

Chinese Culture and Christianity: Assessing the Agendas

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Why is Chinese culture important for the Church or Christian Churches today? Where does that culture stand among our priorities?

Somehow, we assume that Chinese culture is deserving of our attention, and would readily agree that since Ricci's time, Chinese culture has been a priority item for the Church.

I want to point out three agendas which in many ways are quite different from those of Ricci's time. In this historical process a number of changes have affected Chinese culture as well as Christianity. Moreover, both have shared a common history filled with violence and mutual suspicion. On the one hand, Christianity has touched off cultural minefields within Chinese society; on the other, the latter has fought back under many guises and under a succession of ideological flags.

In Ricci's day the two cultures were meeting for the first time. It was a time of mutual discovery, each side bringing out its own maps of the world, physical and metaphysical. Today that is no longer the case, and each party comes to the negotiating table:

- (1) with a backlog of grievances, fears, suspicions (Part I)
- (2) knowing the historical record of the other (Part II)
- (3) aware that it will have to live with the other within the global "modern civilisation" of tomorrow's world (Part III)

This is the ambiance in which Chinese culture and Christian-



ity encounter each other today. This ambiance also suggests the three agendas which I will try to outline in the following pages. These three "agendas," I hope, will allow us to reflect on a number of questions which I deem important as we go about our many China-related projects.

Agenda I: Chinese Culture and Ourselves

We cannot talk about Chinese Culture and Christianity in general. How seriously do we accept the notion that there exist different cultures, and that a common faith does not cancel the cultural differences? Or, to use Max Weber's distinction between an "ethics of conviction" and an "ethics of responsibility:" Are we ready to take responsibility for our religious convictions--to take into account the cultural factors which may prejudice our performance, distort our message and lead to unforeseen consequences?

In view of these questions *Agenda I* reads as follows: "Before we talk about China and make new plans, it is important that we sit and ponder: to what extent have we ignored the cultural dimension? To what extent have we been fooled by Chinese culture? To what extent are we ready to face the traumas and the violence we have experienced, and to acknowledge our fears and resentments? This is not an exercise in breast-beating or in pointing fingers at mistakes that have been made. I am not sure that things could have happened otherwise. The point is not to dream of remaking history--but to come to terms with that past which is still haunting us."

Missionaries were expelled and persecution went on unabated for years. We have ascribed all these events to the will of God who allowed the onslaught of the evil forces of Communism. This experience of defeat did not necessarily mean that we had failed in our efforts, but it did bring about an overall sense of failure, and with it guilt feelings, resentment and anger. We became refugees, holding on to our right to be allowed back to resume our mission in China.

In this unexplained triumph of atheism some evangelical theologians later on read a divine judgment over traditional Chinese culture and traditional mission culture. We have not tried to explain the perceived failure of mission, partly out of

fear of selling out to Marxist ideology. Take the Jesuits: the year 1949 brought disaster to one thousand of our number; yet we have not attempted to recapitulate the history of our involvement with one-sixth of the Chinese Catholic population up to 1949. We do not even have an oral history project to tap the memories of the old missionaries still alive. The reasons for (and the consequences of) this oversight deserve reflection. Seemingly, what has happened between China and us has to be kept away from the scrutinizing eyes of the historians; it must remain a family secret. Meanwhile, as with family secrets elsewhere, the past does not go away. We remain hostages of this official silence. As T.S. Eliot wrote in *The Family Reunion*, we have yet to admit that "the future can only be built on the past that was."

An Intellectual Failure?

"Considering the vast amount of money, personnel, thought and devotion that have gone into the Christian schools and colleges in China, our intellectual failure is remarkable," a missionary wrote in the 1950s. In the same vein Fr. Ladany used to remark that we had failed to address the intellectuals in China, to explain to them what our message was all about.

The most articulate statement along these lines came from the first Chinese bishop of Hong Kong, Francis Hsu, in 1968. A Shanghai man of letters, an Oxford graduate and a convert from Protestantism, Francis Hsu told his audience that the Church could not plan its role in Asia without first drawing conclusions from the missionary experience in pre-1949 China. This conclusion he presented in the following terms:

The Church that has received from her Divine Founder the mandate to teach all nations, was mute when my country, having broken with its own past, looked beyond its horizons for light and guidance. I was born the year after the May 4th Movement when anti-Confucian iconoclasts finally won the day and projected science and democracy as the new gods almighty. Less than thirty years later, Communism had conquered the country. In between there was a long tormented period of disenchantment with Western civilization followed by cynicism, war weariness, decadence, and moral collapse. The spiritual vacuum that appeared in the wake of the dissipation of Confucian influence became wider and deeper until Communism filled it by default. The Church was a powerless, helpless spectator to all this. I do

not mean that the missionaries were not aware of the danger or did not preach the Gospel with zeal. No, I mean that faced with a desire for a change and a new order of things, the Church failed to make its message intelligible and obviously relevant. The traditional way of preaching, even if it had been extended and enlarged a thousand times, would have remained ineffective. Given to pagan Chinese as it had been given by Christ to the Jews, the Sermon on the Mount must have sounded like romantic escapism. "Is that what you have to offer us?," incredulous Chinese intellectuals asked the sons of Matteo Ricci. China was going through a phase of soul-searching agony and the Church in China could offer no help.

