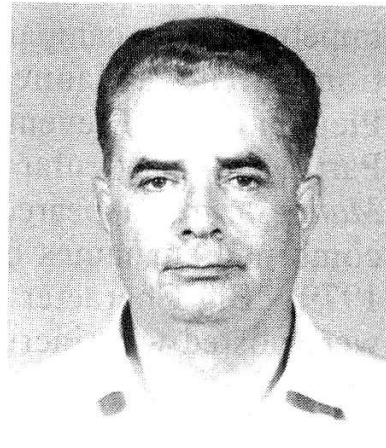


China 1993: Openness: Its Cultural Implications

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(The following article was translated for Tripod with the permission of the author and EDA - Eglises d'Asie).

China without walls? This seems to have been the premise of the TV documentary *He Shang (The River Elegy)*¹ before the cruelties of Tiananmen gave lie to such hopes. The wall indeed remains. Nor do I refer to the Great Wall on which all the tourists of the world now converge--China has never before been so open to international traffic--but rather to the great psychological barrier, that social wall, which Alain Peyrefitte speaks of in his recent writings under the general theme of "a clash of cultures". In his *The Immovable Empire* (1989), which gives an historical account of Lord Macartney's ill-fated embassy to Beijing two hundred years ago, he not only exposes cultural differences between China and the West, but he also leaves the reader in awe of the vast amount of research material he has accumulated in the process.



Predictably, he published *The Chinese View (La Vision des Chinois)* in 1991, a Chinese translation of some of the above mentioned documentation. And recently he has announced the publication of a second book, *The English View (Le Regard des Anglais)*, to be followed by yet another *The View of the Missionaries (L'oeil des Missionnaires)*. We can look forward, then, to further descriptions of the confrontation of these two great cultures, and this from the British government's as well as the French missionary's point of view.

Without trying to anticipate the contents of Peyrefitte's third volume, may I be allowed to propose here some modern missionary views on a China which is now in the full flood of its own evolution? I shall focus on the cultural aspects of this evolution under the three headings which might be of most

interest to Westerners at this time: the democratic movement, human rights and the role of Christianity in society.

I. What Kind of Democracy?

The present democratic movement, which continues to draw the interest of foreign observers, began shortly after the death of Mao Zedong in 1976 and marked the end of the Cultural Revolution as well as the fall of the Gang of Four. It was given impetus by the campaign for political openness and emancipation which was launched in December of 1978 by the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party. This particular democratic thrust had its origins in the *Manifesto* that appeared in Canton newspapers in 1973 under the combined surnames of Li Yi Zhe.² Late in 1978 and early 1979, "Big Character Posters"³ demanding democratic reform were posted with increased frequency on the walls of Xidan in Beijing.

The demands were for greater freedom of expression, and the reformers criticized harshly a bureaucracy which they claimed was paralyzed by its own internal corruption. Such criticism surfaced again in other places under other forms, i.e. in the ideological criticism leveled at the socialist regime for alienating the masses, and given new validity as a form of Marxist humanism during 1982 and 83; in the nationwide student movements of December 1986; and, finally, in the Tiananmen Square demonstrations of April-May 1989, which followed upon the death of Hu Yaobang, the former party-secretary, who was seen as in favour of reform.

Democracy in Chinese Tradition

The call to liberty by the students in Tiananmen Square reverberated around the world, due in no small measure to the formidable presence of the international news media people who had come to Beijing to cover Gorbachev's historic visit. Prior to this, the democratic movement had received some coverage in the foreign press because its inception had coincided with China's new policy of openness to the world community. It would be foolish, however, to judge the extent of China's

democratic resolve based on this one movement alone. It will be up to the historians to sift through the available evidence in an effort to uncover the specifics of this particular phase of China's democratic aspirations. Undoubtedly, it is they who will also have to show cause as to how this movement towards spiritual freedom is related to the ten year Cultural Revolution preceding it, and how a revolutionary dynamism critical of the bureaucracy was inherited from the past, and, again, how deep was the frustration among students and intellectuals in the face of shattered hopes, for this was above all a movement not of the masses but of students and intellectuals.

*The fact that religion
is still very much alive in China is
a source of puzzlement...for Chinese leaders.*

The democratic movement of the 1980's finds its rightful antecedent in the May 4th Movement of 1919. At that time, the aspirations of the university students for liberty were fired and fanned by such avant-garde intellectuals as Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Cai Yuanpei and the writer Lu Xun.⁴ It was their committed purpose to bring about the birth of a new China. Following the revolution of 1911 and the declaration of the Chinese Republic under the presidency of Sun Yat Sen, the country soon reverted to its feudal past and rule by warlords. Sun's Three People's Principals:⁵ nationalism, democracy and socialism for all practical purposes were dead. The end of the First World War brought further humiliation as the encroachments of the Western colonial powers and the imperialist Japanese were ratified in the Treaty of Versailles. The "Sleeping Giant of Asia" was no longer considered to be sleeping but rather to be seriously ill. How could China be restored to health? What were the root causes of her illness? In all the large cities of China the university students rose up, cast off the old ways and rallied round the modern flags of *science and democracy*.

