

**Christian Theology
And
Intellectuals in China**

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Preface

The current booklet, *Christian Theology and Intellectuals in China*, marks the fifth publication in the series *Occasional Papers*, edited and published at the Centre for Multireligious Studies at the University of Aarhus. The five papers presented here were all given at various occasions during a two-month visit in August - October 2002, by professor Gao Shining and professor He Guanghu, both offering their academic capabilities as guest lecturers at the Centre for Multireligious Studies and in the wider context of the University of Aarhus.

The subject matter of the papers, however, not only importantly documents the work of He and Gao during their stay at the Centre, but it also mirrors one of the four aims set up by the Centre for Multireligious Studies Board, namely to monitor and to provide information on Christianity's global developments. We have chosen to include these particular papers by He and Gao as part of the series because their scholarly insights and analyses reflect an aspect of Christianity as a global religion, which is rarely taken into consideration in a global theological discourse; this even less so in an intra-European discussion on the apparent future pluriformity of Christianity as it has developed over the last 50 years.

The Centre for Multireligious Studies, thus, sees currents in global Christianity as the ones presented in this publication as important landmarks for a better understanding not only of Christian belief but also of religion in general in the 21st century. Hence, we are happy that we were able to facilitate the visit of He and Gao in 2002 and pleased that cooperation with Areopagos Foundation in Oslo and Copenhagen as well as with the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies (ISCS) in Hong Kong was established on this occasion.

The Centre would like to expand such scholarly exchange also in the future and hope that this initial international exchange of some length will lead to further and wider contacts with the individuals, organisations and institutions involved. Furthermore, in this era of increased academic mobility worldwide we welcome networking with other like-minded institutions, which find themselves in a position to work with the Centre for Multireligious Studies in an attempt to promote and enhance global

awareness in a constructive theological discourse suitable for a 21st century context.

January 2003

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Christian Theology and Intellectuals in China A Historical and Theological Introduction

By Jørgen Skov Sørensen

“The most significant transformation of Christianity in the world today is not the liberal Reformation that is so much desired in the North. It is the Counter-Reformation coming from the global South. And it’s very likely that in a decade or two neither component of Global Christianity will recognize its counterpart as fully or authentically Christian.”

Philip Jenkins¹

In such radical conclusions Philip Jenkins in his article *The Next Christianity* describes a future scenario for world Christianity. Gone is the term “unity”, which has otherwise characterised a long ecumenical process throughout the 20th century. In comes a new paradigm for Christian awareness, namely a situation where Christianity develops in new and rather arbitrary patterns that substantially challenges our traditional way of understanding Christian belief, Christian dogma, Christian existence and not least our understanding of Christianity as one united faith. Jenkins even points to a situation only a decade or two away where internal splits will result in an even more diffused and mutated Christianity than the one we witness today, and he compares what may be before us to the original reformation of the 16th century, which he also recognises as a significant reason for today’s developments².

What Jenkins has in mind is primarily the developments within that which can generally be termed *Pentecostal* churches and movements,

¹ Philip Jenkins: “The Next Christianity” in *The Atlantic Online*, October, 2002, accessed from *The Atlantic Online* November 11, 2002, pp. 11f.

² *Ibid* pp. 2.

particularly in Africa. There can be little doubt that most recent literature in the field of Pentecostal research is exactly dealing with the developments in Africa³, and fairly so, as the changes here have been massive over the last two to three decades. But also in Asia and South America and to some extent in what we have sometimes termed “the first world”, Europe and the USA, similar Pentecostal developments have seen daylight in recent times⁴.

However, it is worthwhile to take a look at China to encounter movements that are not only in line with what Jenkins has observed in the African continent, i.e. movements that challenge old western forms of Christian establishment, but also at the same time wish to challenge Pentecostal trends in their own context⁵. The contributions in the present volume of Occasional Papers from the Centre for Multireligious Studies is doing exactly this: taking a look at and exposing analyses of Chinas intellectuals and their rising interest in Christianity in order to have a closer look at a somewhat different phenomenon in present day China, namely the emerging and growing interest for Christianity and Christian studies among many Chinese intellectuals. We are dealing with a phenomenon that distinguishes itself from both the global and the Chinese charismatic movements as well as from western mainline orthodoxy, as we know it from catholic and protestant traditions.

In order to better understand the background for this development it is helpful briefly to have a look at the Christian scene in China over the last decade or two. Throughout the 1990s one could roughly identify four main groups of Christian orientation in Mainland China:

- China Christian Council Leadership (CCC)
- Grass Root Christians (CCC and non-CCC)

³ For a significant research contribution in this field see Allan Anderson, *African Reformation: African Initiated Christianity in the Twentieth Century*, Africa World Press, Trenton, 2001.

⁴ Cf. Viggo Mortensen (ed.) *The Charismatic Movement and the Churches, Occasional Papers No. 2*, Centre for Multireligious Studies, University of Aarhus, Aarhus 2001.

⁵ Charismatic Pentecostalism is a significant trend also in Chinese Christianity, cf. Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China*, Cambridge Studies in Ideology and Religion Series, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1993, pp. 152ff.

- Christian Indigenous Sects (non-CCC)
- Scholars in Mainland China Studying Christianity or “Culture Christians”

China Christian Council has since the new religious liberalisations in 1979 stood out as the official protestant church body and comprises today app. 20 million Christians. It seems, however, that there is a great gap between the theology of the CCC leadership and its grass roots. The CCC leadership has promoted a liberal understanding of Christianity, characterised by a this-worldly theological agenda and with a largely positive attitude to the socialist government and the dominating Chinese Communist Party (CCP). On the other hand we have seen the so-called “grass root” Christians, to some extent officially belonging to the CCC structures, but in many cases regarding themselves as independent from the CCC. This incoherent group⁶ has exposed a more conservative theology with much focus on the afterlife as it is promised and preached in traditional Christian dogma. On top of these two distinguishable groups one could find what was probably the largest group and also the most indigenous expression of what we may term Chinese Christianity, i.e. scattered gatherings of unorthodox, however distinguishably Christian, worshippers with strong influences inspired from Chinese popular belief systems.

These groups mirrored more or less similar trends in other countries with significant Christian minority groups. However, what was interesting at the beginning of the 1990s in the Chinese context was the emergence of a new segment on the Christian scene, one, which neither could be nor wanted to be identified with any of the existing three groups. What could be observed can probably best be described as scattered interest groups consisting of young intellectuals in universities and other institutions of higher education and with a new profound interest in Christian thought and philosophy. Again, it is questionable whether we can talk about a distinguishable “movement”, although this terminology is

⁶ Sometimes referred to in the literature as the “house church movement” although one can hardly identify these trends as one coherent “movement”. For a deeper description see Tony Lambert, *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church*, Hodder and Stoughton, London 1991. Cf. also Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan (1993) pp. 81ff.

from time to time applied in discussions about the phenomenon. In the beginning of the 1990s and onwards what could be observed was really not a coherent mass of people with similar aims and goals⁷. However, such “movement” indications were inherent in the most common term used in connection with these individuals in the late 20th century, i.e. “Culture Christians”⁸, which is, however, today among some of the same individuals a disputed term that is often criticised or discouraged⁹.

Whatever the terminology used, one must conclude that here was a new development in Christianity in China, a development, which transgressed both CCC liberalism, and grass root conservatism and Christian sectarianism. Whereas most literature on Christianity in China produced in the western academia throughout the 1980s focussed on the explosive expansion within these three groups in the mid 1990s, the attention slowly shifted towards this new phenomenon of SMCSC, and on how they distinguished themselves from the three aforementioned groups through a critical attitude to all three. To most of the SMCSC, the CCC leadership was too closely associated with the governing bodies of the Chinese nation, the grass roots were seen as way too other-worldly to be

⁷ Edmond Tang points to the fact that “[m]ost of them work individually in isolation and do not belong to a group or an organization”, cf. “The Second Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and Christianity Today” in Werner Ustorf and Toshiko Murayama (eds.) *Identity and Marginality. Rethinking Christianity in North East Asia*, Peter Lang Verlag, Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums Vol. 121, Frankfurt am Main, 2000, p. 65.