I find quite remarkable Francis Hsu's eagerness to make sense of the past, his "cultural interpretation" and his questions on the significance of the evangelical message in the Chinese society of those times.

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I also think that Francis Hsu overstretched his cultural interpretation. The Church, he says, did not succeed in making her message heard. The truth of the matter is that no one succeeded during those thirty years, be they Confucianists, liberals or agrarian reformists. Only the Communists imposed their views, through ideological propaganda, military operations, and not without much good luck. No one succeeded because no one had the answer. Confucian reformer, Liang Shuming, says that neither Marxists nor well-meaning Westerners could assess the gravity of the crisis, much less provide the remedy. The crisis was there indeed but, given its nature, it cannot be said to be a "chance" which the Church "missed." It has taken the Communist Party itself thirty years, including the chaotic ones of the Cultural Revolution, to discover that the cultural modernization of China has not yet begun.

The conclusion may be that 1949 did not signal a failure of the Church in China, but only another and particularly dramatic stage in a history which has been again and again disrupted by persecution and civil wars. In 1968, during the Cultural Revo-

lution, Francis Hsu had many good reasons to believe that the Chinese Church was breathing her last. Today we can see that the Church was able to survive the trauma of 1949. It is also worth noting that present day Chinese intellectuals mention Christianity as one of the components of contemporary culture in China.

On the one hand, Chinese Marxism cannot be explained without reference to a global crisis of culture; on the other, the Church has managed, dramatically indeed, to survive this crisis, the Cultural Revolution included. Against this general background we should be able to reflect on our missionary history in China without grudges and without guilt feeling.

Christianity: a Minority Culture

Having said that we did not "miss" the "opportunity" to solve China's cultural crisis, we must add that Francis Hsu's remarks cannot be dismissed that easily. The Church which, he contends, remained "silent" constituted what we may term a "minority culture" and, in many ways, this "minority culture" model still provides the basic pattern through which we relate to the "majority culture" in China even today.

Let us summarize this minority culture model in a few sentences. 1. Ultimately we were defeated by the overall breakdown of Chinese culture--not only by Communism. This crisis of culture was beyond our understanding and our resources even if we had been interested in it. 2. We ended up establishing pockets of "Catholic culture." This minority culture could only be despised by intellectuals--traditionalist and progressive alike, but, given the circumstances, it was probably the only way to proceed. 3. Unfortunately, we were running out of time: the Japanese War and the Civil War followed one another in quick succession. Given twenty more years, the minority culture could have had the time to train theologians and philosophers able to address the global issues of society. 4. Came 1949, and the minority culture model was transferred to Taiwan and reinforced the trauma and the sense of failure. We held Communism responsible for all the evils of China, recent and present (a view confirmed by every issue of *China News Analysis*...). We were busy building the Church in Taiwan: we had no time and seemingly no reason to explore cultural issues.

Again, all this was probably inevitable, but what happened *to us* in the process? What has the minority culture model done to us, as communities and individuals? Fr. Ladany used to quip that missionaries in China (including Hong Kong and Taiwan) were like Buddhist monks who would spend their lifetimes in New York and never be able to read *The New York Times*. A Chinese Sister from Hong Kong once remarked to her foreign colleagues: "How can you come to 'teach' us, as you know nothing of our culture and history?" Such commonsense remarks have little currency in the minority culture model and we still must ask: what happened to individuals, trapped in "between two worlds" as it were?

Between Two Worlds

Two years ago, I asked a Chinese Jesuit about his experience. Aged 60, he entered the novitiate in China in the late '40s and belongs to a generation which studied philosophy and theology in the Philippines in the 1950s and then was sent to Taiwan. He first remarked that Chinese Jesuits "are undervalued in the eyes of their countrymen." He commented: "Educated Chinese know the names of Matteo Ricci, Adam Schall...all foreigners. The only Chinese Jesuit to have become a celebrity was Ma Xiangbo but he left the Society and became one of the founders of Fudan University in Shanghai. In China, local Jesuits and Catholics in general enjoyed no intellectual prestige. Many, in fact, grew up in all-Catholic *ghettos* which remained cut off from the surrounding culture."

He continued, "In the Society of Jesus worldwide we make no difference. We are too few, we have no selves. Indeed, the Gospel comes from God, but the Church from the West. The *white* Church, European and American, makes the decisions which matter. We are too small." He is not a revolutionary, nor has he given up, but he is aware that he has lived and still lives *between two worlds*. At the time Mao Zedong was entering Beijing, "we were memorizing a Latin-taught philosophy and theology; then, many of us developed psychological problems; a good many left the Jesuits later on."

This *between two worlds* predicament was probably unavoidable. The question is rather who, even today, is going to take seriously stories of this Father and others as *an integral*

part of our history? The Catholic Church's encounter with China and its culture has been more dramatic and tragic than its encounter and suffering at the hands of the Boxers, the Japanese and the Communists. It is important that we re-capture all that past and learn to live with it. Missionaries clicked their heels and with cross emblazoned chests, boarded the next boat in search of martyrdom. Chinese seminarians joined out of admiration for these missionaries and for other reasons of their own. Both found themselves in the throes of a national tragedy which was also the demise of a long-lasting culture.

