christianity. Most mentioned the importance of diligence, and responsiveness to authority as being aspects of filial piety present in the identity. The socio-motivational project for the family (Question No. 41) revealed that Confucian heritage was widely present in the hopes of many who desire the best for their brothers and sisters (familial interdependence). Responses revealed that Christian faith strongly influences Confucian/Christian family values:

[I seek to live as]

a godly father leading my family to serve God

[I seek to live so as]

to help my family members to be good Christians and good human beings.

to lead my parents to Christ.

to see my father come to Christ.

to establish a Christian family.

to have each member grow in their relationship to Christ.

Chinese Culture and Education as a Value

Education was another aspect of traditional Chinese culture which participants mentioned as being an element of Confucianism

which was preserved and passed on. Participants describe education in a variety of ways.

For some, education refers to Christian and Confucian values:

- modesty, kindness, gentleness, humility;
- moral teaching, solid moral teaching;

For others, Chinese culture and language teaching were important. Many parents in our study send their children to Chinese language classes at church on the weekend. A great number emphasized the importance of higher education:

I believe having a higher education is an important part of growing up. Studying and having good grades at school could lead to better education and a better job.

Through word and deed, my mother exhibited a high regard for higher education I wanted to attend college because of her attitude.

Many in our study were motivated to teach:

I wanted to be a teacher; Chinese respect teachers.

Motivation for Conversion

According to a majority of participants, the choice to convert to Christianity was often linked to strong relationships with those in the community, the family, or with Chinese Christian friends. It is the love (*ren/renai*) experienced in the ethnic church which often motivated the person to become a Christian:

I was attracted by the love of Christians, then by the love of God.

Convicted of my sin, I wanted to be saved.

I came to know Christ through my wife and brothers and sisters in a Chinese Bible study group.

Their prayer and constant love led to the church where Jesus showed me in my heart that he is my Savior.

I was encouraged by Christian friends.

The experience of God who comforted me when I was in trouble and who answered my prayer.

I was influenced by my wife and friends and teachers.

1. Drove my wife to church every Sunday. 2. Sat outside to wait. 3. Sat at the back of the church to find out what was taught. 4. Got involved in church activities. 5. Discussed with Christians and priests. 6. Attended catechetical classes. Love of other Christians, the Bible.

For others, a feeling that God loves them as shown in the example of Christ was important and this direct *Tianxia* or vertical relationship led to conversion:

I became a Christian because I marveled at how much God loves us and how much the saints love God. Selfless love in union with God, all of creation, past, present, and future is how I want to live.

Before high school graduation I was moved by the great love of Jesus who died for our sins.

The way participants lived out their family lives was significant as evidenced in the following comments:

God makes my life much happier, gives me inner peace.

My family is more lovely, more peaceful.

We accept each other more and are more considerate to each other.

We pray together and for each other during difficult times.

Diversity among Participants

In the second phase of the study, the focus groups reflected the diversity within the Chinese population in North America. They also reflected the religious diversity in the different Christian churches to which they belonged: Presbyterian, Evangelical, non-denominational, Methodist, and Episcopalian. One focus group also represented a Chinese seminary which had begun as a Chinese Bible study group, another involved seminarians and their professor from the Bay area. The members in the churches in Chinatowns were mostly immigrant or American raised Chinese. In San Francisco's Chinatown, a majority came from Hong Kong with a goodly number from the PRC. A substantial number were also American born Chinese. According to Bishop Ignatius Wang of San Francisco, approximately one million

Chinese live in San Francisco, with a large concentration in the Bay Area. Most of the Chinese in the Bay area are highly educated, and many return to Chinatown to attend church. In the LA area, there was an equivalent number of church members from the PRC and from Taiwan. There were fewer coming from Hong Kong and S.E. Asia. However the majority of Chinese attending the Chinese Methodist Church in the LA area had immigrated from S.E. Asia. The remainder had immigrated from the PRC, and Hong Kong. These reflected a preference for concepts such as interdependence and filial piety: A Chinese Methodist pastor put it this way:

Recently, many from the PRC have been baptized. They state that they come to church because of the love they experience here, and because it's like a small family. They aren't afraid here, and trust those in the church. Now that they are here in the US, they aren't afraid to be spied on, it's easier to come to church. They say that they find that many Americans have been positively influenced by Christianity. These new church members appreciate the feeling of equality, of help, and the feeling of being valued as persons.