⁸ The term was popularised by one of the most prominent “Culture Christians”, Liu Xiaofeng, who was later on instrumental in the development of the academic study of Christianity in China. Cf. Liu Xiaofeng (writing under the pseudonym Tan Xin), “Culture Christians on the Chinese Mainland”, *China Notes*, vol. 29, no. 2/3, Spring and Summer 1991, New York 1991, pp. 628ff.

⁹ Such discouragement is mainly founded on the fact that identification as a “Christian” in any form in today’s China still carries with it connotations of suspicion and anti-nationalism esp. within central and in some places local government circles. In order to respect the recent discontent in relation to the use of the term “Culture Christians” I shall in this introduction primarily make use of the somewhat chunky but on the other hand also more precise and less subjective terminology “*Scholars in Mainland China Studying Christianity*” (SMCSC) which has recently as a term won some acclamation among scholars in the field, cf. Edmond Tang (2000) p. 64f.

reckoned with as a player in society at large¹⁰, and the various Christian sects were usually and bluntly discharged as superstitious and with a need for critique and education. Here with this new phenomenon researchers of Christianity in China suddenly and certainly had something new to report on. One significant indication of this was the fact that the Lutheran World Federation, as part of its large China Study Project launched in the early 1990s, concluded in a preparatory document that with the emerging interest for Christianity among Chinese intellectuals, we may witness a “*third way [...] between extreme Orthodoxy and extreme Third World spirituality*”¹¹. As a first apex of this development and new academic interest, an international conference, *Christianity and Modernization – A Chinese Debate*, was organised by the Chinese Academy for Social Sciences and held in Beijing in 1994 including several intellectuals and researchers with both research and personal interests in Christianity¹².

As the popular term “Culture Christians” implies, the main interest in Christianity among these scattered groups of SM CSC was the *Christian culture* or simply *Christianity as a culture* and as such a social and anthropological element that critically interacts with society and, eventually, will have an impact on society. Christianity without any interest in dialogue and interaction with the larger society was for the major part of these individuals not to be considered as a construction worth dealing with. Hence, the critique of the existing more or less established Christian expressions in post-Mao Chinese society rose, as we have seen above, on the grounds that they were perceived by the SM CSC largely as inward looking and basically avoiding any critical interaction with the surrounding Chinese society. For the intellectuals with their new interest in Christian thought and culture, their religious interests were strictly tied up with developments and changes in Chinese society, and eventually with the modernisation of China as a nation state and as a society partaking in a

¹⁰ As we shall see below this factor, i.e. religion as a constructive contributor in society, is of major importance for these scholars and intellectuals.

¹¹ *Agenda*, Programme Committee for Theology and Studies, Attachment 3 to EXHIBIT 7, The Lutheran World Federation, June 23-25, Kristianssand 1993, p. 4.

¹² The conference is documented in the publication *Christianity and Modernization – A Chinese Debate. An International Academic Consultation 10-14 October, 1994, Beijing*, edited by Philip L. Wickeri and Lois Cole, Daga Press, Hong Kong 1995.

global world. Seen in this light, this new segment of Christianity in China was part of a larger historical development which China entered more than 150 years ago, namely during and after the Opium Wars between imperial China and the western powers with economic and political interests in the region. To better understand the SMCSC it is helpful to recapitulate this history and its aftermath in the 20th century.

The first Opium War (1839-1842) witnessed to an exercise of overwhelming western power in terms of technology and economy. The following self-analysis within China focussed exactly on China's backwardness in technological and economic terms and pointed towards the need for modernisation within these two areas of development. This self-critical analysis led indirectly to the nationalist revolution, the fall of the emperor and eventually to the establishment of the Chinese Republic in 1911. It was relatively clear after a short time, however, that there was a need for more than technological and economic reforms in Chinese society. This insight led to the establishment of the so-called "May 4th Movement"¹³ – a group of intellectuals, mainly based in Beijing, who pointed to the fact that in order to truly modernise China, China's leaders and scholars would have to look closer into the value systems of the western modernised world, the value of the individual and the equal rights of all¹⁴. The adherents of the "May 4th Movement" advocated this view through the slogan "Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy". There was, however, at this time no mentioning of "Mr. Religion" as a player in the modernisation process of the western world.

¹³ Cf. Jonathan Spence, *The Search for Modern China*, Hutchinson, London 1990, pp. 310-319.

¹⁴ Jonathan Spence describes the May 4th Movement as first and foremost a group of cultural reformers, stating that "It was as if [...] the mounting evidence of the spinelessness of corrupt local politicians coalesced in people's minds and impelled them to search for a way to return meaning to Chinese Culture. What did it now mean to be Chinese? Where was the country heading? What values should one adopt to help one in the search? In this broad sense, the May Fourth movement was an attempt to redefine China's culture as a valid part of the modern world", Spence p. 312. Eventually, as we have noticed above, the May 4th reformers opted for western technology and civic rights as the solution to the Chinese (cultural) modernisation process.

Although the May 4th Movement is recognised as a significant part of Chinese history in the 20th century, their ideals were never realised. The following 20-30 years of Chinese history were inflicted both by civil wars, fuelled by local warlords and the rivalling between the nationalist forces and the Marxist rebels, as well as the Japanese invasion and following occupation which ended only in 1945. Finally, China came through this period of tumult and in 1949 on the first day of October the leader of the CCP, Mao Zedong, could announce the Peoples Republic of China at Tian An Men Square in Beijing. Modernisation in China henceforth was concentrating on a stern critique of western ideology and adhered to the realisation of a Marxist model for development and modernisation of Chinese society. During the following 30 years, internal critique of this line of modernisation ideology had a hard time and was more or less non-existent at least as part of a public discourse. The restraints of academic activity during this period are reflected in various ways in He and Gao's papers in this publication.

It was not until 1979 when China's new reformer, Deng Xiaoping, came to power after the political showdown following the death of Mao Zedong and consequently the end of the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), that intellectual critique of the Chinese society could again spread its wings, although still through limited ways and means. In his article *The Second Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and Christianity Today* the sinologist and theologian Edmond Tang, however, suggests that it was only in 1988 that China really woke up to a critical awareness with regard to a new modernisation of Chinese culture and society¹⁵. Interestingly, this new awareness took shape through one of the most archetypical examples of modern culture and life: the television. In 1988 the TV series *He Shang* (Agony of the River) was followed by an estimated 600 million Chinese throughout the Mainland. The river referred to was the Yellow River, together with the Great Wall one of the prides of the Chinese civilisation, which developed exactly along the river basin and was kept intact later in history by the Great Wall, defending China against hostile attacks from the north.

¹⁵ Tang (2000) pp. 60f.

However, what was significant in the *He Shang* series was the fact that it criticised rather than praised these two national symbols. The Yellow River is known not only for being the basis for one of the world's first and greatest river civilisations, but also for its destructive capabilities when it occasionally floods the adjacent fields and residential areas. Likewise the Great Wall, traditionally perceived to be a powerful means of defence, was in the TV series portrayed as a symbolic keeper and sustainer of an inward-looking Chinese culture, which cannot transgress that, which the producers of the series pinpointed basically as Chinese nationalism¹⁶. The vision of the people behind the series was that China, in order to modernise herself, have no choice but to work with renewal from the inside, break with its isolationist and nationalist culture and become part of the world society. The series raised, as one can imagine, both harm and enthusiasm among the viewers and caused a public discourse on modernisation in China, not entirely dissimilar to the trends previously seen with the May 4th Movement, however, this time on an even more popular basis due to the role of the mass media.

