

For a Christian Reading of the Core Values of the Chinese Dream: Different Prospects in the Light of a Culture of Unity

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Abstract: As a follower of the Focolare Movement founded by Chiara Lubich in 1943, I believe in the vision of the charism of unity whose goal is to help fulfill the prayer of Jesus “may all be one” (Jn 17:21). With the increasing tension between the USA and China, it is a critical and dangerous point in time, with so much at stake for the whole world. A new and mutual knowledge is badly needed, truly a necessity. In my research, I have opted to focus my attention on the two oldest and existing institutions: the universal Catholic Church and China. With their worldwide reach and influence, their relationship and dialogue can well be the game-changer in the present world scenario. Inspired by the vision of Pope Francis on the Church and the world, his recent encyclicals, and in particular *Fratelli Tutti*, I have presented a dissertation on a Christian reading of the Chinese dream. It is an analysis based on some common values, as well as some differences in perspectives, to promote mutual knowledge and understandings between China and the West. The outcome of this relationship will have consequential geo-

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political implications. It is my sincere hope that the promotion of this new understanding could be a humble contribution to world peace.

Keywords: fraternity for peace, culture of unity, Trinitarian relationships, Christian Revelation, dialectics of harmony, ecological civilization, better kind of politics, sharing economy, endogenous development, inculturation solidarity

[摘要] 盧嘉勒於1943年創立了普世博愛運動，其神恩為「合一」，並以幫助實現耶穌的遺願「願眾人合而為一」（若17:21）為目標。作為這團體的追隨者，我深信合一神恩可以給今天世界帶來獨特和所需的貢獻。隨著國際局勢的轉變，中美關係變得日益緊張。在這個危險和關鍵的時刻，全球面臨著諸多利害關係搏弈，國際間有必要達致一種新的相互瞭解。我在研究中選擇將焦點集中在天主教和中國，兩個人類歷史悠長現存的實體上，憑藉其全球的影響力，他們的關係和兩者間的對話很可能成為當今世界格局中的遊戲規則改變者。教宗方濟各面向世界，從對教會和人類的願景出發，最近頒佈了《眾位弟兄》通諭，我特別受其啟發而發表了一篇論文，以基督徒從合一文化的角度來解讀「中國夢」。本文基於一些共同價值觀以及一些觀點差異的分析，旨在促進中國和西方的相互理解，這種關係的結果將產生重大的地緣政治影響。我真誠地希望能為促進這種相互之間的理解作出微薄的貢獻，讓大家以普世手足情誼為前題，一起為世界和平而努力。

關鍵詞：和平情誼、合一文化、三位一體關係、基督啟示、和諧辯證、生態文明、更好的政治 / 政治良策、共享經濟、內生發展、本土化

1 Introduction

With this article I would like to share some thoughts from my second PhD dissertation admitted in May this year at the Sophia University Institute, Italy. It's a continuation of my first one 10 years ago, at the Gregorian Pontifical University, on "Evangelization of China today, challenges and prospects". The dissertation takes an integral approach, dialoguing on values between Christianity, represented by the Catholic Church, and China, in five fields: philosophy, ecology, politics, economy and cultural-religious dialogue.

My first dissertation 10 years ago was timely, for there was talk of excommunicating some bishops in the Church in China,¹ without exaggeration, with danger of a third Great Schism, while my thesis emphasized on dialogue instead. With the election of Pope Francis, he changed the scenario by re-opening dialogue with China, and made an historical agreement on the nomination of Chinese bishops with China in 2018.

The present research is mainly on dialogue between the Catholic Church and China. It is essential to know the present context in which this relationship (between Church and China) articulates. For this reason, it is necessary to talk

1 For some examples, please refer to "Communiqué of the Press Office of the Holy See: Episcopal ordination at Chengde (Province of Hebei, Mainland China)", *Agenzia Fides*, 24 November 2010; "Vatican Excommunicates Bishop Ordained by Chinese State", *Agenzia Fides*, 17 July 2011.

of the even broader dimensions of East-West in general, and China-US relations in particular, more so at this present moment the policy of the US to contain China is more than obvious, with its military and economic alliances all motivated by geopolitics. Underneath what is obvious, there are countless hidden initiatives to undermine the rise of China. The 2019-2021 social movement and unrest in Hong Kong, and the present Russian-Ukraine war point to the fact that the world is facing challenges with dangerous time ahead. The cold war may very well turn into a hot one. This is the overall context in which *Fratelli Tutti* may be read. The value of brotherhood and the practical meaning of a Good Samaritan can be seen in a broader understanding of unity under an intercultural and interdisciplinary framework.