Conclusion

Recently, after several years abroad, one well-trained Chinese priest went back to Taiwan. There, he found a good deal of optimism and satisfaction in Catholic circles regarding the growth of the Church in China. His own comments, however, were: the same enthusiasm was found in the underdeveloped Taiwan of the '50s and '60s; now that Taiwan has become an economic little dragon, the wave of conversion has subsided. Will the same phenomenon occur on the Mainland? Of course, no one knows, but no one even seems to be asking the question.

This question well reflects the ambiguities surrounding the notion of *local Church* in the Chinese context. One option emphasizes that our main role is to serve the Church in China. Another warns against the danger of a strictly Catholic approach: is it not important to compare our literatures and methodologies with intellectuals whom the local church may never reach, they ask? These two approaches represent two different stands on the issue of culture. For the Church, is China only the local Church, or is China the larger society in search of a new culture?

Agenda II: Turning the Biblical Narrative into a Cultural Fable

The Second Agenda reads as follows: "We are interested in Chinese culture because in recent years the biblical narrative and modern theologians have inspired a number of Chinese intellectuals in their search for a reconstruction of Chinese culture.

They are not believers, still less theologians, but through their cultural reading of Christian tradition they may come in close contact with some basic issues in today's Chinese society."

The Biblical Narrative: Intellectually Relevant

In the last three years the monthly *Readings*, which deals with broad comparative cultural issues, has been introducing books by foreign theologians: Niebuhr, Rahner, Bultman, Küng, Barth, Bonhoeffer, and also Christian thinkers like Chekhov, Max Scheler, and T.S. Eliot. On the eve of June 4, 1989, *Readings* published an article on Jürgen Moltman's two major works: *Theology of Hope* and *The Crucified God*. These articles were mainly written by Shenzhen University sociologist Liu Xiaofeng, under a pen name. After June 4, *Readings* stopped publication for a few months. It resumed soon after. Seemingly it has been allowed to continue to act as a cultural window, as a recent article on *The Pilgrim's Progress* testifies. Other publications have also been printing theologically-minded pieces.

The main theme running through these various articles was that theological works are *intellectually relevant* to the cultural modernization of China. This is news indeed. Generally speaking, during the last 70 years or so the Chinese intelligentsia have had no time for theology, which they identified with medieval superstition. The modern age, as they saw it, began at the time of the Renaissance and the Reformation, in reaction against the Church and its theologians. Even if they were aware that Christianity had brought about a new type of social organization, even a new approach to the world of nature, they dismissed theology, and more fundamentally, the Biblical narrative as nothing but a collection of primitive myths, both unscientific and philosophically irrelevant. Marxists, Confucianists and others were satisfied with the verdict of Carnap and Ayer that by definition theological statements could only be meaningless.

Not so today, and the newly discovered intellectual relevance may be briefly illustrated under two headings: the "journey of life" and "from utopia to hope."

The Journey of Life

Human life is a journey. This Biblical vision is contrasted

with the Confucian view that the main business of life is moral growth and nurture. Whereas the Confucianist stays at home, as it were, in the garden, like a tree which patiently grows deep roots, in the Bible men and women are driven out of the Garden onto the bypaths of history. They reach their moral stature only through the dangers and windings of a life-time journey. From the Patriarchs to Moses to the Way of the Cross, the same powerful "cultural fable" unfolds: individual men and cultures alike must go "through fire and water," journey through "the test of crime and punishment."

This discovery of the journey of life is not limited to the theologically minded Liu Xiaofeng. A reviewer of W. Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*, elaborated on the same theme, adding that Faulkner made it clear the "journey" is undertaken to fulfill a "promise." And the reviewer goes on: all this is the "quintessence and soul of Western culture and its superiority over the East," from Homer, to Dante, to Shakespeare, to Milton to Faulkner, etc. In brief, Christianity has transformed man's view of "history, destiny and death" and "it is time for Chinese literary circles to do their homework in Biblical literature."

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Until recently, sin, and essentially original sin, was regarded as the main message of the Bible, the first dogma of Christianity. In the eyes of contemporary Confucianists this original sin was but an infra-philosophical notion, a superfluous fable, which in turn made it necessary to have a saviour who could restore man's original nature, whereas Confucianists had always held that man's moral conscience was sufficient to enable him to fulfill his nature. Now the news is that the notion of sin makes a difference. The Christian spends his life working out his salvation in the hope of "coming home" at the end. He thus leads a life which is much more adventurous, more eventful, less shallow, than the Confucianist who "stays at home." Comparing

Tolstoi's *Resurrection* with the Ming period Beijing opera *Spring in the Jade Hall*, another reviewer comments that the two works have similar plots and characters, but the author of the opera, lacking as he did the experience of sin and repentance, could produce no more than a melodramatic story, where nothing really happened, whereas Tolstoy's sinners kept breaking new ground as they discovered the ways of repentance and forgiveness.

From Utopia to Hope

The life journey parable is also seen as intellectually relevant to the future of Chinese culture. This culture, many fear, "lies dying" at this hour. Can it be reborn? It can be, but only if "we dare to accept the responsibility of fulfilling its promises, if we are ready to shoulder the cross of its sins and shame." Whereas many in China may still try to maintain traditional culture on life-sustaining gadgetry, Western theologians suggest that one should bargain for nothing less than "death and resurrection."