The intellectuals and students were given two courses of

action from which to choose. The first was a pragmatism that offered practical, concrete solutions to economic and political problems as they arose. The pragmatic approach was espoused most notably by Hu Shi and reflected his American educational background. The second approach was more radical and revolutionary, advocating the adoption of an ideology of social development from the many 'isms' in vogue at the time: i.e. anarchism, populism, socialism, and Marxist communism. Chinese youth filled with idealism and grandiose dreams naturally favoured the second choice.

The Rise and Decline of Marxist Ideology

The success of the 1917 Bolshevik October Revolution was acclaimed by Li Dazhao⁶ as a great liberating and humanitarian victory over Czarist bureaucracy. Marxism was for him both scientific and democratic. The shackles of the oppressed would indeed be broken by the application of a scientific law of history. The most energetic and committed revolutionaries of that time chose Marxism on which to construct a new China.

Was Marxism compatible with Chinese culture? The young Chinese revolutionaries did not stop to ask the question, nor did they hesitate to import a foreign model. The choice, however, did resonate with soundings deep within the Chinese psyche. Marxism is a form of popular Messianism, and China's history is marked by the frequency of its peasant uprisings. The Confucian philosopher Mencius⁷ recognized as long ago as 300 BCE the right of the people to refuse to submit to the authority of a corrupt dynasty. The Chinese word for revolution (*ge-ming*) indicates an expulsion from office, a change of command, the loss of the mandate of Heaven which was bestowed upon the emperor as Heaven's Son. When a corrupt sovereign showed he was no longer capable of "harmonizing heaven and earth" and chaos ruled throughout the kingdom, the people were invested with authority to rise up and overthrow the established order. This kind of revolution usually brought to power a new dynasty more able and willing to work for the common good. It was not in any way, however, to place power directly into the hands of the people. These periodic uprisings also harboured egalitarian ideals which were inspired by the teachings of the Daoists, Buddhists and more recently Christians, as in the case of the

Taiping Rebellion of the mid-19th century.

Mao Zedong, in the name of Marxism, assumed the messianic mantle of the traditional peasant movements. For the first time in Chinese history, however, it was not to be a change in dynasties but rather putting power into the hands of the people. Mao outlined this concept in 1940 in his *New Democracy*,⁸ and the task of establishing this popular democracy was given over not to the "dictatorship of the proletariat" but to the dictatorship of the Chinese Communist Party.

*...China, with its Confucian tradition,
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Aside from the long tradition of messianic popularism there was another reason which predisposed the Chinese to choose Marxism and that was the cult of modern scientific knowledge. The Marxist option had all the appearances of being an authentic science of history and society. Historical determinism was interpreted by Li Dazhao as a doctrine capable of liberating people from a blind fatalism.⁹ By the beginning of the 20th century the respect accorded science by China's intellectuals had reached religious proportions. Before they came to believe in dialectical materialism they had put their faith in Darwinian evolution, popularized in the writings of Yan Fu around the turn of the century.¹⁰ The theory of evolution taught them how to fight for their own survival. They believed that only a strong and prosperous nation could compete with the world outside. Such reputedly scientific theories as evolution and dialectical materialism would invest China with a basic moral prestige. The destiny of China and its people became the object of a religious belief, and "the law of destiny" (Tian-ming) was revived in a new and secularized form.

We can imagine the state of confusion among veteran Chinese Marxists as they confront the collapse of the oldest

Marxist societies. Countries throughout the world have abandoned ideological dogma for democratic forms as they adapt to the economic, cultural and religious needs and desires of their peoples. Within China itself there is a crisis of faith in Communism not only among intellectuals but also among the common people. Theoreticians have become aware of the system's weaknesses, while the people no longer believe in the ideological sermons of cadres, who are often corrupt. The leaders are maintaining Communism only out of fear and the need to preserve order and stability. Many among them are quite aware of the urgent need to renew the political fiber of socialism by introducing more democratic reforms.

The Hazards of Opting for Democracy

Can democracy work in China? If so, what kind? How does one define *democracy*? In its eagerness to enter into the modern world, China once again is tempted to look outside its own boundaries for appropriate models. Under the present circumstances, it is hard to see how an open discussion of this matter could take place inside the country. To understand the Chinese preoccupation with this issue we must look at discussions that have taken place outside China, first in Paris during September 1990, and then again in Singapore in December of the same year.