For me, these dialogues are not two-terms but three-terms relationships with the Gospel message on top. My point of departure is the conviction that the Revelation is a light that enters into all cultures, and inculturation had once taken place in the West, now at this propitious time after Vatican II, is taking place with eastern culture, with Chinese culture as my emphasis.

The present paper will analyze this broader meaning of brotherhood and neighborly love in an integral manner with five subtitles from the disciplines of philosophy, politics, economics, ecology, and interreligious dialogue.

2 Dialectic of Harmony in Dialogue with Trinitarian Relationship

I distinguish between the dialectics of thesis-antithesis-synthesis of Hegel, the dialectics of love of Lubich and the dialectics of harmony of Laozi.² Hegel's dialectics with the bud-blossom-fruit example, each former disappears and is refuted by the latter, is criticized. Marxism even justifies violence in the revolution in this dialogical process. While in the dialectics of love of Lubich, Jesus forsaken on the cross, instead of denying the Father, lives a total self-denial in his kenosis, entrusting completely to the Will of the Father. In Laozi, there is a dialectics of harmony, with *dao-de*, *yin-yang* harmonizing, being-nothingness mutually generating (有無相生).

To conclude, I argue that the Chinese mindset of dialectics of harmony is in good disposition to understand Trinitarian relationships, rather than scholastic philosophy. Instead of just comparing the Logos with the *Dao* in the effort of inculturation, there should be more re-thinking of the relationship between *Dao-De*-harmony, and the love between Father and the Son in the Trinity. Again, this dialogue and relational dialectics of harmony and reconciliation is the conducting line throughout the five

2 Kin Sheung Chiaretto Yan, "Prolegomenon to Interreligious Dialogue in China: Daoism, the Trinitarian Relationship, and Christian Inculturation", *Claritas: Journal of Dialogue and Culture* 6 (Indiana: Purdue University Press, 2017), pp. 43-44, 55.

chapters of this thesis.

3 Ecological Civilization in Dialogue with Integral Ecology

Daoism reminds us of our relationships in the creation. The Daoists, followers of Daoism, are the first ecologists because of their concept of being in harmony with nature, blending in with the environment, therefore, do no harm to the nature.

However, China has developed from a backward economy and industrialized in recent decades. The world knows well that the pollution was acute, but few are aware that air quality across China has improved in recent years due to countless and big scale green initiatives. It has the duty now to share its experience to developing countries of striking a balance between economic development and environment protection.

I had the privilege to serve as the coordinator of the Holy See Pavilion at the Beijing Expo 2019 on Horticulture, the theme on *Laudato Si'* is well-presented with a painting of Adam and Eve at the Garden of Eden and other artistic elements. As Pope Francis says in the encyclical, empirical data have shown humankind's negative effects on the environment and an integral approach concerted effort is needed to combat this ecological crisis. The Genesis account says that humans are created in God's image, but it is a distorted interpretation that they are given absolute

domination (Gen 1:28) over nature and other creatures.³ Rather, they are to be caretakers (Gen 2:15) to glorify God with other creatures. Humans have disobeyed God and ruined the harmonious relationship between humans and God, but also human-nature relationship, and among human beings. Instead of a distorted anthropocentric position, the Social Doctrine of the Church orients towards an “anthropocentrism of Christ”.⁴ Jesus, the new Adam, through the Cross, restores these relationships.

Although with no concept or mention about God and creation, I found certain consonance with spirit of *Laudato Si'* in the inauguration at the Expo. President Xi emphasized on human wisdom, scientific policies and research to create a harmonious ecosystem, following laws of nature, the earth, “our common homeland”. Nature punishes and rewards. The rise or fall of a society is dependent on its relationship with nature. Industrialization generated material wealth, but damaged nature. All humans live in a community with a shared future, need collaboration to tackle environmental issues, to have a balanced ecosystem, to accelerate an “ecological civilization”, to raise people’s awareness, to

3 Francis, *Laudato Si'*, *Encyclical Letter on Care for Our Common Home* (Vatican, 24 May 2015), p. 66.

4 Cf. Sergio Rondinara, “Custodire ciò che è salvato”, ed. Paolo Carloti, Mario Toso, *Per un umanesimo degno dell'amore: Il Compendio della Dottrina Sociale della Chiesa* (Roma, 2005), p. 437. See also Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (Vatican: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2004), p. 463.

work together with other countries to achieve the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). He also spoke of the responsibility towards future generations.⁵