A goodly number (85% in the church) who made up one group of young Catholics in the LA area were immigrants and/or American raised Chinese from Hong Kong and Guangdong /PRC. Only 10% came from Taiwan; the others were American born Chinese or Chinese who had immigrated from the Philippines. The young people in this group had finished their university studies and were working as teachers, consultants, nurses, and doctors in the local hospital. The Catholic Bible study group which participated in one of our focus groups in the San Francisco Bay Area was largely composed of immigrants from Taiwan, with a few coming from the PRC and Indonesia. Our statistics indicate that most persons in these Chinese Catholic Bible Study groups are young professionals (very highly educated) with young children who live in a suburban setting. A Protestant group in the San Jose area had a similar composition with more persons, however, coming from the PRC.

This phase of our study confirmed a statement made by Bishop Ignatius Wang that despite the diversity, there is a

significant cohesiveness in identity formation and harmony in the Church among those coming from different origins in the sinicized world.

Dao, and Filial Piety (xiao)

The *Dao* (the Way) was very important in focus group discussions. It was

- the *zhenli*, the truth of God which helps us learn and improve ourselves.
- the principle which helps accomplish things. Christ as *Dao* is the Word and the Principle of God, the *Dao* since the beginning of time.
- the *Dao* is the Word in the Gospel of John.

Jes, a member of a Catholic Bible sharing group found that the *Dao* of truth helps her to raise her children. It is found in the Church which shows them the difference between good and evil, between love and the secular world.

Jen, a member of a Protestant Bible group posited that *We are born in God and we will return to the center of God's world.* This way of linking the paternity of God to the return to our origin evokes the *Dao* as described in Laozi. It also reminds us of filial piety shown towards God the Father. Filial piety in this sense was mentioned by all the focus groups as being important for Chinese Christian life in the church.

In another group, many mentioned the importance of transmitting the Confucian ethic of *zhongshu* to their children as being an essential heritage of Confucian values (it is defined as fidelity and forgiveness as they are present in their Church community). When linked together with Christian principles, this ethic shows forth the *gen*, or root:

I found this root in my life. Based on this root, I can grow and receive peace and tranquillity. I do not need to wander looking for anything else.

In another focus group (Protestant), filial piety was directly linked to love and respect shown to God and to members of their families:

This love gives us a big heart to love all the brothers and sisters

in the church. The Spirit given by Christ helps us to love (and to better understand) Confucian values (jiazhi) such as obedience. Chinese parents want obedience and respect..

One lady in another group discussed Christian love as:

integrating well with Chinese culture... They are compatible. We must take care of others, of old people, of children. There is harmony between Chinese culture and Christianity and they integrate well together.

The members of a Protestant group also indicated that Chinese cultural values (Confucian) are similar to Christian values:

We see love in the church: love and joy... Christian culture and the idea of love in relationships, having close relationships, is very close to Chinese culture

A Catholic Sister involved in social assistance ministry in the Church and in the Chinese community notes:

The (traditional) Chinese family... members support each other; the Church also has this support system. We help the person until he sees the light. The Church and the family are complimentary. This is true of Chinese culture, we live and we work as a group.

However, she also identifies what is attractive about Christianity for the Chinese identity:

For the Catholic, it is a question of free will. One accepts to become a child of God, it isn't forced. I believe that people become Catholic because there is the idea of free will.

We note that in this case, community and filial piety toward God are seen to be a sort of completion of the original concept of filial piety. It is possible that the deliberate choice to live as a child of God liberates the person to "become" complete. This concept could help the immigrants integrate into a society which values the individual...

Heaven, Natural Philosophy, and Natural Revelation

Jam, a seminary professor, says that because Confucius received his mandate from Heaven in order to teach virtue, he seems to have been inspired from Heaven. He notes that Confucius' reference to Heaven seems to equate Heaven with God. In this sense, Heaven (*Tian*) refers to a Supreme Being and is open to a transcendent interpretation.

Bishop Wang confirms this:

We find that Christ completes natural philosophy and Confucian ethics. Philosophy opens one's horizons. But in terms of the love of God, of inner peace, of self-sacrifice, of forgiveness of sins, natural philosophy does not go far enough. Relation as it is found in the natural sphere (natural process) does not really satisfy. Natural philosophy should go as far as God, but Confucianism and Buddhism stop prior to reaching God. Confucius says that moral truth can be known, but he doesn't always seem certain of the truth. The Church gives direction to one's conscience. Its science and knowledge inform the conscience and give security.