In this context, Moltman's statement that Christian "hope" is a radical criticism of all utopias is good news to intellectuals who, as they admit, have endorsed readily so many Communist and other dreams in the past decades. Here, Liu Xiaofeng, reviewer of Moltman, puts it very clearly: in China, "more than anywhere else, intellectuals and their utopias" are still the "main obstacle to modernisation." In the name of utopias, we read, our friends and many others have sacrificed their youth and their lives: "we have not forgotten their pathetic slogans or the smiles on their faces before their execution." And in fact, it may be worth a mention that the present attempts at bringing dropouts back to school (by providing them with scholarships) have not been couched in terms of campaign with slogans, but bear the name "Project Hope..."

Lastly, Western theologians themselves bring hope simply by their "courage to be": the courage to "speak God" again after Nietzsche and other prophets of the death of God; the courage to speak of hope after the silence of God at Auschwitz. Whereas, 40 years ago, Feng Youlan had little to say about theologians except that they used to wonder how many angels could stand on a pin top, Moltman and his like suggest that all may not be over

despite the dying looks of Chinese tradition. The crucible of the Cultural Revolution, like Auschwitz, may prove to have provided the conditions for a new beginning.

Christian Criticism

For all this intellectual relevance, do the theologians and the Biblical narratives provide anything more than cultural fables? The question was raised in *Readings* by Christian contributors in China. For believers, they wrote, "religion" and "God" transcend man-made "cultural forms." No intellectual quest for new cultural orientations can replace God's own revelation and human response in prayer. In other words, they warn, "misunderstandings and ambiguities" surround the exercise.

For instance, we read, in reaction against ideology, many Chinese intellectuals have in a few years' time come to "doubt their own culture" while trying to catch up with 100 years of intellectual evolution in the West. Nowadays, they read theologians all right, but they have not the slightest idea of the centuries-long tension in the West between philosophical and theological discourses. In China, "homecoming" does not go "beyond nature, beyond the unity of Heaven and Man": how can the average subscriber to *Readings* understand the radical otherness of the transcendent God? Furthermore, Chinese intellectuals are still unable to dissociate the issues of national destiny ("for which God has no answer") from the ultimate issue, that of individual values and salvation.

The Cultural Fable

These criticisms from Christian quarters are to be taken seriously. All in all, the Biblical-narrative-turned-cultural-fable fits well within the broader "Christian agenda" of Chinese intellectuals in the last decade.

What agenda is that, one may ask? *On the one hand*, these intellectuals have obtained a much more complex and positive view of Christianity. Students of comparative literature have discovered that you cannot read Western literature if you ignore the religious dimension, or confine it to footnotes under the label of superstition or feudal exploitation. Historians of the sciences have, among other things, realized the role played by

medieval monks and their universities in preserving and transmitting the ideas of Greek science. Until, then, the Confucian- and the Marxist-establishment had been repeating that areligious Confucianism had always been closer to modern science than religious Christianity. This assumption has now been exploded. Likewise, best-seller Max Weber and his Calvinist God have brought home a new understanding of the role of the Judaeo-Christian tradition in the making of the modern West.

On the other hand, this positive discovery of Christianity remains well circumscribed. Philosopher Li Zehou invites youth to make a serious study of Christianity ("Why all those crosses everywhere?"), only to conclude that it is not a matter of becoming Christian. Christianity, like Nietzsche, Sartre, Camus and others, is only called upon to provide ingredients which will go into the global process of modernizing Chinese culture. It is understood that this culture will keep to its own sources and ends. One may argue to what extent Buddhism has changed Chinese culture, but it is agreed that in the end Buddhism could not become a function of Chinese culture. No doubt, the Christian model will play its role in culture modernization, but this role will be very much restricted to that of cultural fable.

"Cultural fable" here has *two meanings*. *One* is that God's revelation has been reduced to its cultural significance in the history of the West. However, in China this secular reading gives Christianity an intellectual respectability it has long lacked. In a sense Moltman, Faulkner and their like are providing the cultural input that, said Bishop Hsu, the Church failed to offer in the '20s-'40s.

The second meaning of "cultural fable" is that the Christian experience of the West is no blueprint for China in the '80s. By reading Max Weber or historians of science, Chinese intellectuals have come to criticize the simplistic tenets of their Marxist catechism. They know now that religion has been a moving force toward modernisation. But, by the same token, the more they analyse the complex interplay of Christian values with other forces in Western cultural history, the more they realize that they cannot reproduce that experience in their own history. Max Weber's Puritan is no answer; he is only a "fable" from another world "once upon a time." At best, Weber is telling China that modernization has to come from one's own "tradition"; at worst, Weber is telling China that it could happen just

"once upon a time", and that China has nothing to learn from him but her loss. To realize the full implications of the cultural fable, we may best examine two recent interpretations of Weber which focus on two major concerns: individual freedom and individual happiness.

Huang Kejian: Individual Freedom

What is "modernity"? What is this objective "pattern of culture" which can allow China to assess where she stands in the contemporary world? Quoting from Marx, "The history of human societies is nothing but the history of the development of the individual," Huang Kejian answers that "free individuality" constitutes the essence of modernity. What the modern West has invented is a civilisation unlike all others, one where the individual has gained "relative independence" from natural relations.

How then did the transition to modernity take place (and how can it be repeated in China today)? Marx answers that, like everything else, this transition was the result of changes in the material conditions of production. But Huang Kejian, who has just read Max Weber, finds Marx's explanation hardly convincing and proceeds to "further Marx's thought" on this precise point.