***Paris, September 1990: A University of Democracy*¹¹**

Some of the students and intellectuals who fled China in the aftermath of the Tiananmen crackdown found asylum in Paris. There they established a centre for Chinese democracy. Eager to learn what brand of democracy would be most suitable for China, they organized study sessions in the Fall of 1990 that ran from September 12 to 15 at Centre Sevres. Calling it the University of Democracy, they invited about a dozen professors to lecture on the political, judicial, economic and social aspects of democracy. The presentations dealt with the larger realities as well as the smaller particulars of the subject. Speakers analyzed the history of democracy in Europe, the way it functions in the United States and France today, the Hungarian experience in establishing a democratic state, and the demise of Communism

in Eastern Europe. Only Angelo Petroni, the president of the Foundation of Italian Liberals, addressed the basic question of what is democracy? His vision probably left his Chinese listeners unsatisfied. He presented democracy as an instrument at the service of liberty and defined the content of freedom as the absence of coercion. He described the democratic system as a set of institutional regulations designed to prevent oppression by the government. Petroni's interpretation was decidedly liberal, favouring a purely negative, empirical and individualistic form of freedom. He rejected the more positive concept of a freedom founded on human nature and he maintained that to put the stress on the positive concept of liberty would only bring about another inquisition. He saw democracy as a protection against tyranny and achieved by means of a multi-party system, free elections, popular referendums and constitutional law. His emphasis on human rights was the most substantial part of his speech. He insisted on the rights of the individual being safeguarded over against those of the collectivity, which, he maintained, do not exist at all.

Nothing could be further removed from the Chinese mentality, since in China the group is more important than the individual, and the political system must have moral import. The individual has meaning only through belonging to a group: a family, a geographical place, a school, a profession, a trade union, etc. The duty of the citizen is to serve the people, and, if needed, to sacrifice oneself for the common good. The state is seen as the extended family wherein the fundamental virtue of filial piety *xiao*, that is, obedience to parents and loyalty to the sovereign, must be exercised. To leave individuals to their own designs is enough to disrupt the whole of society.

In point of fact, Petroni assumes the existence of many personal values while not imposed by the political system are nonetheless vital to the life of the nation. He takes for granted the existence of an entire code of civil law, a sense of civic responsibility, decent and proper human relationships, a social conscience, moral and religious convictions, and, most of all, a situation in which customs, rights and traditions are protected by a judicial system developed over the course of centuries.

Singapore, December 1990: Liberal or Corporative Democracy
The tiny Republic of Singapore, which is 75% Chinese, can be

taken as a laboratory for China's modernization process. Under the guise of enlightened pragmatism, its leadership incorporated into its socialistic plan a number of effective capitalistic features. Of course, China and Singapore are not the same. Singapore is a former British colony and has inherited the English educational and legal systems. The Chinese migrant population, however, is marked by a profound Confucian tradition. Recent debates there on democracy are the result of the meeting of two cultural currents. Intellectuals educated in the West wanted a more liberal democracy and they were impatient with the minutiae of political regulations issuing forth from a Chinese paternalism justifying itself on the grounds of "care for the people" as its principle guideline. The leaders, for their part, argued that Singapore's economic successes was proof enough of the merit of a corporatism that they judged to be indispensable for social cohesion and development.

Singapore's English language daily *The Straits Times* devoted two months of its "Comment & Analysis" section at the end of 1990 and the beginning of 1991 to an examination of the kind of democracy most suitable for this culturally Asian and predominantly Chinese republic. The two protagonists of the debate were Asad Lutif and K. Shanmugam, neither of whom was Chinese. It was as if the concept itself was foreign to the Chinese and they were holding themselves aloof from the discussion. Shanmugam, a member of Parliament, defended liberal democracy while clearly stating the conditions for its success. He maintained that democracy expressed the ideals of justice, equality, the dignity of the individual and, finally, the sovereignty of the people. *Liberal*, he said, was a term that implied the following presuppositions: limited government intervention, social pluralism, and acquiescence to the principle that the majority is not always right. The democratic ideal, he insisted, while desirable, is difficult to attain. This can be readily seen from the decline of the Western democracies with their lowered moral standards, rising crime rates, economic stagnation, costly social welfare systems that impair the work ethic, and the excessive emphasis on the individual to the detriment of the common good. The question remains as to how it is possible to have a liberal democracy free of all such deviations?

Shanmugan concluded that "a society needs, first and foremost, strong institutions, a juridical system, a political body

and a sufficient level of social order and stability."¹² Such institutions, he conceded, can only take shape over a long period of time. In Singapore, South Korea and Taiwan, the initial emphasis was on discipline rather than democracy. This was seen as necessary in order to insure a strengthening of the economy, the construction of an infrastructure, a rising standard of living, a socially disciplined citizenry, and a spirit of patriotism. Today in all of these countries there is a firm foundation on which to develop a democratic system suitable to each one's individual needs if they so desire.