Png, an Anglican university professor and researcher, is of the same opinion as Bishop Wang. He goes even further showing that a parallel exists between Confucian thought and Jewish thought that has its culmination in Christ's teaching (Beatitudes):

I believe that God revealed himself in Chinese culture and that this revelation is God, the God of all. Jewish understanding is similar to the Confucian understanding of God. The Chinese are practical as are the Jews. Greek philosophers thought of love in terms of different levels, but the Jews think in practical terms. It is close to the Chinese way of thinking. We don't think of loving Jesus in an abstract way. We compare: 'You love me more than something else?' That's how Jesus asked Peter, 'Do you love me more than these?' Chinese do not like the doctrine of the Trinity or how to prove the existence of God; theological questions. They are interested in practical life: sin, forgiveness, love. How to live a long time and have a healthy life (practical questions) had its answer in Taoism. How to live without sadness, without desire had its answer in Buddhism. Chinese like religious questions in practical terms. This is why Psalm 23

is so popular in China, as are the 10 Commandments and the Beatitudes....

Png adds that a large number of Chinese Christians remain Confucian:

Confucian teaching best represents Chinese culture. Christian faith does not contradict Chinese culture but rather compliments it. If one loves his parents, one honors them. Jesus said not to forget one's parents and to take care of them. However Christ calls us to deny the self. Denying the self is a concept present in both Confucian and Christian thought.

Young Catholics from a focus group in the LA area found that Confucian values such as kindness, "the golden rule," perserverance, gratitude, the importance of family, relational values were quite close to Christian values:

Chinese cultural values resemble Christian values, but we don't know the reasoning behind Chinese values. Christianity gives us the reasoning behind them.

It seems that in this case, the group is referring to natural revelation as it differs from the specific revelation found in Christianity. Confucius himself did not speak much of the Lord on High in the Classics...

Jam, a seminary professor in the LA area, showed how the notion of God is not absent from Confucianism:

Christ completes Chinese culture, he completes Confucian teaching in much the same way as he completes the Old Testament. Classical proverbs are part of general revelation, but are not as complete as in the Biblical canon.

Young married Chinese Catholics in the Bay Area saw similarities between Confucian and Christian values in the following: perserverance, thankfulness, family, education, faithfulness, forgiveness, and compassion.

Bishop Wang also spoke of compatibility between the values present in the two systems: kindness, respect, relational orientation, humility, warm friendships.

Professors from a seminary in the LA area also found

similarities and equivalents in virtue, humility, stability, and responsibility in Confucianism and in Christianity.

Sil, a religious from the Bay Area, commented on the practicality of most Chinese in religious matters:

They want to see how Christianity helps in one's daily life. Look at the first Christians, how they loved each other, no arguments, no disputes... In Chinese culture and in Chinese Christianity there is great respect for others. There is peace and harmony in this.

A young Catholic in the LA area also notes that:

Christian life is different from American individualism. I find greater harmony and peace in the Church. The Church is a family larger than our families which are also important to us. Here, we share amongst each other. I find comfort, strength, spiritual, and emotional support here.

In this we see how concepts of humanity, help and love (*ren-ai*) in Christian and Confucian thought are fundamental in the identity construction of those polled. They are also important in that they help in founding families which are open to others and the Other, and are attractive for this reason.

Mr Jess, a Catholic from the Bay Area, also emphasizes the compatibility between Christianity and Chinese (Confucian) culture:

Christ comes into each culture and integrates into that culture.

Miwa, a Protestant seminarian and a Chinese of Confucian background, says:

I receive good teaching. I was a disciple of Confucius when I was younger. However, we also need the spiritual life, not only moral teaching. Kindness, happiness, self-control come from the spiritual life (the love and Spirit of Christ) and are (actualized) through prayer. God gives us the love to put these values into practice.

Another young man in the same group found that the love of Christ completes Confucian relationships as it converges with many of the same notions:

Something moved me in my reading of the Bible. What touched me most was the unconditional love of Jesus, including his love for women. I did not see unconditional love in the literature I read (Western or Eastern). Members of a Bible study (in Taiwan) asked me if I wanted to believe in Jesus and I said yes.

Respect, Sharing, Human Relationships Opening up to a Holistic Concept of God

Honoring one's parents is for the "Christian –Confucian" an attitude which one must also have toward God the Father:

Because of the violence and the suffering in Asia, we are more respectful of God. We treat Him as Lord and Divine, less as a friend (Western way of seeing God). God is judge/just, but He is love...

A woman in Li's focus group also affirmed that one finds Love in the church, that it is this Love which gives people meaning in life:

I discovered that Christianity was more than I thought. God became real to me and profoundly changed my life, and that is how I learned that God gives meaning to my life,

It is this love experienced by those in the Chinese churches which is the source of true freedom, and gives meaning to their lives. This concept was fundamental for all kinds of focus groups.

Sil, a Catholic, mentioned that it is the search for truth which led her to God and to Christianity....

My goal is to search for the truth, and God is truth.