4 Universal Brotherhood, Fraternity for Peace and Social Friendship

One of the major themes of *Fratelli Tutti* is the story of Good Samaritan anchoring the value of fraternity and social friendship. In Chinese culture, the concept of fraternity and love is expressed in the following terms: *ren'ai* (仁 愛), *jian'ai* (兼愛), and *bo'ai* (博愛). *Ren'ai* (仁 = 人 + 二) has a rich connotation of benevolence, forgiveness, humanity, and human-heartedness. *Jian'ai* (兼愛), all-embracing love, introduced by Mozi immediately after the time Confucius, but it was deemed too abstract and has become a forgotten principle. *Bo'ai* (博 愛) was influenced by the concept of “agape” in Christianity, introduced by Dr. Sun Yatsen, the founding father of modern China. With the inroads of Christianity and influence of Western ideas such as the motto of the French Revolution, the term taken from Chinese classics is made popular to express the idea of universal love and fraternity.

The relationship of fraternity is also expressed in an idiomatic expression “a relationship as close as one’s hands

5 Cf. “Xi Jinping’s Keynote Speech at the Opening Ceremony of the International Horticultural Exhibition 2019 (Edited Excerpt)”, *Beijing Review*, 3 September 2019.

and feet”. In recent years, President Xi stresses that fine traditional Chinese culture, including values of *youshan* (友善), friendliness and fraternity, are alive in the people’s hearts. This friendship does not apply only at the personal or social level, but also refers to relationships between nations.

In the history of Christianity, brotherhood is intrinsic to a strong spiritual meaning of fraternity in Christ, and thus manifests in sharing of goods in a community and helping the poor. It contributed to the abolition of slavery in society. As the motto of the French Revolution (1789-1799) was liberty, equality and fraternity, the notion of fraternity had since then entered as a political category. In great part of the 20th century however, the principles of freedom in liberalism or equality in socialism have been emphasized in one political system or another, but the triptych motto has not been taken altogether as a whole and “fraternity” had become a forgotten principle.

Pope Francis signed a joint declaration “Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” with Sheikh Ahmed el-Tayeb representing the Muslim world at Abu Dhabi in February 2019. The Holy Father has a gradual approach. The point of departure is the recognition that all persons in the world are to live as brothers and sisters in the one human family. The faith in God is the starting point of this fraternity, but the benevolent gaze of God includes each person in the human family. This fraternity is destined to

extend to people of all religions and cultures.⁶

Consonant to the Confucian tradition, the concept of fraternity starts within the family with the emphasis on benevolence (*ren*). Such love should then be extended until it includes distant members of society as well. “Honor the elderly and care for the young in other families as we do to those in our own (老吾老以及人之老，幼吾幼以及人之幼)” (*Mencius* 1A7). This extension is also well expressed in another verse of the *Analects*: “Now the man of perfect virtue, wishing to build up himself as such, seeks to build up others as well; wishing to enhance himself, seeks also to enhance others” (己欲立而立人，己欲達而達人)” (*Analects* 7:2).

5 Poverty Alleviation and Sharing Economy

(From endogenous economic development to common prosperity)

In *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis talks about “re-envisioning the social role of property”. Neighborly love must be realized in the economic dimension of daily life. This aspect of social practice is seen in the efforts of the

6 Pope Francis affirms that man is made for love, therefore he must go beyond the self towards others to find fuller existence. Love is capable of transcending borders of regions or countries. He says: “The ever-increasing number of interconnections and communications in today’s world makes us powerfully aware of the unity and common destiny of the nations”. Cf. Pope Francis, *Fratelli Tutti*, *Encyclical Letter on Fraternity and Social Friendship*, 2020, no. 96.

Chinese government to reduce poverty. The success in poverty alleviation is the result of long-term planning and continuous effort typical of the Confucian spirit of making a change. State policies and guidance has been important for delivering results in poverty alleviation: (a) Targeted Poverty Alleviation (精準扶貧) strategy; (b) The Chinese experience of prosperous coastal provinces paired with and help poor provinces in western China; (c) Putting into practice an age-old saying, “Give a man a fish and he will eat for a day. Teach him how to fish and you feed him for a lifetime” (授人以魚不如授人以漁).

By endogenous development, it means a model of development from within its culture.⁷ It also means harnessing cultural values, particularly Asian and Confucian values, of being industrious, frugal and high-saving, emphasizing on education, political stability and pursuing continuous reform, government competency, and improvement of people’s livelihood. China has worked out a development path in many aspects that are consonant with its own culture and adequate for its stage of development.