On the other hand, Asad Latif, who is a journalist, reproached Shanmungan for failing to put sufficient emphasis on a power structure that allows for the development of democratic values. He argued that only through a viable political structure can lasting peace and stability be assured. He maintained that Singapore's experience was conclusive. It is

a corporative democratic state, governed by an administrative elite, legitimatised by periodic free and honest elections, following the principle of universal suffrage. The government is not the mediator but the final arbitrator. Liberal democracy is then not the best means of achieving political progress.¹³

Both Shanmungan and Latif agree that democracy is in need of some kind of State regulation. The former hopes it will intervene to prevent the deviations to which liberal democracy is prone; the latter recognizes that some liberal modifications should be made in the corporatist system as long as the stability of the State is not placed in jeopardy.

Two Western professors at the National University of Singapore, in an effort to clarify ambiguities raised by the two terms, called for more precise definitions of corporatism and liberalism. "Corporatism" they noted, "has a rich history. It has its origin in the Catholic European concept of society as an organic community."¹⁴ They went on to say that when applied to Nationalist regimes of the first half of the 20th century "Corporatism refers to a strong State which is not allied to any social groups whatsoever." If such be the case, then, this kind of corporatism has nothing Catholic about it. The social doctrine of the Church insists on the role of intermediary groups and on the active participation of all citizens in all aspects of political life.

The two professors reduced contemporary corporatism to a State strategy for controlling the economy in the service of the nation and concluded:

If Singapore seeks to preserve a culture of filial piety, it is perhaps better not to chose liberalism as its dominant ideology. If, however, Singaporeans think that social changes will automatically bring about increased social mobility, with the young demanding more freedom within the family and the State, then they can lean toward a policy of liberalism.¹⁵

This effort of pure Western logic was quite foreign to the ideal of harmonizing opposites so dear to Chinese tradition, and it also betrays a lack of understanding a political tradition wherein individuals can be isolated by the State and stripped of all social and human relationships.

II. Which Human Rights?

Successful implementation of liberal democratic principles rests on an adequate protection of human rights. This, in turn, presupposes a notable development of judicial structures. A Chinese view of American society is one of chaos and conflict where legions of lawyers do battle for the benefit of their clients and, most assuredly, for their own financial gain. The Chinese themselves prefer peace, and they are not tempted to be drawn into the struggle of individuals to defend their rights. They tolerate injustice out of fear of a larger evil that might befall them. The weakness of their own legal system is enough of a deterrent to dissuade them from acting otherwise.

Law and Ritual

The traditional Chinese concept of law immediately conjures up punishment and repression. A contemporary Chinese analyst living in Hong Kong, struck by the absolute and transcendent quality of Western law, wrote:

This transcendent element (of Western law) is borrowed from God, the world's Lawgiver, wherein all are equal before the law just as all are equal before God.¹⁶

In place of the Western concept of natural rights, China, with its Confucian tradition, postulates a social order that is spontaneous and conforms to the cosmic order, regulated not by rights but by ritual (*li*).

Current debate seeks to ascertain how far ritual order can replace civil rights. The ritual of human relationships responds to the norms of filial piety (*xiao*), mutual benevolence (*ren*) and moral rectitude (*yi*). Social hierarchy is an extension of the large family structure. Individuals must comport themselves in a manner appropriate to their station and function within the community as a whole. Under threat of being isolated from the group, each member must honour in practice the community rituals which have been ordained by local custom.

Modern critics of the Confucian tradition have in our own century deplored certain weaknesses in the system; namely, an unequal application of the law wherein the guilty if poor are given heavy punishments while the more educated are treated to sermons and other forms of moral suasion; family favouritism, where the demands of filial piety result in the guilt of relatives being covered up out of family loyalty, while the innocent are falsely accused and punished for the crime; social immobility and entrenched conservatism due to absolute obeisance to custom and tradition; public hypocrisy and profiteering by those adept at disguising exploitation and dishonesty under an outward display of moral virtue. Lu Xun in his *Diary of a Madman* denounces such abuses in establishment morality as a ritual destruction of human beings.

The modernization effort and the recent rise of consumerism have only served to highlight the weaknesses in the traditional morality. According to Confucius, "The good man seeks moral rectitude (*yi*); the mediocre man seeks profit (*li*)". A recent slogan of the modernization process proclaims: "Get rich, build up Socialism." The result: many young people, imitating their parents, reject the traditional standard of morality in order to procure material goods. The Chinese saying: "Xiang qian zou" which means "Go forward", today uses a different character for "qian", which changes the meaning to, "Go for the money". Communist morality, now largely discredited, seeks in vain to rely on traditional Confucianism. China is experiencing both an overall ideological crisis and a decline in morality.