Although *He Shang* did not do it on its own but must be seen as part of a general trend following the cautious liberalisations after 1979, the series was instrumental in reviving to some extent not only an internal critical mindset, but also an interest in ways and things foreign. The emergence of excessive interest in Christian religion and not least Christian culture with a number of scholars and intellectuals must be seen in this light also. Their interest is part of a long history of struggle for modernisation of China beginning after the first violent encounters between China and the colonising West during the Opium Wars, through the fall of the Chinese empire to the May 4th Movement, which was eventually disabled as an intellectual reform movement by the national turmoil of the 1920s and 1930 and later by the Maoist revolution.

Today the SMCS have taken up the "May 4th" spirit from the second decade of the 20th century, but they have added to their wish list apart from "Mr. Science" and "Mr. Democracy", already there, the

¹⁶ This aspect is made evident in He Guanghu's paper *A Religious Spirit. The Hope for Transnationalism in China Today*, included in this publication.

newcomer “Mr. Religion”, recognising that the religious tradition of the West, i.e. Christianity, may well have played a significant role in the societal development of western powers. This change in attitude is also significant due to the fact that the traditional view of religion of Chinese academics and intellectuals has always been that of discontent and a stern critique of all forms of religion as superstition and, during the Marxist period, as feudal and counter revolutionary constructions, which deserved eradication. Contrary to this, during the 1990s it became almost fashionable to have an interest in religion and in particular in Christianity. This new basically benevolent interest took a more definite shape during the 1990s and resulted after a few years in a number of nationwide initiatives related to the emerging academic interest in religion. Several universities and places of higher education established centres for studies in Christian thought and world religions¹⁷, and a significant number of journals on Christianity and the cultural encounter between the East and the West were published by these centres¹⁸.

Thus having placed this interest for Christianity among Chinese scholars in its historical context, it may be of interest to have a closer look at the reasons why these scholars have come to this particular interest in Christianity in the first place. In a publication from the late 1990s, director of the Centre for Christian Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Zhuo Xinping, offers his view on and explanation of this development¹⁹.

Zhuo divides his suggestions into five categories:

¹⁷ Best known outside China is the Institute of World Religions (with its Centre for Christian Studies) at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing. For a brief survey on this subject, see Gianni Criveller, “Christian Studies in Mainland China”, *Tripod*, no. 122, Hong Kong, Summer 2001, pp. 6-28.

¹⁸ E.g. the Chinese language journals *Christian Culture Review* and *Eastern and Western Culture*. Also on the publication side, a special feature has been the numerous translations into Chinese of Christian classics, ancient and modern, published in recent years and thus made available to academics on a wider scale.

¹⁹ Zhou Xinping, “Die Bedeutung des Christentum für Chinas Modernisierung“ in Monika Gänsbauer (ed.) *Christentum im Reich der Mitte. Aktuelle Thesen und Texte aus China*, EMW and China InfoStelle, Hamburg 1998, pp. 80 ff.

1. A general academic interest for human civilization can now again after 1979 legitimately include western trends and values and therefore also Christianity as a cultural phenomenon. Christianity is seen as an indistinguishable part of a collective human history and therefore draws attention for objective studies.
2. Maoist ideology of strong antagonism between China and the West is a thing of the past. Western thinking and philosophy has been going through a rehabilitation process following its very negative reception not only through Mao's reign but also to some extent since the Opium Wars on the 19th century.
3. There exists among a large number of intellectuals and scholars a deep search for the rebuilding of Chinese culture, which suffered particularly badly during the Cultural Revolution. Some try to establish how Christian culture in its function, meaning and effect can be applied in parallel processes of both recapitulation and rethinking of Chinese culture.
4. Some intellectuals and scholars search for a spiritual Truth. The violent changes after 1949, and especially during 1966-1976, and the mental strains of deep societal transformation processes after 1979 have left many with the huge gap of a missing value system. Many feel that the hard core capitalism and the widely spread commercialism of post-1979 China cannot fulfil a basic spiritual need and they turn to Christianity, especially Christianity in its philosophical forms.
5. Finally, some scholars have simply found new interest in Christianity as an object for scholarly research as they have now been able to work with religions other than the traditional Chinese ones, including Christianity. This is related to the upsurge in academic religious studies within the last few years²⁰.

²⁰ Li Pingye in a likewise exercise covers similar reasons for the interest in Christianity among intellectuals, but includes the view of Christianity as a concern for global affairs (contrary to traditional Chinese religions) as a significant factor for many, cf. He

It is of course easy, much too easy, to exaggerate the numbers and the significance of the SMCSC. Basically, it must be remembered that we are dealing with small numbers²¹ and that the ones interested are scattered throughout China and in general not organised in any substantial way²². These circumstances must always be reiterated when discussing the phenomenon of SMCSC. Zhuo Xinping is of course aware of this and tries in his article to demonstrate the complexity of the phenomenon not only through the five individual points mentioned above but also through a closer qualification of the consequences as he sees them. This is particularly well expressed in a passage that from the authors hand relates primarily to item four above but which describes the situation as such more fully also:

“The outcome of such investigations reveals a variety of characteristics: Some scholars establish a discrepancy between the spirit of belief in Christianity and real Christian existence. Others go through a conversion to Christianity in order to reach personal “salvation”. Yet others realize the importance and necessity of Christian belief, however, they see a need to overcome the limitations of denominational differences in the Christian church. Finally, some scholars try, as friends of Christianity, to observe the religion from an external perspective, to investigate and to engage in dialogue with it.”²³

This quotation illustrates perfectly well the diversity within the SMCSC and once again stresses the fact that we cannot talk about a “movement” in traditional terms or even a “group” if by this terminology we indicate a kind of internal conscious coherence. Scholars involved in Christian studies of all sorts in China today are engaged with this particular subject due to a

Guanghu’s paper *A Religious Spirit: The Hope for Transnationalism in China Today* in this publication. However, Li also takes note of the fact that some individuals are simply driven by the enhanced chances of travelling abroad and especially to Europe or the United States, “Christianity as a means to pragmatic results or negative political objectives”. Li Pingye, “The Attitude of Contemporary Chinese Intellectuals Towards Christianity” in Wickeri and Cole, pp. 72 and 74.

²¹ Although it must always also be remembered that even small numbers in a Mainland Chinese context are substantial due to the mere size of population in the country.

²² Cf. note 7.

²³ Zhou Xinping in Gänsbauer (ed.) p. 82 (my translation).

variety of interests: personal or societal or both. On top of this, we are dealing with a small minority within the minority of a “Christian presence”, to use a deliberately but necessarily vague expression, in China today. These are probably the most important aspects to remember when we enter a discourse on SMCSC. On the other hand, the fact of diversity and dispersion should not overshadow the potential influence such scholars have or may have in the future of China’s modernisation process. Scholars in China have traditionally had an important role to play in formulating enlightened and balanced policies of the Chinese state. This tradition, which builds on the Confucian practice of civil servant scholars, may return in the future after some 50 years with extreme socialism and extreme capitalism as China has witnessed it, with 1979 as the decisive turning point from the one ideology to the other.

Bearing these precautions in mind as important lenses through which the phenomenon of SMCSC is to be observed today, let us finally turn to a few remarks on what we may term “the theology of modernisation” which partly denotes which basic elements of Christian theology that appeal to these scholars, and partly is developed as they go along exploring the path of Christian thought. Again, it will be helpful to turn to Zhuo Xinping for some preliminary elaborations on such a theology²⁴. Zhuo believes, contrary to the trend in most missiology and ecumenical theology, that what is requested from a legitimate theology by the SMCSC is not a contextual theology, i.e. a theology that “fits into” Chinese tradition and contemporary context, but, quite opposite, a theology that stands out as an alternative to what is already there²⁵. Zhuo points to

²⁴ This field, i.e. mapping, analysis and critical theological assessment of the emerging theological patterns and paradigms of the SMCSC, is still waiting for a thorough investigation and comprehensive presentation to be made available to a western audience.