From the well-known thesis in *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (translated into Chinese in 1986), Huang Kejian drew three conclusions. (1) In the transition to the modern "independent individual" the forerunner was not a "definite change in the cultural objective reality," but a "substantial readjustment or transformation of the value system due to the appearance of new values." (2) There exists one major difference between the old and new value system: the former was based on the group, the latter on the individual. In Protestantism, each believer stands on his own, he communicates directly with God; likewise, in modern society, all are equal before commodities, money and law. (3) In the transition to the new value system, the individual is emancipated, but at the same time economic rationalism puts liberated aspirations under definite constraints. In other words, as long as a similar cluster of values does not prevail in China, "modernisation" will remain a "delusion."

Since 1840, Huang Kejian explains, China has attempted modernisation. The economy is number one on this agenda, but the modernisation of the economy is not only a matter of emancipating vital forces from the shackles of tradition. It also requires new values which can bring about the type of rationality mentioned by Weber. Economic development is a "cultural" problem. In the West, the Puritans who "listened to sermons on detachment," spontaneously accepted the modern economic order. The Chinese, however, discovered the modern world at a time when "their religious roots had already slowly withered; therefore, by what method can we arouse not only independence and the vital impulse, but also devotion towards one's individual vocation and the corresponding rational behaviour?"

This basic issue, Huang Kejian adds, was soon compounded by a second. China had hardly encountered modern civilisation from Europe, when Westerners came to realize that their economy was leading to "alienation." The liberated individual was becoming a prisoner of his own economic magic. Is this what China wanted? No, but she found herself in a no-exit predicament and could only "delude herself" in the utopian hope that she could reap the benefits of modern economy while preserving the individual's integrity. This "delusion" has now held sway over Chinese minds, including Communist ones, for seventy years.

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What is the priority as Huang sees it? China must "first of all establish and identify with value orientations which, in the context of world history, represent the best of our times." These value orientations, he insists, are those which Marx called "independence," and "free individuality." In not-yet modernized China, priority should be given to promoting the ideal of individual freedom, since without this *one* value, modern civilisation and cultural transformation cannot succeed. Unless the right "pattern of culture" is agreed upon, it is illusory to try to

look for meaning in traditional values. Unless individual freedom is made the key value, "hard work" or "patriotism," for instance, remain functions in the old authoritarian patterns ("a hardworking slave remains a slave").

Jin Guantao on specialization

At the beginning of his article, Huang Kejian lamented that "since early 1987," intellectuals have tended to take refuge in narrowly limited topics and given up altogether the broad issues of cultural reconstruction. In connection with this issue, Jin Guantao re-examined Puritan ethics.

A friend of Jin Guantao had remarked that to him "the day all Chinese intellectuals discard their (traditional) sense of mission, China will be saved." This remark, Jin Guantao later discovered, well illustrated the younger generation's stand on tradition. On the one hand, they think that China needs a good deal of Western individualism and must learn the still foreign notion of "privacy," since the traditional emphasis on the "social responsibility of intellectuals" has stifled individuality and creativity. On the other hand, the general feeling is that the spirit of specialization/professionalism has been one of the motivating forces behind modernization in the West, where a great number of intellectuals have devoted themselves totally to their specialized tasks. Meanwhile, in China arts and sciences remained part-time occupations or hobbies, second to the moral and generalist goals of the "mission" of the intellectuals.

Jin Guantao voices his dissatisfaction with what he sees as an "emotional reading of a partial analysis" of Chinese and Western cultures. His main posture is that the essential structures of a culture cannot be tampered with at will. Without a "sense of a mission," specialists can only fail in their attempts at modernizing Chinese culture. Enter Max Weber.

The specialist spirit belongs no doubt to the essential structure of Western culture. How? Historians still hesitate to say, but they agree on the Greek and the Puritan connection. In *Problems and Methods* Jin Guantao reported on the Greek Euclid (passed on to the Renaissance by medieval monks). Regarding Puritans he now writes:

If Weber's theory is correct, then we must not separate the professional spirit from the deeper structure of Protestant cul-

ture. In the asceticism of Calvinism, man cannot obtain God's grace except by proving his own value in his daily life and professional labours. This, no doubt, contributed to the development of the professional spirit. In my eyes at present, the link between this spirit and the deep structures of Western culture needs further clarification, but Weber's work at least proves one point: when we see Western intellectuals spending a lifetime at their specialized trade and making immense contributions to society, be sure not to forget to analyse why they can do it while feeling at ease and satisfied.

By itself, as long as the question of fundamental values has not been solved, specialization may well bring but "a feeling of loss and immorality." Hence the issue of specialization must raise that of the essential structure, the "ultimate commitment," the "ultimate reality."

In traditional culture, the ultimate moral commitment was linked with society. Individuals could choose between a variety of postures ranging from intense moral involvement in society to simply cultivating their own moral gardens, but in no way could the ultimate commitment be found in limiting oneself to a specialized line of work. This basic orientation still represents the ultimate commitment of Chinese intellectuals today, "whatever the structure of the new culture of tomorrow may be."

Jin Guantao feels it necessary to add that of course he does not jump to the "simplistic view" that "as long as intellectuals refuse to believe in God's existence" individualism and specialization have no future in China. His question is rather: how can the sense of mission lead us to improve on the traditional value system? (and will the younger generation be ready for it?)