Human Rights in China

Can China ever rid itself of the abuse of power? Can it liberate itself from its passive submission to so much extortion? With an poorly developed civil code and biased law courts, the people cannot successfully defend their human rights and China is liable to severe criticism from the West. Aware of the many violations of human rights in China, the American congress, each year, reviews China's status as a most favoured trading nation. In 1991, an Australian delegation was permitted to go to China to observe the condition of human rights. As a result the delegation published a particularly scathing report. The opinions of foreigners have helped China better understand what the West expects.

A White Paper entitled, *Human Rights in China*, was published on November 1, 1991, under the auspices of the State Council. The Chinese government defends its record. The present situation is advantageously compared to the privation of all rights under imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism. The paper then links human rights to the historical context of a country's economic development and more specifically to China's situation. It points out how the new China has been able to ensure its enormous population the right to subsistence as well as provide additional political rights for its people with everyone benefiting from constitutional guarantees. Section 4 offers an ideal picture of the functioning of the legal system. Section 6 declares that citizens enjoy religious freedom. This liberty excludes all foreign interference in the internal affairs of China's religions. This poses a particularly acute problem for Catholics where papal primacy is an article of faith. The document ends on a double affirmation which to a Westerner seems contradictory, but which is perfectly sound to the Chinese always eager to harmonize opposites.

Interference in other countries' internal affairs and the pushing of power politics on the pretext of human rights are obstructing the realization of human rights and fundamental freedoms. In the face of such a world situation, China is ready to work with the international community in the continued and unremitting effort to build a just and reasonable new order of international relations and to realize the purpose of the United Nations to uphold and promote human rights and fundamental freedoms.

China thus defends its place in the international order while also reserving to itself a special interpretation of human rights. This is both a Marxist and Chinese concept of things: Marxist because in that system human rights are strictly linked to a particular stage in the development of the means of production, and not founded on a universal view of human nature; Chinese because it is jealous of its national sovereignty and of its independence so dearly acquired.

Human Rights versus Human Behaviour

The cultural background for China's interpretation of human rights, independent of its Marxist allegiance, can be demonstrated by certain reflections of Mr. Lee Kuan Yew, former Prime Minister of Singapore. Mr. Lee prefers to talk of "human behaviour in general" rather than "human rights.". Below are some of his responses to a recent interview by "Worldview", published in the English language press of Singapore.

Question: In principle, do you believe in a universal norm for human rights and for freedom of expression?

Mr. Lee: In today's world where communications are more and more rapid, anyone can watch the repression on Tiananmen Square on television...In that kind of world, no society can protect itself against the influence of others. This, however, does not necessarily mean that Western values will predominate. What I mean to say is if Western values are indeed superior in that they make for better conduct in a society and help that society to survive; they then will be adopted. I really believe the process is Darwinian. If the adoption of Western values reduces the chance of survival for a society, they will be rejected. For example, if excessive individualism is harmful for a country as heavily populated as China, they will have none of it.¹⁷

Are we here in the presence of a real Chinese, or only a Chinese formed in Trinity College in Cambridge and fascinated by the evolutionary scientism of the 19th century? In their approach to modernity, Chinese intellectuals are deeply marked by an fierce dualism. A principal, formulated in the 19th century by Feng Guifen, is still good today: "Chinese knowledge for substance; Western knowledge for usage" (*Zhongxue wei ti, Xixue wei yong*). While the Chinese think of themselves as

morally and culturally superior, they do not hesitate to borrow from the West the sciences and the technologies necessary for the development of their country. This pragmatic dissociation assures China of a moral victory as facile as it is factitious and prevents it from recognizing the close ties that unite culture and progress. Nothing, in fact, would prevent them from taking from Western culture whatever can be advantageously integrated into their own tradition. The affirmation of human rights as an absolute universal principle has been fashioned on the abstract philosophical system of Western thought. The Chinese philosophical tradition since the time of Confucius is neither speculative nor abstract. It reveals human nature by describing its behaviour. Confronted by Western exigencies of "human rights", the Chinese interpret this as "the quality of human relationships."

III. What Christianity?

The Chinese fear foreign interference in their internal affairs as well as the growth of Christianity in their country. Recently, they have questioned the role of Christians in the collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and in the Soviet Union. As a result the Chinese Communist party has strengthened its policy on "religious liberty," that is to say, demanded the strict integration of Christianity into the Socialist order in the name of national independence.

The Resurgence of an Old Contentious Affair

Suspicion of Christianity is not a recent phenomenon. For four centuries China has felt its ritualistic order threatened by this religion which seems to upset social and cosmic harmony by proclaiming the equality of all before a sovereign God. Christians have often been considered traitors in the Empire because they belong to the great Catholic family governed by a foreigner, the Pope, "the religion's emperor." The Catholics, for their part, aggravated the situation in the 18th century by refusing to associate themselves with the rites in honor of Confucius and the ancestors. This was interpreted as a manifest proof of their lack of loyalty towards the Chinese State.