²⁵ Such an understanding builds on a presumption that theological contextualization must result in a fully integrated and even absorbed theology in a given context. This may not be the true case in all definitions of what theological contextualization is, but seen in the light of the Chinese Christian experience, where different types of Christian expressions are by some critical observers seen as fully absorbed in either political ideology (CCC) or traditional Chinese folklore (Christian Indigenous Sects) and with grass root Christians somewhere in-between and to a large extent belonging to both camps, the theological description we find with Zhuo may be justified or at least

five elements, which constitute a theology that appears to have emerged from the SM CSC in recent years, five elements that give an impression of the theological foundation, which is to be found behind the interest in Christianity as a significant player in the development and modernisation of Chinese society²⁶.

Firstly, the *concept of sin* in Christian theology has sparked an interest because it counteracts the Chinese traditional philosophical and anthropological assumption that human beings are basically good and basically capable of turning development in a right and good direction. Chinese cultural history has in general been characterised by an overwhelming optimism on behalf of the human race, whereas there has been little room or understanding for the Christian theological concept of human beings as basically sinful beings. Failure of several modernisation attempts over the last couple of centuries, however, has, according to Zhuo, together with spreading corruption charges and political fatigue and pessimism, led to a more critical assessment of human endeavours, which has again opened up for a better understanding of humans as sinful beings. To some, Christian anthropology is more in line with their experiences from life than traditional Chinese models.

Secondly, due to various ideological experiments during the 20th century the spiritual spheres of Chinese society have suffered. Maoist ideology worked decisively against religion and succeeded to a large extent in eliminating significant religious groups in society. After 1979, capitalism has taken over and with official slogans such as "To be rich is glorious" printed on banners and painted on walls, materialism is making a huge impact on the Chinese people. Such developments are creating a society, which when it comes to wealth distribution is extremely unequal, and many who feel marginalized in this new society and by these newly implemented economic measures feel comforted by the *notion of redemption* in Christian theology, stressing that God through incarnation is among his people, which he redeems through his self-sacrificing acts. This also serves

understood. Zhuo in this way also underscores the SM CSC understanding of theology as a counter-cultural presence in Chinese society.

²⁶ Zhuo, pp. 84ff.

the purpose of filling in a spiritual vacuum created by ideological measures during the 20th century.

Thirdly, the *concept of transcendence* in Christian theology can, according to Zhuo, be an important inspiration for the modernisation process in Chinese society. Traditionally, Chinese religious ways and means have stood out as particularly pragmatic and immanence oriented, a position also reflected in Chinese politics and economic structures both before and after 1949 and 1979²⁷. Critical voices on such notions have emerged, however, claiming that economic policies based on such immanent and pragmatic reasoning will eventually lead to uncritical utilitarianism and the urge for short-term success in all endeavours. This also means that all measures in human life, political, social, economic, are created and taken on immanent foundations, i.e. they are based solely on, and hence dependent on, human norms and regulations. Contrary to this assumption of basic immanence, a Christian notion of transcendence offers a foundation for decisions in society that lies beyond human errors and self-centred insufficiency and, furthermore, allows for a more objective critical assessment of both possibilities and difficulties in a Chinese modernisation process.

Fourthly, Zhuo suggests that the Christian *notion of concern for the last things* may play a significant role for the SMCSC. Most Chinese see modernisation as a means to better living conditions on all levels in terms of materialism, but few have realised the dangers and problems also inherent in an uncritical modernisation process. The Christian concern for the last things and the end of history, though, enables a critical assessment of human progress in history and points to the fact that spiritual enlightenment is more important than material wealth. According to Zhuo this is by many seen as a prerequisite for the establishment of a spiritual civilisation in present day China.

Fifthly and finally, the Christian *notion of oikoumene*, the worldwide fellowship of Christian believers, can be an inspiration to a

²⁷ This fact is well illustrated by the often quoted dictum by Deng Xiaoping advocating a more pragmatic line in the development of economic structures in Chinese society after 1979: "It does not matter whether a cat is black or white: as long as it catches mice, it is a good cat...". Cf. Spence, p. 738.

more open Chinese society and an urge and a call for closer cooperation and mutual cross-cultural and transnational recognition in today's "global village". This is, according to Zhuo, badly needed in Chinese culture and society with its traditional tendency of nationalism and inward orientation in international affairs. China should no longer be the "Middle Kingdom" but a participant and partaker in the international society, the global oikoumene.

One can conclude from these theological observations by Zhuo Xinping that as a matter of fact the theology both accepted and promoted by SMCSC is not particularly unorthodox. It is focussing on some of the main pillars of traditional Christian faith such as sin and redemption, the transcendent nature of God and the notion of an apocalyptic end to history. Where the SMCSC differ in substance from more traditional, western, understandings of Christian faith is in the lack of organisational structures and ecclesial rites of inclusion which have through 2000 years of Christian history characterised legitimate structures of the Christian Church. This may be the most striking challenge that encounters the "Old Christianity" from the side of the SMCSC: the lack of an ecclesiology as we know it in the church tradition.

With the terminology of Philip Jenkins, as we saw it at the beginning of this introduction, what we encounter in today's China is not so much a conscious "counter-reformation" of the kind that we can witness growing within the Pentecostal movement. It is not on the agenda of individuals or small groups of SMCSC to reform the world church or Christianity. In fact, this is far from being the case. What they are looking for and trying to identify are elements within the Christian tradition, which can carry through a reformation in Chinese society, and which will eventually turn out to be the missing, but exclusively important, foundation for modernisation in the otherwise long history of failed modernisation attempts in Chinese society. One may say with a hint to Chinese intellectual history of the 20th century that what they believe they have found is the missing "Mr. Religion" of the May 4th Movement.

Still, that does not take away the challenge this is for the traditional Christian community and for that matter the challenge posed by SMCSC to secular society at large. Not only will Christian traditional

theologians have to deal with questions relating to the lack of ecclesiology as we have grown used to it and as we understand it in the way of a norm for legitimate Christian theology, but also secularists will have to deal with, and position themselves with regard to, the seemingly unlimited use of religious connotations and transcendent foundations which SMCSC apply to their societal constructions. While intellectuals in the west have learned to disbelieve in God and believe in humanity, some Chinese intellectuals seem to be convinced that it is wrong to believe in humanity and right to believe in God. One can almost hear the question, if this is not an example of the unhealthy mix of religion and politics that the western world has convinced itself to fear even more at the beginning of the 21st century? Few people would draw such alarming conclusions from what we witness among scholars and intellectuals with an interest in God in China today, and justifiably so. But what we see is an undeniable suggestion for a symbiotic relationship between religious transcendence and political decision-making. Furthermore and along the same lines, both secular and liberal theologians of the West may find themselves obliged to ask, if not the SMCSC have a too narrowly positive view of what Christian theology can achieve, and whether they do not forget to critically assess the negative influences of Christianity in history.

These are issues too large to be dealt with in these few introductory remarks, but it does seem that the more traditional Christian community will have to get used to the fact that it is faced not only by the challenge from an reform-urging and sometimes theologically aggressive Pentecostal movement on a world wide scale, but also from “local theologies” that on the one hand claim not to be contextual, but on the other hand also question decisive institutional elements of what we have previously considered to be legitimate Christian expressions. The Christian West may have to get used to and eventually accept the fact that material of the Christian tradition is used and applied in what is seen as non-Christian contexts. The challenge has always been present, however from the powerful centres of world Christianity mostly without theological recognition of the fact that this may be a legitimate development within Christianity.

Let me finish this introduction with a quote from Li Pingye of the Chinese Association for Religious Studies who summarises the characteristics of the SM CSC in this way:

“Although some of them have accepted Christian Faith, they do not strictly observe traditional Christian disciplines and rituals, they are not very enthusiastic about the church and its pastors, and they do not expend much energy on religious rituals and activities such as worship, religious observance, Bible study and prayer. Some of them have very little contact with the local church organisation. [...] They believe in Christianity with the Confucianists attention to the practical and the concrete, and with Taoism’s free and easy style, a Christianity unstricted by external forms and without dogma, but still a Christian faith which is tenaciously taken to heart. For the Chinese Christian intellectuals, faith is a matter of the spiritual realm for the satisfaction of their own spiritual needs. It is part of their search and it is their choice, and it can be completed by their own efforts. This is perhaps the difference between the faith of Chinese Christian intellectuals and Christians from Western Christian cultures”²⁸.

