

From the Editor

Professor Paul Chao in his response to Father Michel Masson's article, *Chinese Culture and Christianity*, comments that "the study of culture requires the native's point of view." The point is well taken. *Tripod*, however, offers in this issue, not one but two analyses of Chinese culture by "outsiders". Both Masson and Arnold Sprenger are scholar-priests, sinologists and social researchers in the field of contemporary Chinese studies. They also share a particular interest in the influence of religion on China's modernization policy. We hope that our readers will find in their works some insights of value, albeit from an outsider's point of view.

Many articles have appeared recently that examine the impact of religion on China's modernization process. The big three: Buddhism, Islam and Christianity, have been around for a long time but what effect are they now having on China's efforts to become a modern industrial state?

Buddhism came to China almost 2,000 years ago during the Han dynasty. Its effect was immediate and dramatic, permeating Chinese culture to the core and leaving an indelible mark. However, the question being raised today in many circles is whether Buddhism is having a positive influence on modernization efforts or does it constitute an obstacle to them?

Christianity and Islam came to China in the VIIth century during the Tang dynasty. The Muslims came with the Koran and their propensity for commerce. While they did not engage actively in proselytism, they did marry into local families and were able to integrate themselves into the culture surprisingly well. Again the question is raised: Has Islam played any significant role in China's modernization process?

The Nestorians brought Christianity to China shortly after the arrival of the Muslims, but they soon disappeared. The Franciscans did not fare much better during the Yuan dynasty in the 13th century. But Christian missionaries arrived again during the 16th century bringing with them this time not only the Gospel but also the new scientific achievements of Renaissance Europe. While they made significant contributions to China's scientific advancement and did convert a number of intellectuals to Christianity, they were hard-pressed to convince

the Chinese that Christianity was something more than a product of an alien culture, a "western" religion.

However, today, there is in China, a growing awareness, especially among China's intellectuals, that Christianity has served as a catalyst in the modernization of Western culture. Some wish to explore the benefits which Christianity could bring to China's own modernization programme. More and more Chinese are convinced that religion, and specifically Christianity, does have a positive role to play in China's emerging "spiritual civilization", which is an integral part of China's modernization process. There is mutual enrichment to be gained in deepening relationships with the churches, in sharing research and theological reflection. Many feel that material progress alone will not be enough for China to achieve its modernization goals. Also the proven expertise of Christianity in such fields as education and social services could make a significant contribution to China's future; and the methodology employed by the West in its science, history and medicine could offer China invaluable assistance in its struggle to modernize.

While Fr. Sprenger focuses on a number of obstacles to China's modernization, i.e., an underdeveloped legal and educational system, restrictions on religious freedom, censorship of the press, etc., Fr. Masson explores the ambience in which Chinese culture and Christianity encounter each other today. There is a growing conviction among Chinese academics that despite lingering memories of past grievances and the burden of a negative history, sincere efforts at mutual understanding and cooperation are necessary to achieve the civilization of tomorrow.

Also in this issue, you will find in our documentation section Anthony Lam explaining why it is all but impossible to get accurate figures on the number of Catholics now in mainland China, and why official statistics are to be taken lightly.

Jean Charbonnier's book, *Histoire des Chrétiens de Chine*, is reviewed in the English part of this issue. Our reviewer found this work not only comprehensive and informative but also a thoroughly enjoyable read. More than a retelling of events, it is a remarkable inside story of China's Christians. If you do not read French, be patient and take comfort in the thought that the English translation will be out early next year.