The contemporary ritual finds its expression in the new terminology of a people's government obviously critical of the old order. It is no longer a matter of sacrificing to the emperor, but a total submission of oneself to the party's bureaucratic hierarchy and to its directives, whatever they may be. Christianity has a right to subsist, on condition that it become completely Chinese, that is to say, perfectly conformed to the established political order. Relations with Christians of other countries are tolerated only if they respect the principles of equality and mutuality, that is to say, if foreign Christians unreservedly applaud the Chinese order and abstain from any criticism. They must, among other things, maintain that violations of human rights do not exist in China, even in the case of forced abortions or female infanticide.

New Forms of Christian Intrusion

This deep seated fear of Christianity is cultural. We meet it again in an analogous form in Lee Kuan Yew of Singapore as revealed in his responses in the *World View* interview.

Question: The Chinese intellectual, Liu Binyan, presently exiled in the United States, has criticized the absence of any Japanese comment related to human rights in China. He has encouraged the United States to continue to pressure for human rights there. What do you think of that?

Mr. Lee: Yes, indeed, the Americans have tried to convert the whole world to Christianity...Others come only to do business and leave you alone, but as soon as the Americans arrive they want to convert you. Today, it is no longer conversion to Christianity but to human rights and American style democracy. Chinese leaders call this human rights imperialism.¹⁸

Mr. Lee Kuan Yew refers here to two kinds of unacceptable proselytism: one propagated by evangelists, usually fundamentalists, who risk provoking social discord ; and the other, by messengers of the social Gospel, less religious perhaps, but probably more harmful to the established order. In Singapore he has demonstrated his own impatience toward aggressive Protestants and Catholic liberation theologians.¹⁹

Chinese leaders are eager to assess the evangelical initiatives taken in China during the last ten years. They are particularly

worried about the inroads Christianity is making in education.²⁰ American English teachers, they believe, are responsible²¹ for this. They are also aware of the dynamism of many Chinese evangelists formed in America, Hong Kong and Taiwan. These itinerant preachers travel throughout the country and hold meetings in private houses without obtaining official permission. In this way they escape the control of the Three Self Patriotic Movement.²²

Catholics are not so active in the propagation of the Gospel, but Communist authorities are no less worried because of the unity among the rural Catholic communities and their unshakable fidelity to the Pope regardless of pressures put on them. The policy of religious liberty, formulated by the party in its Document 19, of 1982, tried to legislate a limited exercise of religion in the big cities in view of reorienting believers toward social services. A few seminaries were supposed to educate some priests, who would become activists capable of guiding Christians into a secularized form of religion.

Chinese Leaders Authorize Research on Christianity.

Chinese leaders are bothered and puzzled by the fact that religion is still so very much alive in China. In an effort to ascertain the reasons why, they have authorized a certain amount of research and a number of publications on religion. Although these works are obviously Marxist inspired, they do help reveal how Christianity is developing in contemporary Chinese society.

Religion under a Socialist Regime

In *Religion under Socialism in China* published by the Academy of Sciences of Shanghai in April 1987, and translated into English and published in New York in 1991,²³ the editor, Luo Zhufeng and his team, approach religion as a social entity avoiding, in this way, the usual theoretical quibblings of Marxist dogmatism. They use an empirical research methodology to study religion under Socialism and conclude that Christians, especially, adapt themselves to Socialism, and take an active part in the work of the country's modernization process. In Socialist China, they note, social classes have disappeared with the elimination of the system of exploitation and the exploiting

class itself, so religion can no longer be a means of exploitation. They then attempt to explain why religious beliefs still persist. They seek the causes in a phenomenology of religion. They point out five characteristic traits of religion: popular roots, long standing history, international ties, complexity and minority consciousness. They also realize that suffering still exists at this stage of Socialism's development in their country. The unfortunate who despair still can find comfort from belonging to a fraternal community and in a dream of a future heaven. In spite of this Marxist concept of religion as illusion, the authors recognize that, in certain regions such as Northern Jiangsu, Christianity has encouraged positive ethical values. Also they point out that the Catholic fisherfolk of the Shanghai region seem very disposed to cooperate in the modernization programs, and constantly increase their productivity.

This adaptation of Christians to the work of modernization invites the authors to reflect on general aspects of Chinese religiosity. They conclude that in Chinese religiosity:

- the idea of heaven is far afield from the Judeo-Christian perception of a personal God;

- the emphasis is on the unity of human beings and Heaven;

- ethical concerns are of primary importance because of the influence of the Confucian tradition;

- religion is subject to the political order;

- there is an atmosphere of tolerance favoring the assimilation of various religious currents;

- there exists elements of popular religious beliefs (destiny, spirits, fortune telling, etc.).