An obvious question to be raised, as the Centre for Multireligious Studies with this publication makes available to the interested public five papers by He Guanghu and Gao Shining, is whether there is a possible middle way for the traditional Christian community between on the one hand turning their backs to the phenomenon of SM CSC in sheer indifference and with no dialogical intention at all, and, on the other hand, forcefully criticising them as not being part of the Christian community. Or is Philip Jenkins right also when it comes to the relationship between SM CSC and the traditional Christianity when, as we have seen it at the beginning of this introduction” he says that “*it’s very likely that in a decade or two neither component of Global Christianity will recognize its counterpart as fully or authentically Christian*”²⁹ In this way the present volume in the series *Occasional Papers* is raising questions for deeper theological discussion not only relating to the multi-

²⁸ Wickeri and Cole, 1995, p.76.

²⁹ Cf. note 1.

religious state of the world but also to the pluriformity within the Christian tradition itself.

Introduction to the five papers:

The following is an attempt to make brief introductions to each of the five papers presented by He and Gao. It should be noted that they all stand out as individual papers, which can be read on their own.

In the first paper featured, *Religious Studies in China and their Connection with Political and Social Circumstances*, He Guanghu sets the scene for a better understanding of the renewed interest for religious studies in China by systematically going through recent history of the discipline. He relates this to the general history of the Chinese nation and pinpoints elements that have had decisive effects on the way the discipline has been understood - and misunderstood - by the Chinese authorities.

The Second paper, *Some Causes and Features of the Christian Upsurge Among Chinese Intellectuals*, opens up the debate on some of the more profound reasons behind the emerging interest of Chinese scholars and intellectuals in Christian faith and theology. He deals with the topic from both an autobiographical point of view as well as from a professional view as an academic in the field of religious studies.

Gao Shining in the third paper of this compilation, *Chinese Christianity in the 21st Century*, addresses in the light of recent Chinese history the developments within Chinese Christianity and its role in society. Christian faith is at the same time placed in its context of other religious traditions in China and Gao identifies elements of Christianity that may have a positive effect on the modernisation of Chinese society. Finally she calls for dialogical interaction between the various religions present in China today as a prerequisite for a better society.

Faith and Values – Case Studies of Chinese Christians is an example of the systematic collection of data on Chinese Christians, which is compiled and registered by academics at the numerous emerging centres in China aimed at the scholarly study of religions in general and Christianity

in particular. With her five presentations of Christian existence Gao gives a brief introduction to the various typologies of Christian faith found in contemporary China. Finally she offers her own analysis of the typologies researched and concludes on the role and place of Christian belief in China's value system discourse.

Finally, in his paper *A Religious Spirit: The Hope for Transnationalism in China Today*, He Guanghu presents his view on the positive role of religion as a spiritual bulwark against rising nationalism in China. He analyses the potential of various religious and philosophical traditions, Buddhism, Christianity, Islam, Confucianism and Taoism, as bridge builders between nations and peoples, and he stresses the role of the scholar of religions in this transnational process. Finally he offers his own personal vision of transnationalism fuelled by a universal religious spirit.

Biographical notes:

He Guanghu is born in Guizhou, China, in 1950. He obtained his PhD on the Study of Religion from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, in 1989 and served as a Research Fellow at the Institute of World Religions of the same Academy until 2002 when he was appointed professor at Beijing University. He Guanghu has lectured at numerous academic institutions in Asia, Europe and the USA and published extensively in the fields of religious studies.

Gao Shining is born in Guizhou, China, in 1950. She currently holds a position as Professor at the Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing. Gao has served as a visiting scholar in Canada and Hong Kong and has published extensively within the field of religious studies, recently with a focus on Marxism and religion and the sociology of new religions. She has also translated a number of western theological classics into Chinese.

Religious Studies in China And their Connection with Political and Social Circumstances

By He Guanghu

I A Retrospect

1. The Trend of Enlightenment Thought, the Spread of Western Learning and the Rise of Religious Studies.

Up to the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, there was no usage of the word *zong-jiao*, religion, in China, though there was some concept which was similar to 'religion' as we can see in the common expression *san-jiao*, three religions or three teachings¹ denoting Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism.

What was similar to religious studies in the ancient or pre-modern China can be classified into three types:

- A Interpretations and commentaries of the classic teachings or theories of one of the three religions;
- B Critiques of or attacks upon some religions² on the position of one of the three;
- C Comparative or synthetic study of the three in terms of one of them.

As all the three types displayed show neither signs of descriptive methodology nor interest in value-free approach, they cannot be counted as religious studies in the modern sense of the word since Max Müller (1832-

¹ Some of the modern Chinese scholars understand it as 'three religions' whereas the majority of them argue that it just means 'three teachings' or 'three streams of cultivation' on the ground that Confucianism is not a religion. But I think the former is much better grounded than the latter (cf. He Guanghu, *A Thesis on the Reformation of the Chinese Religions*, Dong Fang, 4, 1995.)

² Buddhism (in the Tang Dynasty) and Christianity (in the Qing Dynasty) were typical objects of criticism.

1930). It follows that religious studies in China did not arise until the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries.

The western invasion in the second half of the 19th century brought to China two changes: the brook of enlightenment thought which sprang from thinkers such as Huang Zongxi (1610-1695) and Gu Yanwu (1613-1682) and was drained from time to time, suddenly became a great river; the side-door to western learning which was opened by the Jesuits such as Matteo Ricci (1552-1610) and J.A.Schall von Bell (1591-1666) and was closed from time to time surprisingly became a noisy entrance hall.

The trend of enlightenment thought strengthened by its western counterpart and modern science helped to generate some sceptical and critical attitudes towards all the traditional religions among intellectuals and educated young people. So in the early 20th century, most of the discourses on religion among Chinese scholars and intellectuals took at least some rational or objective mood, if not some radical or repudiating mood.³ Although such a mood was to be responsible for the lingering confusion of religion with superstition, it made possible the rise of religious studies, which got rid of the apologetic position either of Confucianism or of Buddhism or Daoism. This helped to form a characteristic of the newly born discipline, i.e. a critical motif, at the same time as it gave the discipline its presupposition - a rational attitude.

The spread of western learning, widened by the introduction of humanities and social sciences, brought to scholars some entirely new ideas, theories and methodologies. Therefore, from the beginning of this century, Liang Qichao, Hu Shi, Chen Yinque, Chen Yuan and other outstanding scholars were able to study religions on a level above the traditional horizon, applying some modern methods of western learning to their studies.

However, owing to the influence of the historical and textual research tradition, the religious studies in the first stage had a second

³ See the famous works such as Zhou Rong's *Ge Ming Jun (The Revolutionary Army)*, Zang Bingling's *Wu Shen Lun (On Atheism)*, Cai Yuanpei's *She Hui Gai Liang Xuan Yan (Declaration on Social Reform)* etc.

characteristic, i.e. the major achievements centred on the field of history of religion.⁴

The third characteristic of the newly born discipline of religious studies in China was the important role played by the scholars within religious circles. As many western Christian scholars contributed a lot to the formation of the scientific study of religion, many Chinese Christian scholars and other religion-affiliated scholars contributed a great deal to the rise of the discipline in China, honestly and positively reacting to and reflecting on the criticism of their religions. In fact, some learned religious scholars, including church people and missionaries, were themselves leading introducers of western learning and modern ideas, theories and methodologies.⁵

In short, from the turn of the century and until the Communists took over China in 1949, religious studies in China followed a way quite similar to their western counterparts in the first stage of development, with many talented scholars and important works in a difficult situation of revolutions and wars.