Conclusion

How can we summarize Agenda II? We are interested in Chinese culture because our Biblical narrative has caught the attention of intellectuals in this hour of cultural soul searching. In the process religion in general and Christianity in particular have gained a new intellectual respectability. This development has taken the Party by surprise and since July '89 the ideological establishment has turned its guns against the un-Marxist positions of Max Weber.

On the other hand, "intellectual responsibility" does not mean "acceptance." Reflections like those of Huang Kejian or Jin Guantao invite us to realize that Chinese culture has its own

chemistry and cannot be tampered with at will.

Agenda III: Beyond Modernization, Recapturing the Universal Significance of Chinese Culture?

The third agenda is about the future of Chinese culture. It can be summarized in Jin Guantao's reflection that, for all its faults and historical failures, Chinese culture has kept alive values and orientations which "once were common to the whole of mankind." China has not "yet departed from the main trunk of cultural development" in the history of civilizations, and this may prove to be a chance "for mankind to discover a new path of development" in a world shaken by the contradictions of modernity.

Overview

This third agenda includes in fact *various platforms*. One is that there is still a tradition alive in China today, and that this tradition is necessary for the Chinese tomorrow. Two, the tradition provides the seeds for a new modern philosophy which will be of significance not only for China, but for the whole world. Three, Chinese traditions can provide the world, including Christianity, with symbols and philosophical insights much needed to allow humankind to face the ethical challenges of the next century.

Altogether, these various versions of the agenda agree on a *mainstream thesis*: the fact that the historical culture of China has proved unable to create and stimulate modernization does not amount to saying that traditional culture was or has become valueless and has nothing to contribute in the modern world.

Let me emphasize that this agenda is not the blanket glorification of Chinese culture, or a programme for the revival of culture as undertaken in Taiwan. This agenda remains very much a question, or rather a *series of questions*, asked by a curious assortment of people: Chinese in and outside China, Japanese, Koreans, etc...; some are Confucians, others are not; some are Christians, including a few with a Confucian tradition in their families, including also three or four who call them-

selves "Boston Confucianists. "

I submit that *we are interested* in this agenda for a variety of good "Catholic" reasons. One is that a number of Catholics are actively working along these lines. Secondly, John Paul II has set up a Council for Culture in Rome and that institution, one would expect, must be interested in the prospects of a culture which represents at least one fifth of humankind. Last, whenever in recent years, Pope John Paul II has ventured to comment on cultural issues in China, he chose to emphasize the valuable, enduring elements present in the long cultural tradition of China.

The Right Timing

The timing is said to be right in more ways than one. (1) First of all, unlike in the previous decades (1920-1970's), Chinese culture is no longer easily identified with political forces opposed to Communism. Marxism has made recent history, not Confucianism. No longer a threat, Chinese culture is now on the agenda of socialism with Chinese characteristics. There is no doubt that on this agenda the traditional culture is meant to be but the handmaid of the socialist commodity economy--and this is the main tune at many meetings and debates on culture. Yet, at the same meetings, views like those of Du Weiming are duly commented upon because they represent the best of scholarship in the last two decades. (2) This scholarship is another factor behind the right timing. In the last 40 years much research has been done on Chinese cultural-intellectual history, including Neoconfucianism and religious Taoism; in the last decade intellectuals in China have also caught up with the research carried out in Japan or in the West, by Chinese and non-Chinese scholars. In contrast with an earlier view, from the '50s, that saw "tradition" as opposed to "development," these scholars have begun discovering many "progressive" streams within the Confucian tradition and others which were of "enduring value." In other words, the thesis that Confucianism could not survive the demise of Confucian China was being called into question. (3) The timing is also right because the economic success of Japan and the small dragon countries seems to explode the view that Confucianism is incompatible with the modern world. This success does not amount to saying that Confucianism was a decisive factor in the development of these

countries (some say it was), or that it was no obstacle to development. At least, it suggests that old Confucianism is still playing its part in these industrialized societies. (4) Finally, we are told, the timing is right because we are now standing on the threshold of the 21st century. According to Tofler's, *The Third Wave*, the 21st century is important because it will be a century of new values, new social standards, new technologies, new geopolitics, new styles of living--all changes which will require a rethinking of all traditions. In the same way, Chinese experts like to quote Jaspers: "the 21st century will see a revival of all major religious traditions."

The Hong Kong and Harvard Hermeneuts of the Confucian Text

The two best known leading "new Confucianists" are Liu Shuxian at the Chinese University of Hong Kong and Du Weiming at Harvard. I call them "hermeneuts" of the Confucian text because, they themselves say that hermeneutics in the West has inspired much of their methodology. In February, Du Weiming made a few biographical comments in *Readings*, recalling that his main interlocutors have included Gabriel Marcel, Buber, Gadamer, and other theologians, philosophers and students of comparative religions (he even attended a symposium in Vienna together with John Paul II in August 1989).

This option for hermeneutics is based on the straightforward view that "Confucianism and Christianity are two great traditions" both facing *similar tasks* at present. Both are traditions coming from the pre-modern age, but both proclaiming a message that "still has vital significance for us." Even though "some aspects of these traditions are indeed dated, the spirit or the core of these traditions is something perennial which does not die with the past." In this context, what Christian theologians have been doing--like extricating the Christian message from a medieval cosmology--is also necessary and feasible in the case of Confucianism. As Liu Shuxian put it at a recent Confucian-Christian Dialogue Conference at Berkeley, "It is not difficult to see that there are many parallels between the Confucian and Christian efforts to modernize their own traditions."