Throughout Chinese history, these fundamental components of Chinese religiosity have been harmonized and codified in the Confucian order. The social scientists' historical research leads them to this striking conclusion:

In our country, a preliminary condition to a critique of everything else is not a critique of religion, but a critique of the feudal, patriarchal and ritual ideology.

There, we have a substantial deviation from the Marxist critique of religion as a basic sign of alienation. It is also a response to the usual distinction made in China between religion and superstition. But a serious critique of the present forms of

feudalism still needs to be done, something the authors are careful not to do.

Is Christianity called upon to make such a critique? The authors tell us that history reveals two aspects of religion; it can be an instrument for the exercise of power; it can also be a liberating force. Certain movements for liberation have been inspired by religion. But with the success of the Communist Party in achieving liberation for the people, liberation movements have no role in a Socialist regime. With that kind of logic, it is clear that only the first aspect of religion remains.

The Prophetic Dimension of Christianity

From a sociological viewpoint, the work *Religion under Socialism in China* tends to ignore or even to reject the 'spiritual vision' of the Christian faith. In Beijing the Institute for the Study of World Religions of the Academy of Sciences did a more refined and objective study of Christian thought. Professor Tang Yi, especially, in August 1991 published an article in English entitled, "Chinese Christianity in Development."²⁴ In this article, he makes allowance for the prophetic message rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition. Tang Yi writes:

The Church is realistic enough to face the absolute necessity of coming to terms with a government which demands absolute conformity from all citizens and communities in terms of political loyalty....

In stressing the absolute importance of patriotism, both the Catholic and the Protestant Churches have either overlooked or suppressed the prophetic traditions of Christianity which uphold the spirit of the Gospel of the Kingdom of God as a challenge to the secular world...

Tang Yi sees three possible ways in which an authentic Christianity can develop in China:

1) *by the Christianization of Chinese culture*: the secular and anthropocentric mentality would eventually be replaced by a Christocentric and transcendent spirit. Is this likely to happen? There is the precedent of Taiwan. After many years of a free and on-going evangelization, only about 2 % of the population have been converted and at least half of these conversions are among the indigenous peoples.

2) *by the Sinization of Christianity*: In imitation of Bud-

dhism, Christianity would be absorbed into Chinese culture, becoming an anthropocentric and sinless religion. Such an evolution seems unlikely given the absence of any such precedent. In Chinese history, Christianity has always been careful of preserving the purity of its doctrine.

3) *by a limited integration remaining a sub-cultural minority religion*: This minority Christianity would retain its prophetic character. The population would get used to this and nothing of the great Chinese civilization would be placed in jeopardy. That is the most likely solution, concludes Professor Tang Yi.

He is undoubtedly correct provided he does not attribute to the expression *sub-cultural* any pejorative meaning. The situation in China would then be similar to that of the Christian communities in the secularized West which are also in the minority.

The Christian Contribution to Culture

Professor Tang Yi does not sufficiently explain just how a cultural Christian minority could represent itself within Chinese society. He thinks, first of all, of a minority Church tolerated by its environment, similar to the insertion of the Muslim minorities. This is to give too little importance to the social dimension of the prophetic vocation of Christians. He does not mention those Chinese intellectuals, university scholars, who are convinced of Christian ideas and enthusiastic about the theological content of the Christian tradition, who in April 1990 started a new Chinese review entitled "Christian Culture". These 20 university professors are convinced that to understand Western culture, one must plumb the depths of its spirit and have a good understanding of Christian theology.

The editor in chief of the review, Liu Xiaofeng, is a young professor of comparative literature at the University of Shenzhen near Hong Kong. He studied philosophy and theology in Germany and also under the Hungarian thinker Karl Mannheim and the German, Max Sheler. He displays special interest in the theological approaches of Bultman and Rahner, as well as in the Russian Christian writer, Lev Chestov, exiled in Paris after the October Revolution of 1917. Attracted by the "absolute values" of the Christian tradition, Liu points out what is missing in the Chinese cultural tradition. Christianity, he notes, realistically considers the phenomena of suffering, of fear, of evil and of sin within the context of salvation in Jesus Christ, while the Chinese

limit themselves to the esthetics of secular humanism. He adds:

It is too bad that since the May 4th Movement in 1919, the Chinese have concentrated on the study of Western sciences and technology and have ignored or even rejected the spiritual religious traditions of the West.²⁵

Chinese openness to international exchanges often ends up in a clash of seemingly air tight cultural traditions. In fact, relations between China and the West are now more cordial than they were three centuries ago. In March 1692, the Emperor Kangxi signed an edict of tolerance permitting the practice of Christianity in China. But he re-emphasized simultaneously a State ideology based on Confucianism. For their part the learned Jesuits in his entourage, tolerated for their technical services, could not propagate anything of their solid post-tridentine doctrine. A century later in April 1792, George Macartney's English embassy found itself up against the wall, making the hard realities of culture shock clear to Westerners. In 1993 we live in a world where the tremendous development in communications tends to break down cultural barriers. Adherents of the most compact ideological systems, like everyone else, experience a certain amount of doubt. What are the bases on which to make political and social choices that would permit human beings to live in peace in the world of tomorrow? Mutual acquaintance and a better understanding of cultures are certainly essential components of these choices.