2. The 'Political Campaigns', the 'Cultural Revolution' and the Fall of Religious Studies

After the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, all academic activities, just like all other cultural and social activities, were put under the leadership of Marxism-Leninism and Maoism, and all the academic institutions were transformed into parts of the enterprise of the Communist

⁴ We can mention, among others, Liang Qichao's *Fo Xue Yan Jiu Shi Ba Pian* (*Eighteen Papers on the Study of Buddhism*), Hu Shi's *Chan Xue Gu Shi Kao* (*A Criticism of the Early History of Zen*), Chen Yinque's studies of Buddhist Scriptures and of Daoism, and Chen Yuan's studies of histories of Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, Daoism and Catholicism in ancient China.

⁵ Yang Wenhui, Yue Xia, Di Xian, Master Tai Xu, Han Qingjing, Ouyang Jian, Da Yong and other Buddhists established many modernised academic institutions for the study of Buddhism. Wu Leichuan, Xu Baoqian, Fan Zimei, Liu Tingfang, Cheng Jingyi, Zhao Zicheng and other Christian scholars finished a large amount of works of works in comparative studies of Confucianism and Christianity. Many missionary societies published numerous books, newspapers and journals in promotion of religious studies and also trained some scholars in the field.

Party of China (CPC). Just like every branch of literature, art and culture, every branch of humanities, social sciences and academia was admonished to 'have partisanship'. So, religious studies were transformed into some instrument of the Party's policy.

From 1950s to 1960s, the CPC brought into the 'United Front' the religious people who advocated its leadership on one hand, and pushed on the atheist propaganda and confined religious acts and expressions within religious sites or churches on the other hand. Through all the series of 'political campaigns', which came one after another from the above, the ideological criticisms of all non-Marxist-Leninist ideas developed into institutional abolishment of all teachings and researches in many disciplines which were dismissed as 'bourgeois pseudo-sciences', such as sociology and demography. As the campaigns degraded the material and social situation and the everyday life conditions for the personnel concerned at the same time, it became extremely difficult, even impossible in some cases, to keep on researching in privacy.

Such a policy led to the disappearance of any serious studies of religion from academics and of any courses in religious studies from universities. At that time, articles and publications in the field were very few and filled with severe attacks and jeering comments on any religions, dismissing them as superstitions and counter-revolutionary ideas. Religious studies no longer existed in China apart from a few exceptions.⁶

In 1963, Chairman Mao summoned Ren Jiyu and praised his articles as Marxist study of Buddhism. Mao said, in the interview with Ren, one cannot write well on the histories of philosophy, of literature and of the world without 'criticism of theology'. Owing to these words, the first institution for study of religion was set up, i.e. the Institute of World Religions which became the largest centre for religious studies many years later. But in the 1960s and 1970s, the word 'criticism' in Mao's instruction

⁶ From the late 1950s on, some Buddhist scholars were organised to contribute to a Buddhist Encyclopedia edited in Sri Lanka (but the articles they wrote were published in China only in the 1980s with the title '*Chinese Buddhism*'). Some sections of Hou Wailu's *A History of Chinese Thought* and several articles by Ren Jiyu criticised Buddhist thought and analysed its social basis in terms of Marxist historical materialism.

was to be understood only in terms of absolute negation, severe attack, complete suppression and utterly clearing up.

However, not more than two years later, even 'criticism' became unnecessary and impossible for academic institutions, because all kinds of signs of any religion had been swept away from Chinese society, and all the people in the institution, as well as all the people in every other academic institution, had been sent to the countryside to do manual labour, with the establishment of the 'Cultural Revolution' (1966-1976). During this 'revolution' launched by the top authority, all forms of traditional culture, including all religions, were attempted destroyed, and even all orders of social life were disturbed. So, the fall of religious studies was just like the fall of a leaf on a tree trembling in the winter wind.

II The Reform and Opening and the Revival of Religious Studies

The culture-destroying 'Cultural Revolution' came to an end with the death of Mao Zedong in 1976. And after a two-year struggle against Mao's interim successor Hua Guofeng's clinging to the old ways, Deng Xiaoping's new policy of 'reform and opening' was established at the end of 1978. This really meant a spring bringing a revival of social life to China.

The new policy led to the lifting of the prohibition on religious activities and of the persecution of religious people.⁷ Then the following decade witnessed a rapid revival of religions. Owing to the past long suppression by force, the serious chaos in values, with the past disturbances and the spiritual crisis, with the disillusion with the revolution, all the religions, especially Protestant Christianity and Buddhism, grew with a speed, which surprised the whole world. Such a growth and its effects could not escape the attention of intellectuals as well as some officials. Many intellectuals were undergoing a re-orientation of values, and it was natural for some of them to turn to the study of the religions which they

⁷ Of course, the restoration of the government-sanctioned organisations of Buddhist, Daoists, Muslims, Catholics and Protestants meant at the same time that the lifting up was just for the five religions' followers who were co-operating with the government.

supposed might have something to meet the spiritual demands of the people.⁸

At the same time, with the gradual loosening and opening of the conditions for academic research, the professional scholars of religions began to confront the objects themselves and to 'have courage to use their reason' (*sapere aude*) in thinking and judging. Such an attitude helped to bring some liberation of thinking. Many scholars considered religions according to the facts concerned rather than to the rigid and dogmatic interpretation of the Marxist theory of religion. All this resulted in the revival (1978-middle of the 1980s) and development (middle of the 1980s onwards) of religious studies with some subjective conditions.

In 1978, with the restoration of colleges, universities and other academic institutions, the Institute of World Religions, which was put under the newly founded Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), began to go ahead with its research projects, in the 14th year after its founding.⁹ More than twenty graduates from various specialities entered the Graduate School of CASS and the Institute for Religious Studies of Nanjing University, majoring in studies of religions, including Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Daoism, Confucianism and atheism! That was the first time such education had appeared since 1949. In 1979, the first academic association in this field, the Chinese Association of Religious Studies was set up in Kunming, offering some academic networking among the professional and amateur researchers in various institutions and universities throughout the country. And in addition, the two institutes in Beijing and in Nanjing set up respectively three journals or magazines at the same time - *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu*, *Shijie Zongjiao Ziliao* and *Zongjiao*¹⁰.

All three events, the education of researchers, the organisation of academic associations and the setting up of journals, can be seen as obvious marks of the revival of religious studies in China. They made a real

⁸ Some of them, after a few years, became professional researchers in this field and constituted a great part of the academic circle of religious studies in China. See the section on 'Cultural Religions' of this paper.

⁹ The major results of the project were the publication of *A Dictionary of Religions* (Shanghai, 1981) as well as the commencement of writing *A History of Chinese Buddhism* in several volumes.

¹⁰ *Studies in World Religions*, *Information on World Religions* and *Religion*.

beginning and set a good example for the subsequent development. Although the graduate enrolments, the association activities and the journal increases were comparatively few in the following years for various external causes, we witnessed the setting up of courses in religious studies in the department of philosophy at Peking University with the help of the Institute of World Religions, the founding of two more academic institutions and their journals in this field in Shanghai and in Chengdu, all this before the middle of the 1980s.

III From the Debate on 'Religion as Opium' to the Idea of 'Religion as Culture'

As mentioned above, the revival and development of religious studies in China required subjective conditions, i.e. the liberation of thinking, as well as objective conditions, i.e. a reformed and open society. If the latter was to be formed decisively by the politicians in power, the former was to be realised basically by the scholars working in this field.

There were two landmarks in the course of the liberation of thinking for the scholars of religions: the debate on 'religion as opium' and the idea of 'religion as culture'.

In early 1980s, the primary obstacle in the way of religious studies was the generally and absolutely negative attitude towards religion which came from some one-sided and dogmatic interpretation of the famous remark by Karl Marx who had an unarguable leading position: 'Religion is the opium of the people'.¹¹ Encouraged by Deng Xiaoping's calling for 'wholly and fully' understanding of Marxism, some leading scholars (mainly of a background in Nanjing and Shanghai or of the Protestant Church)¹² proposed that the remark could be understood neither as the motif of Marx's idea of religion, nor as an absolutely negative judgment. Regarding religion only as 'opium' or illegal drug would lead to dismissing believers as 'opium eaters' or drug addicts and to judging religious leaders as drug dealers, which did justify the destroying of all

¹¹ Critique of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*, Introduction.