Thus, Du Weiming and Liu Shuxian see themselves as the

Ricoeur, Gadamer, Buber or Levinas of the Confucian text. This "text" includes the Classics, the Four Books, and other major Confucian and Neoconfucian writings. This "text" is what remains "alive" once the political and institutional structures of Confucian China have collapsed. By saying that the "text" is what remains "alive," Du Weiming and Liu Shuxian mean two things: one, they acknowledge that the Confucian tradition has been dying for several generations, so that now there is nothing much to return to but the "text." Secondly, they affirm that the text is alive because it represents what has been a living, developing, tradition dealing with live issues. Following Tillich, they call this the ultimate human commitment.

Criticisms abound in China and Hong Kong about the enterprise. I will just mention two. First: how valid is the assumption that Confucianism and Christianity are in the same boat, and that what is good for one may work for the other? For instance, how much Du Weiming and Liu Shuxian appreciate the fact that Gadamer and those like him are not only faced with a "text," they are also members of a church congregation which sings the "text" with roof-rattling power. They also tend to ignore the fact that (see Agenda II), unlike Confucianism, Christianity can recognize modernity as at least the illegitimate offspring of its own "text." Similar questions have led critics on Mainland China to accuse Du Weiming of trying to "revive a dead soul in someone else's corpse." At any rate, these questions invite further clarifications.

Second: the objection is often raised in Mainland China that today's Chinese society is not the seminar room at Harvard. What does Du Weiming know about China as it really is? This question is altogether irrelevant. For what did Karl Marx or Max Weber know about the real China of their times, and yet they are best-sellers in China today. The objection is also irrelevant because in the socio-political "context" of China it is simply impossible for Chinese intellectuals to engage in a modern re-reading of the Confucian "text." There are too many cadres around, too many ghosts from the old society, too much ideological pollution, and the modern world remains for them a "fable" indeed. This is why part of the thinking (political and cultural) must be done by Chinese outside China. As a Hong Kong commentator put it ten years ago, if China ever goes back to a modernized version of Confucianism, this version will have

to come from Japan or from the West.

Humanizing Modernity: a Confucian-Christian Agenda

Another person I would like to introduce is Chung Chai-sik, a Korean Christian with a strong Confucian family tradition; he is now teaching ethics at the Boston University School of Theology. The Korean connection is quite important here, since in Korea both the Confucian and the Christian traditions vitally interact in the context of a developed society.

This broad philosophy of the inchoate Confucian-Christian dialogue must be put on record. It was reflected at the Second International Confucian-Christian Conference which took place in July, 1991. This philosophy may better be read in the form of a question. One tradition, Christianity, has played a major role in the shaping of modernization and in spreading it to the world at large. Will Christianity alone be able to articulate the ethical problems of the global world of tomorrow or will it need the input of other major traditions, including Confucianism?

This question has two aspects. One is that the Christian-inspired West has sown its technologies around the world only to reap a mess; has or has not Confucianism a store of key-ideas and symbols which may be even more effective than the Christian tradition in inspiring respect for Nature, for instance, in tomorrow's world? The other aspect relates to the universal values the Christian West stands for--individual freedoms, equality, "human rights": can these values take root in other parts of the world if they are not couched in the words and symbols of other traditions, such as Confucianism? In other words: can Christians pursue their own agenda for tomorrow's world without learning from the traditions of others or can they even accept the obvious fact that we are not the only ones having an agenda?

Chung Chai-sik, who casts his own Confucian and Christian experience in the broad language of ethical theology writes:

The ever increasing global interdependence, especially in the economy, technology and the environment, is now an established trend that calls for closer global cooperation beyond the nation-state. The foundation of international cooperation is the sense of responsibility for global stewardship, which in turn rests on an universal spiritual vision and aspirations. The mission to make Planet Earth a livable habitat for humans ultimately rests on

expanding our 'sources of the self' to global dimensions. We are challenged to go beyond the confines of our received traditions.

The human condition on this endangered Planet Earth demands a radical shift in our understanding of human nature and values. Individualism and rationality which Christianity and especially Protestant cultures have been historically associated with are now ever more questioned. We must explore a view of the human person that sustains both a balanced respect for individual autonomy and a genuine respect for person-in-community. ... We must come up with a new perspective to see the value of human life in view of the greater interdependent ecosystem of Heaven, Earth and all forms of life. Reappropriating what is the best in the received traditions, whether Confucian or Christian, we need to articulate and explain what it means to live a good human life and to achieve a good society here and now.

Breaking the Code: Taoist liturgies

In recent years, scholars in China have been discovering the importance of another "text," besides the Confucian one, namely that of religious Taoism. This religious Taoism has been snubbed by Confucians and Marxists alike; even now Taoist temples and priests remain under a political cloud. Yet, the need for asserting Chinese characteristics in the service of socialism could not but direct attention to China's only native religious tradition. This step was easy to take, since Joseph Needham proved that, in China too, a religion had been busy with scientific experiments. At the same time, the study of religious Taoism had become a respectable scientific field in Japan and the West.