China experience can be a reference on one hand for developing countries, but on the other hand, for its sheer size and characteristics particularly of its own, may not be emulatable by others. Each country should find a

7 Kin Sheung Chiaretto Yan, “The China Experience as Contribution for a New Economic Paradigm”, *The Journal of the Macau Ricci Institute* 7 (May 2020), pp. 91-95.

model suitable for its conditions and its present stage of development. From its perspective, China has taken the road as it calls “with Chinese characteristics”. The success depends internally on administering well the country, and externally on adapting to the international environment.

Can the China experience provide a new paradigm for the world economy? The new economic reform of China, advertently or not, is somehow in line with Pope Francis’ thoughts. As mentioned before, the Holy Father sees the crisis of the pandemics as an opportunity for radical changes in the economic system, and he emphasizes on the culture of care. By caring, even the pandemic becomes a lesson for people at times of adversity to spend more time with the family. New policies in China after all are for reducing social ills of materialism, too much competition and stress for Chinese kids, youth, and parents.

For the education of future generations towards a more sober lifestyle, there are exemplary testimonies from both East and West. While Pope Francis mentions in his encyclical, St. Francis of Assisi (1181-1226), and Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916). I cite inspiring figures such as Zhang Zai (張載) (1020-1077). In his writings *Western Inscription* (西銘), he highlights the unity of Heaven, Earth and all beings; Heaven and humanity are one. Another figure is Tao Yuanming (陶淵明) (365-427) who abandoned his career in the capital and returned to his small town to live a sober life and has left his poems for generations to this day.

6 Freedom of Religion and the Golden Rule of Reciprocity

In the discussion of “re-envisioning the social role of property”, *Fratelli Tutti* takes out the concept of “rights without borders”. In advocating the vision of “a Heart Open to the Whole World”, the encyclical brings out the value of “reciprocal gifts”. Rights should be understood in the context of fraternity and social friendship. If we compare the United Nations’ *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR) and the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China on freedom of religion, we see that both include the freedom to practice and to manifest one’s faith and the freedom to change one’s religion or belief (freedom of conversion).

However, while the UDHR emphasizes the freedom to manifest one’s religious belief due to inherent human dignity and rights,⁸ China emphasizes protection of religious activities that none is developed into fanaticism, extremism and that no foreign interference to use “religious freedom” as pretext to destabilize the course of development of the country.⁹ One focuses on outward manifestation while the other focuses on protection. This subtle divergence is also reflected in the cultural differences between East and West.

8 Cf. United Nations General Assembly, *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (1948), Preface, art.18 & art.26.

9 Cf. National People’s Congress of the People’s Republic of China, *Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, Amendment at the First Session of the Thirteenth National People’s Congress* (2018), art. 33-38.

Both Jesus and Confucius spoke of the Golden Rule on reciprocity. Confucius used the passive form: “Do not do to others what you would not want others to do to you”. From the point of view of ethics, it is more practical to establish as a rule at least not to harm others while it is more demanding to establish reciprocal love as a rule.

Very significant is another document on religious freedom, called *Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World: Recommendations for Conduct*, signed in 2011 by the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, the World Council of Churches, and the World Evangelical Alliance. As recommendations for conduct, the right of freedom to promulgate one’s faith is also balanced by responsibilities. These responsibilities include not only the witness of service and love to neighbors in multireligious contexts, but also reminded that religion should not be instrumentalized for political ends.¹⁰ Therefore, it is a legitimate concern not to interfere in other countries’ internal affairs under the pretext of religion. It is interesting to note that this obstacle is not mentioned anymore in recent years in the process of normalizing Holy See-China relations under the papacy of Pope Francis, but rather, China raises this concern to the US of interfering in other countries’ internal affairs under the pretext of religion.

10 Cf. Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue, World Council of Churches, World Evangelical Alliance, *Christian Witness in a Multi-religious World: Recommendations for Conduct* (2011), no. 5.

While some Christian groups stress on the mission to propagate their faith, the Catholic Church emphasizes that this mission best occurs in interreligious dialogue, that is, when all parties are open and each person or group has the right to manifest and to propagate its faith and culture in a respectful manner.

For the specific nature of the Church's mission in the world, the Holy Father has repeated in numerous occasions that evangelization is not "proselytism", and that the Church grows "by attraction" and "by witnesses".

The Church is missionary by nature. Vatican II has shifted the Church's attention from the object of faith to the greater discovery of the interlocutor to whom mission is aimed. Improved Holy See-China relations offer hope and emphasis on testimony of Catholic as good citizens change relationships with the government and the general public. Christians are called to be instrument of peace in times of "lights and shadows" in the course of human history. Catholics in China, small in number but aware of their historical responsibility, may change the landscape of the Catholic Church in due time.