¹² Cf. the articles by Zheng Jianye, Zhao Fusan and others in *Zongjiao* during the period, published in Nanjing.

religions during the past twenty years. But some other remarks at the same time or even in the same essay showed that Marx had sympathy for the religious people. And the metaphor of 'opium' had something more to it than just a negative sense. Many churchmen used the opium metaphor before Marx in Europe where people knew opium as an effective painkiller, while the Chinese people who were repeatedly reminded of the disgrace of the Anglo-Chinese 'Opium War' knew it only as a notorious illegal drug.

Some other leading scholars (mainly from the Institute of World Religions)¹³ held that the idea of religion as opium could be seen as a corner stone of Marxist theory of religion. Indeed, opium is an effective painkiller, but it is so just because it has some anaesthetic or narcotic function. This function gave religion a reactionary role in relation to the oppressed people of the class struggle. Of course, this function also has something positive to it when people live in a pain-making society. And spiritual opium is different from material opium and is not to be destroyed like the latter. The extremely 'leftist' attitude towards religion of the past had complex causes and was not to be understood only as the outcome of the remark.

The North-South 'Opium War' (as many people called it) brought a very positive influence on to religious studies in the middle 1980s. Although the two sides had different emphases in their own understanding of Marx's remark, they agreed in opposing the 'extremely leftist' interpretation of the past and in advocating every side's right to hold its opinion and of arguing on an equal status. After the debate, more and more scholars threw away the dogmatic interpretation of the Marxist theory of religion, took a more open attitude towards religions and maintained a wider horizon in their research.

From the middle of the 1980s on, partly as the result of the open attitude and partly as the outcome of the influence of the 'cultural studies' current in intellectual circles, a relatively new idea appeared and spread swiftly in religious studies, namely the idea of 'religion as culture'. It was expressed precisely in such propositions as 'Religion is an old and universal social and cultural phenomenon in the history of mankind',¹⁴ 'Religious

¹³ Cf. the articles by Lu Daji, Ren Jiyu and others in *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu* during the period, published in Beijing.

¹⁴ Lu Daji (ed.), *A General Theory of Religious Studies*, Introduction, Beijing, 1989.

phenomena are closely connected with cultural phenomena of mankind¹⁵ and 'Civilisations in the world can be divided into three levels: material productions, institutional organisations and ideological systems. The first level interacts with religion, the second interacts and overlaps with religion, and the third interacts with, overlaps with and centres round religion.'¹⁶ But it was often simplified as 'religion is a culture' or 'a nation's religion is an important content of the nation's culture'.

Although the idea is not really a new invention and its simplified expression may have been a theoretically confusing and misleading proposition, it played a very great role in the political and social context peculiar to China in the late 1980s. Particularly so in broadening perspectives and opening up new regions for religious studies, because it made a breakthrough away from the past stereotype of thinking of religion only in terms of ideology and politics. As more and more people accepted the idea of 'religion as culture',¹⁷ less and less became the influence of the idea of 'religion as opium'.

With this new idea, many famous scholars, as well as some religious leaders, stressed the importance of religious studies in understanding any cultural phenomena. As a result, the position of this discipline was obviously promoted in academic circles and in the government. Such an idea also greatly widened the horizon for study. Since it was realised that culture in the broad sense included not only literature, art, music, philosophy and science, but also morality, politics, economy and law, etc., not only immeasurably rich in content, but also with innumerable strata, the study of religions as culture and the study of the relationships and reactions between religion and culture became immensely richer.

Then, from the late 1980s to the 1990s, there appeared a great flowing tide of scholarly studies, translations and popular books on various religions and their relations to various forms of culture.¹⁸ As journals and

¹⁵ Fang Litian, *Chinese Buddhism and the Traditional Culture*, Introduction, Beijing, 1989.

¹⁶ He Guanghu, Preface to *The World and Religion Series*, Chengdu, 1988.

¹⁷ Zhao Puchu, President of the Buddhist Association of China, and other influential religious leaders contributed very much to spread of this idea.

¹⁸ Among them, to mention a few, are *Encyclopedia of Christian Culture* (K.H.Ting and H.Yang eds.), *Chinese Buddhism and Traditional Culture* (L. Fang), *Taoism and Chinese*

anthologies such as *Christian Culture Review*, *The Culture of Buddhism* and *Religion and Culture* appeared, even the old periodical published by the Institute of World Religions changed its title from *The Material of World Religions* to *The Religious Cultures in the World*. So, many scholars would agree with Lu Daji's observation: 'Looking back at the road religious studies has travelled since 1949, we can say that no other theory or idea restrained the thinking of scholars of religion so severely as the idea of religion as "reactionary politics",¹⁹ and no other theory or idea played a liberating role as great as the idea of "religion as culture"'. Of course, some scholars disagreed with expressions such as 'religion is a culture', pointing out that a religion constitutes the spirit of a culture in perspective of the invisible,²⁰ nevertheless, many appreciated highly the great role of the idea and its spread in improving the development of religious studies in contemporary China.

IV The Growth of Religious Studies and the 'Cultural Religions'.

From the late 1980s to the 1990s, nearly ten institutes for the study of religion were set up by provincial Academies of Social Sciences in Xinjiang, Gansu, Ningxia, Yunnan, Shanxi, Tianjin, Qinghai, Inner Mongolia and Tibet. More than ten institutes or centres of religious studies appeared on the campus of various universities, and two of them (Peking University and Wuhan University) opened departments of religious studies. Even the State Bureau for Religious Affairs and the High Party School of the Central Committee of the CPC set up some institutions for the study under their direct leadership. Besides, some government-sanctioned religious associations also began to pay attention and to allocate some resources to the study, as well as to the education of their own professionals. Hence, the

Culture (Z. Ge), Popular Series of Religious Culture (edited at the Institute of World Religions), Series of Religious Culture (Wang Zhiyuan, ed.) and The World and Religion Series (He Guanghu, ed.) including many Chinese translations of western books on the relationships of religion to literature, politics, science, philosophy, feminism and in some branches of religious studies.

¹⁹ It is a common conclusion from the idea of 'religion as opium'.

²⁰ He Guanghu, *Religion and Culture: Spirit and Expression*, CASS Report, 1997, Autumn.

number of professional researchers increased greatly,²¹ and accordingly, they trained many more students, though there were official enrolments in this field only in three departments of religious studies and undergraduate enrolments only at Peking University.

During this period, Chinese scholars extended their research from the history of Buddhism and Daoism into many alien areas and achieved numerous results. Thus, research was conducted in the areas of history and thought of Christianity, Buddhism, Islam, Daoism, Confucianism as a religion, Tibetan Buddhism, Primitive Beliefs and Folk Beliefs in China, Hinduism, Judaism, Shinto, Zoroastrianism, Manicheism, Sikhism, Shamanism and New Religions. In the studies of philosophy, anthropology and sociology of religion as well as in the multi-disciplinary studies of the relationship of religion to various forms of culture, one could see remarkably numerous articles, papers, reports, translations, treatises and monographs. From 1978-1997, the Institute of World Religions alone produced nearly 1,000 scholarly articles, 180 monographs, 70 translations of books, 15 dictionaries, 132 issues of periodicals, beside numerous popular readings, investigation reports, and scripture and material compilations.²²

From 1949 to 1966, nearly all the publications in religious studies were on Buddhism, but the total number was not more than that in the year of 1992, i.e. 1125. And from 1996 to 1998, there were about 300 books and scores of magazines or anthologies published every year in China. Furthermore, this period also witnessed the publication of a series of encyclopaedias, dictionaries and popular readings, even cartoons which offered the Chinese readers religious knowledge which was much more objective and balanced than before.

Of course, all these publications included many hasty and crude works and sometimes authors were copying from one another. Nevertheless, all the works and achievements in general together

²¹ There are nearly 500 people now.