Where is this "text" of religious Taoism to be found? On the one hand, in the Taoist Canon, on the other in the mostly unwritten rituals performed in temples. For the sake of brevity, let us say that the breakthrough occurred when foreign scholars understood that the byzantine rituals of today's temple are simply the re-enacting of what is contained in thousands of pages in the Canon.

Out of this research two deepseated views are being debunked: the view that it is all superstition, and, accordingly, that it is reserved for the masses. Instead of superstitions, we have "liturgies," that is rituals, which re-present and re-actualize the founding moments in the history of Chinese *Koinonia*. During

these rituals, the priest is meant to "empty himself" of his own desires in order to become the mediator between the local community and the heavenly powers. Likewise, it has become clear that for centuries Taoist liturgies were performed daily at the Court and that only a Taoist genealogy could give legitimacy and "potency" to emperors.

What does this new understanding of religious Taoism bring to this third agenda? Is this Taoism compatible with modernity? Has it something to offer the world? Unlike Confucianism, religious Taoism has so far made no attempts to modernize. Moreover, the rubrics of the rituals are family secrets handed down from father to son, and the structure of the liturgies is highly undemocratic. These, seemingly, ill fit it the modern world. Yet, in Taiwan the Silicon Valleys have not slowed down the temple-building industry. For the time being the Taoist rituals still play their role. They still allow communities to strengthen ties and renew their "covenant" with the universe, visible and invisible.

Has this Taoist religion something to offer the world? Taoist priests and faithful, be they in Taiwan, Hong Kong or China have not expressed their ideas on this. A few Catholic scholars suggest that indeed we could learn from the Taoist tradition. Taoist rituals have presided over the world's most populated country through most of the Christian era. Is God manifested also in Taoism? We do not know, but now that we have "tamed" the earth, it may be time that for us to learn from Taoists the art of living at peace with God's nature. Also, our theologians may find inspiration in a tradition which has quietly kept to the view that God has no name.

Habits of What Hearts?

The persistence of Taoist rituals suggests that a good deal of Chinese culture is still present in China today. In any case, one might add after decades of moral dislocation there is little else left. In brief, communism has failed to change the Chinese, and yet, the enduring values of the tradition are still there.

From Du Weiming to Jiang Zemin all agree that the "dregs" of feudalism, clans and slavery must go, along with the remains of institutional Confucianism. Both agree that the genuine tradition is elsewhere, but Jiang Zemin does not need

Gadamer to identify that tradition: "courage," "self-reliance," "patriotism," "discipline," "self-sacrifice," that is, all values which can, he hopes, well serve political stability and the needs of the socialist commodity-economy. This we may call "cultural tinkering" for the sake of politics. No doubt, many of the values on Jiang Zemin's list have a Confucian ring, but this cultural tinkering simply uses traditional terms in an effort to give legitimacy to the demands of the Communist state.

Is there a third option between Du Weiming and this tinkering? Recently a former associate of Zhao Ziyang, Wang Huning, who speaks approvingly of Du Weiming, elaborated on the broad notion of the "originary spirit" of Chinese culture. This "originary spirit," he said, is not totally identifiable with the Classics or limited to traditional values. It is an historical reality, but it is also alive and well today--an unconscious way of going about things, or in other words, Chinese "habits of the heart".

Wang Huning's "originary spirit" may sound vague, but he is a very responsible analyst of the socio-political scene. In fact, his "originary spirit" is akin to what the anthropologist Sun Longji described a few years ago as the "deeper structures of Chinese culture." In Hong Kong, Taiwan and Mainland China, Sun explained, modernization has not altered the style of social relations. The traditional system of values has broken down, but a number of these values are still alive as an unconscious code of behaviour governing interpersonal relations.

Wang Huning says that this code is still alive in China, still bearing the stamp of the "originary spirit", still bringing meaning to individual lives, still evolving. Yet, this code has lost its traditional bearings, it offers no system of values which could stand up to Jiang Zemin's cultural tinkering. We must give due consideration to a code which is followed by one billion people and has a long history. But we must remember that no one has the key to this code. One billion people may think that they are right since they follow the same code, but the code did not protect them against themselves during the Cultural Revolution. In other words, Wang Huning's "originary spirit" remains very much an "erring soul" as long as it remains outside modern philosophical discourse.

Conclusion

Is the "originary spirit" still alive beneath the State's ideology? Is there any proof that this deep culture in China is anything different from that found in many pre-modern societies around the world? The question is well taken. In the '30s and '40s, philosopher Feng Youlan was already asking a similar question. His answer amounted to saying that China was and would be different on only two points: the "text" (Confucian and Taoist) and the sheer "size" of its population. The "text" is unique in its philosophical style and in its linguistic/literary medium; and this one text will remain the main reference for a population of over one billion people.

What China does with its "text" in the next century is an agenda worth following.

News Update

Interview with Bishop Zong Huaide

In an interview given to UCAN Bishop Zong Huaide, re-appointed president of the Chinese Catholic Bishops' Conference in September 1992, said that a major difficulty encountered by Catholic communities in China is the repossession of Church property confiscated after 1949. To recoup property the Church must furnish proper documentation. Over the years many documents have been destroyed or lost. Some which exist are not easily accessible, he said. Most diocesan records and Church archives were burnt, confiscated or destroyed during political campaigns and the Cultural Revolution. Confiscated Church property, mosques and temples were converted into government offices, factories, schools and housing. Occasionally, the sites were preserved as parks and museums.