7 Looking into the Dream of Our Future under the Vision of Fraternity and Social Friendship

Everyone has his or her dream. There are also common dreams of a people. *Fratelli Tutti* advocates the concept of "a better kind of politics". Politics is about life in the presence

providing hope for a higher quality of life, for example, the aspiration of the Chinese people to satisfy their needs for a better life. The point of departure of the “Chinese dream” for them and for their leaders perhaps is more from a human or socio-political point of view. As for me, the Chinese dream needs a deeper spiritual dimension! No matter where we depart from, once we are on board, we will meet at some point. The following is a short summary of my thoughts on this journey in search of a better kind of politics and dream of fraternity and social friendship. Politics have to be practiced and that is how dream may be realized.

1. I quote extensively Pope Francis and his Magisterium; on the other hand, I sometimes quote Chinese classics and the present leader Xi Jinping. Do they match? Sometimes they are incompatible, nevertheless, there are points of convergence, at least in the theoretical level. Why not take advantage of these similar areas?
2. It is coming of age for China to take a more important role to contribute with Asian values, dialogue in equal footing with the West. The Catholic Church with no political and economic interests can facilitate this process, and to ease US-China tensions as mediator.
3. After the signing of the provisional agreement between the Holy See and China regarding the appointment of bishops four years ago, both sides may extend the dialogue and consultations on other fronts with specific teams of experts and perhaps form special commissions.

In this regard, China needs to trust the Catholic Church and extend sincere gestures as Pope Francis has done.

4. Some Hong Kong families are emigrating after the 2019-2020 social unrest and Beijing's passing of National Security Law to end the chaos. It is important to stress fraternity of blood, but more so, fraternity in the spirit, which is so much in need today for world peace.
5. With the tension between the US and China ongoing and increasing, accusations, true or twisted, on the side of US and its alliance. One very critical issue is the US's position of Taiwan's independence. Just one miscalculation will lead to hot war. In the present cold war, the US is seen as containing China with its economic and military alliances. War should be avoided at all costs as there will be no winners.
6. Regarding the relationship between the two sides of the Strait of Taiwan, as St. John Paul II spoke of the Diaspora of overseas Chinese who share the same cultural roots, and encouraged Catholics to live, suffer, pray, and be open to the plan of God and to discover the victorious love of Christ in history. He also stressed that Catholics in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau should play the role of "Bridge Church" for they belong to the one Chinese people as a great unified reality. It is a "wonderful task".¹¹ It is a challenge, and if successful,

11 John Paul II, "To the Taiwan Bishops and the Chinese Diaspora: Be a

may prove to be the game-changer.

7. While the US emphasizes on individual freedom, China stresses on the collective interest of the state. There is a risk that the spirit of the state is overemphasized at the expense of the respect for the dignity of an individual person. Another risk is to move onto a technocratic ideology with the sole interest of economic wellbeing and scientific advancement. Instead of only pursuing ideological goals, there is the need for China to have an open dialogue with the West! Assuming the West is open to it. China can draw from the original inspiration of the culture of harmony in the Chinese tradition to promote its soft power.
8. Youths are our future. Before the outbreak of the pandemic, many Chinese are going abroad for visits and for studies. More exchanges among young people and students should be promoted. In the education system, instead of overemphasis on the learning of Science it should be balanced by the learning of Arts and Letters. The studies of Technology and Business should be complemented by Humanities. In the present research, I have quoted extensively from Chinese classics and poetries of Zhang Zai and Tao Yuanming as well as biblical narratives that contain poetry and wise sayings.

Bridge-Church, 28 February 28 1984", in *Papal Documents Related to China 1937-2005*, eds. Elmer Wurth and Betty Ann Maheu (Hong Kong: Holy Spirit Study Centre, 2006), pp. 262-66.

They are consonant with one another. Modern poetry should also be encouraged, as reflections leads to interiority and dialogue about transcendental reality. It is consonant with Chinese culture to give importance to forming an all-around person.

9. Based on my first-hand experiences, sincerity can touch people's heart. I believe that we can really engage in constructive dialogue if we are open to each other, without holding a biased or absolute attitude.
10. There is a Trinitarian vision at the heart of the "charism of unity". Jesus prayed to the Father that may they all be one as you and I are one, and he showed us the way in the abyssal emptying of himself on the cross, to reconcile humankind with God and among them. This dynamism and Trinitarian rhythm of the Christian Revelation is open to dialogue with all cultures. There is something that corresponds to the profound needs, not only to western culture but, to all cultures and, particularly to me as a Chinese.