Conclusion

The social-motivational center for many of our subjects, seems to have its basis in Chinese (Confucian) thought and culture. However we find that conversion to Christianity transforms this center, and faith in Christ (meaning gift of self, love, warm relationships with others, etc.) replaces the cultural center with cultural components becoming somewhat more peripheral. We can

see that the participants found greatest Confucian-Christian convergence in the following:

1. *Ren (jen-ai)*: love (filial, familial, spiritual) is most important and must be practiced through: *xin* (heart, mercy, kindness, support), *xu* (compassion), *respect, interdependence, generosity, hospitality, consideration, acceptance of others*. This base is fundamental for the actualization of the other identity spheres and its culmination for the participants is life in Christ.

2. *Xiao* (filial piety), seen in terms of respect, responsibility (in work, study, family life) and especially faithfulness to God the Father leads the person to trust in God and in others. God is seen by our participants as being the Father who is the Source (*gen/root*) or the Origin of the human person. The fatherhood of God implies that men and women are all brothers and sisters... In order to attain to the root/*Origin*, the participants emphasized the necessity of choosing the appropriate *Dao*.

3. *Dao* leads to *Tian* (Heaven): For many participants, *Dao* is seen as the Way, the path, the Way taught to descendants which leads to the root (of true human nature) and to God the Father, the root of the person's personhood. The *Dao* is perceived as being Christ who liberates us from evil and from our selfish tendencies and allows us to live a reunification/relationship with the Source (the *Father and Ancestor of all Origins*). This is how participants understood Harmony or the Great Peace (*He/Da Heping*). *Dao* leads to harmony between Heaven and human beings (*TianDao*), between Heaven and earth, between human and human (*renDao*) and leads to harmony in one's inner being (psycho-social equilibrium). The participants in our study found that it is our duty (*Tienming*) to find this Harmony and to help others in their search for this relationship. A great evangelical work utilizing this concept can be witnessed in the Chinese church in North America.

4. *Yi*: In order to correctly follow the *Dao* (Way), most participants mentioned the need to seek Heaven's (God's) righteousness as well as God's love (*ren*). For the participants, the *yi* implies convergence between the following: moral goodness, respect for principles, moral concern, obedience, honesty, responsibility...

To sum up, the Chinese church in North America seeks to transmit an intimacy with God (through the *ren/agapé*) in conjunction with the *yi* in order to bring about effective peace and joy...

The intellectuals among our participants (a majority) cultivate the *Dao* to realize their human nature through *cheng* (sincerity). In this way, they remind us of Mencius' teaching:

*He who develops his mind to the utmost knows his nature. Knowing nature, he knows Heaven. To preserve one's mind and nourish one's nature is the way to serve Heaven.*⁹ ...

In our analysis of participants' discourse, the unity of man and Heaven happens through the realization of *Li* (principle/rites which open one to transcendence and which contain the personal notion of *Shangdi* (God in the Odes).

The Chinese Christian intellectual in North America seems to find coherence between Christianity and Chinese (Confucian) philosophy. Christian belief in the resurrection of the body and the eternal life of the soul is coherent with this philosophy.

Our study reveals that the participants preserve a three-part unity. Harmony is linked to identity construction and must involve a pragmatic practice of the value system within the church and in society in general. In this way, participants seek to serve God (*Dao* or Christ), humanity, and society through Christianity and by practicing those Confucian values which converge with Christian principles.

For the great majority of our study's participants, the Church is the place where personhood is actualized. It is a place where Chinese (Confucian) Christians gather together, where they seek to create harmony in their society, harmony in our post-modern world, and at the same time, an interior and universal harmony between Heaven and earth (*Tianren heyi*),

Endnotes

¹ Yang Fenggang, *Chinese Christians in America, Conversion, Assimilation, and Adhesive Identities*, {Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999, p. 7.

² Yang, *ibid.*, p. 152.

³ Cf: Benoît Vermander: *Les Mandariniers de la Rivière Huai*, Desclée de Brouwer, Paris, 2002.

⁴ Beverly Butcher, *Remembrance, emulation, imagination: the Chinese and Chinese American Catholic ancestor memorial service*, PHD thesis in Folklore and Folklife, University of Pennsylvania p. 389

⁵ *Ibid.*, p.466.

⁶ Butcher, *ibid.*, Appendix III p.498.

⁷ Zavalloni, Marisa (University of Montréal): *Identité Sociale et Conscience*, PUF, 1984: *Investigateur Multistad de l'Identité Sociale*.

⁸ US Census Bureau cited by Peter Allen Lee: *Chinese American Youth Self Esteem*(PHD dissertation for: Social Welfare, Graduate Division of University of California Berkeley), 1998. See Yang Fenggang for similar statistics.

⁹ Mencius, cf. Wing Tsit Chan: *Religious Trends in Modern China*, Columbia University, NY, 1953, p.249