Notes

1. Cf. Dossier Eglises d'Asie No. 2/89: "Les Chinois interrogent leur culture" (J. Charbonnier).
2. Li Yi Zhe is a collective name made up of the names of the three who signed the manifesto posted in Canton. They were 3 former Red Guards deeply disappointed by the political manipulation of the Cultural Revolution and a return to bureaucracy.
3. "Dazibaos" are big character posters. They were posted on the wall of Xidan, a sector west of Tianamen Square.
4. Chen Duxiu (1871-1942) founder of the review the *New Youth* (*Xin Qingnian*) which was published from 1915 to 1921. He was named dean of the Faculty of Letters of Peking University in 1917. Hu Shi, who returned to China in 1917 after completing his studies at Columbia University, advocated a new, simple and direct written language, "baihua". Cai Yuanpei (1867-1940), Chancellor of the University of Peking from 1917 to 1923.

- Lu Xun (1881-1936) who published the *Diary of a Madman* in 1918 and *The True Story of Ah Q* wherein he denounced the weaknesses in the Chinese mentality.
5. The Three Principles of the People of Sun Yat-sen: Minzu (people's independence), Minquan (rights of the people), Minsheng (the life of the people). The program was started in 1895 by Sun Yat-sen.
 6. Li Dazhao (1888-1927) librarian at the University of Peking in 1917, who at that time published an article entitled "The Influence of the Russian Revolution".
 7. Mengzi (circa 315-305) whose name has been romanized to Mencius: a disciple of Confucius. In the 12th century his work, *Mencius*, was recognized as one of the four canonical books of Confucian writings.
 8. "New Democracy": in January, 1940, Mao Zedong distanced himself from the "idealism" of Sun Yat-sen's "Three Principles of the People." The new democracy, he writes, must foster a "cultural revolution" which responds to the principles of "critical heritage". We must choose wisely the foreign elements that will permit us to establish a "national and scientific civilization of the masses."
 9. Li Dazhao, "Value of the Materialistic Concept of History", December, 1920.
 10. Yan Fu (1854-1921) who in 1895 published a translation of Thomas Henry Huxley's "Evolution and Ethics". The same year he published an article entitled "The Origin of Power" (Yuan Qiang) in which he analyzed the cultural causes of Chinese powerlessness. This text was published in French by Fr. François Houang in his work "The Manifestos of Yan Fu".
 11. The conferences of the democracy university took place at Centre Sèvres in Paris. The comments and quotations are from the author's handwritten notes.
 12. The Straits Times, Singapore, 7 December, 1990.
 13. Ibid, 10 December, 1991.
 14. Ibid, 4 January, 1991, by David Brown and David Martin Jones of the Department of Political Sciences at the National University of Singapore.
 15. Ibid, 4 January, 1991.
 16. Xu Sumin, in the review *Zhaoliu*, January, 1990 cited by Jérôme Bourgon: "Recent Rebounds of an Old Debate: The Chinese tradition of Civil Rights." in Bulletin of Sinology, Hong Kong, No. 65, March, 1990.
 17. Eglises d'Asie (EDA), 129, appended document.
 18. The Straits Times, Singapore, 18 December, 1991, p. 29.
 19. Cf. Exchange France-Asie, dossier, No. 10/87: "Singapore: The Church on Guard," by Jean Maïs.
 20. EDA 125, Document No. 1/B 91: "Notice on the Prevention of Some Places Using Religious Activities to Hinder School Education."
 21. EDA, 116.
 22. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement is the Protestant equivalent of the Catholic Patriotic Association. These semi-political organs have the function of transmitting the directives of the Religious Affairs Bureau which in return is responsible to the State Council and the United Front of the Communist Party.
 23. Luo Zhufeng, ed. *Religion under Socialism in China*, translated by Donald MacInnis and Zheng Xian, M.E. Sharpe, Inc. Armonk, N.Y., 1991, p. 254.
 24. "Chinese Christianity in Development," in China Study Journal, Vol. 6, No. 2, London, August, 1991.
 25. According to Arnold Sprenger, SVD, "A New Vision of China, the Case of Liu Xiaofeng", a conference given at the Catholic University of Fujen in Taipei, December 1989.