²² As for the speed of growth of the study during the period, we can get some impression from the following incomplete statistics:

The year	1991	1996	2024	1985
Articles published during that year	1103		2024	3000

demonstrated to the world that the Chinese academics in the field as a whole had progressed from a one-sided and antagonistic viewpoint to a relatively objective and balanced attitude towards religion. Of course, there are some scholars still holding some negative and hostile views while some others are positive and sympathetic. But generally speaking, the trend of movement was from the former to the latter. It is worth noting that the turn was, to a great degree, an outcome of the increasing exchanges of scholars and ideas between China and the West during the period, through international visits and conferences and Chinese translations of important western works in the field.

As some scholars who were sympathetic to the Christian religion but were not members of any church contributed so much to the public understanding of Christianity through their writing, translating, editing and other cultural activities, they began to be named 'cultural Christians' from the middle 1990s. And recently a similar name, 'cultural Buddhists' began to be applied to the scholars who had a similar status and contributions in regard to Buddhism. The appearance of such names was a striking sign of the fact that the spreading of some religions was not the result of clergymen and efforts within the Buddhist community (*sangha*) as much as that of the scholars' cultural activities. As a result of such scholars' efforts, there even appeared something called 'religious culture fever' during the time.

However, as most Christians would decline to name a person who has not been baptised as a 'Christian', and many Buddhists would refuse to apply the title 'Buddhist' to those who observe none of the 'five commandments' (*pancasila*) or are even not vegetarians, I prefer to coin a phrase, 'Cultural Religions', in describing such a phenomenon - that is to refer to many religious things which are the result of all kinds of cultural activities or are expressed in various cultural ways. In the circumstances of contemporary China, many religious developments are indeed brought to being by or through cultural activities, among which religious studies are the leading ones.

V A Prospect

1. Influences on Society

The phrase 'cultural religions' can be used as a summary of the influences of religious studies upon society. Besides the religious activities within the legal religious organisations, the academic studies are the only activities relating to religions, which are sanctioned by the government, and since the academic studies have displayed a fair, honest, and objective character, they have gained the confidence of the public. Therefore, the results of religious studies have had and will have a remarkable influence upon society. More and more students, teachers, journalists, officials, writers and other ordinary people have left behind the bias against religions, and have, and will have, a relatively fair and even sympathetic understanding of religion. I say 'will have' since the greatest influence is not by means of lectures so much as of books. Many books have been printed several times and still have good prospects for reprints.²³

The influences of the flourishing publications can be seen in various areas of social life. Even in the mass media being under the most severe constraint such as televisions, films and broadcasting, the few casual appearances and planning of programmes concerning religion suggests that there may be a big iceberg of aspiration for such projects²⁵. From the 1980s on, more and more young people have become so interested in observing Christmas and in sending gifts on that occasion, so that a foreign visitor might think he or she was in a Christian country if he or she visited a supermarket or department store during the festival. Furthermore, one can attend seminars, lectures and conferences concerning religion on campus at scores of universities, all this apart from the only three institutions which are sanctioned to have departments of religious studies, Beijing University, Wuhan University and the Graduate School of the CASS.

The influence has reached even into religious circles. As more and more young believers have widened and deepened their

²³ Cf. Wang Leiquan (ed.) *Index of Religious Articles in Mainland China*, Vol. I, Taipei 1985, and *1996 Annual Survey of Religious Studies in China*, Beijing, 1998.

²⁵ Among examples is the film *Master Hongyi*, the videos *Ten Commandments* and *Ben Hur*, a popular TV programme on Buddhist temples, and the broadcasting of interviews on religion and life with four scholars, including the present author.

understandings of their own faiths through reading the publications in the field, some religious leaders highly appreciate the work of scholars for its contribution to their efforts to improve the quality of belief.

In a few words, since the government-sanctioned religious organizations and so-called underground churches are quite limited in spreading their influence, it is natural and necessary that the religious influence upon the society should come mostly from religious studies and their achievements. And I think the influences would be, though neither immediate nor apparent, far-reaching in the development of society.

2. Problems on the Way

Just as the revival and development of religions in contemporary China can be considered a miracle, the revival and achievement of religious studies there can also be seen in this way. However, in prospect, we cannot ignore the many problems confronting religious studies in China before the threshold of the new century.

- A Owing to the effects of past experiences, religious studies are still seen as a 'subtle' field in the eyes of many people. Many scholars think the study of what is ancient is safer than that of the contemporary, the study of history safer than that of theory. Therefore, the development of religious studies is not balanced. It comes with too much stress on the history of religion and too little on the more modern and theoretical studies and even less on the studies of present religious situation. Some branch disciplines, such as psychology of religion and phenomenology of religion, are still waiting for a mere beginning.

- B The quality of the academic work, as a whole, should be improved. Even in the history of religions, which makes up the most fruitful field, a lot of publications content themselves with layout of materials and telling of stories. Some of them are just copying from one another, though there are many new understandings and findings in others.

- C There is a serious lack of young researchers. This is because of (i) the limited enrolment of students, owing to the national education systems and (ii) the even smaller number of graduates who are willing to work in research institutions, owing to the payment being much less than they can get from other jobs.

To add to the difficulty encountered with regard to personnel, the financial support does not meet the research demand, and this in turn exacerbates the lack of information resources. So, the prospects for the further growth of religious studies are quite poor in this situation.

Anyone who keeps in mind the past disasters would not think that religious studies would continue to prosper without a struggle. The most important lesson from the past century is that the flourishing of learning, including that of religious studies, needs open, tolerant and pluralist circumstances. Similarly, closed, suppressive and monolithic conditions necessarily lead to the fall and end of religious studies and of any other learning. Therefore, scholars who are responsible for learning ought to do their best to help form a context where everyone has the right to publish his or her opinions. For the formation of the circumstances which learning needs, in the final analysis, depends upon the ideas and actions of all the people, including scholars.

At the turn of the century, we can conclude that a bright future is waiting for religious studies and true religion in China, if only her scholars and religious and irreligious people have courage to use their own reason and to act.

Some Causes and Features of the "Christian Upsurge" Among Chinese Intellectuals

By He Guanghu

Foreword

"On this road are walking some independent and middle-rightist thinkers who, on the ground of spiritual resources in the biblical civilization, are reflecting upon the lack of freedom in China and envisaging the possibility of freedom for China. The road can be called 'theological liberalism' in terms of the history of thought."²⁶

The report, from which I quoted the words, is titled "Ten Major Events among Intellectuals of Mainland China in 2000". Nine of the "events" have some connections with the three major thought trends in today's China, which are "Liberalism", "New Leftism" and "Nationalism". Although the term "theological liberalism" seems incorrect and misleading in academic terms, its Chinese inventor was right when he said that the "thinkers" influenced by Christianity were "middle-rightists" and classified them as some kind of "liberals" in a special sense of the word in the contemporary Chinese situation.

We can see from these words that the so-called "Christian Upsurge" is just one of many other trends or "upsurges" in China today. And we have to say that it is just a relatively weak one in many respects, in contrast with the noisy nationalism and the arrogant new-leftism. The latter two seem more and more powerful, as they are merging and are in accord with official propaganda in many ways.

However, there is no sign that the upsurge in Christianity is coming to its end. So, it is still significant for us to try to find and discuss its causes and features.

²⁶ Ren Bumei: *The Outlets for Spirit in the 1990s*.

Nobody can deny the interaction between the recent Christianity upsurge among the Chinese intellectuals, who mainly inhabit cities, and the surprising increase of the Chinese Christians, most of who live in rural areas. However, anybody studying the general situation of Christianity in China during the past 20 years would observe that the two developments have been going their own ways from the beginning to the present and with such a minimum relationship to each other that one can hardly find a similar example in history.

Indeed, because of many sociological, political and psychological conditions, Christian missionary work in China seems more difficult or less effective in the cities than in the countryside. And owing to the unconscious despising of the grassroots and uneducated people, Chinese intellectuals have been very little affected by the rural Christians, though some scholars have begun to take seriously the considerable growth of Christianity in rural areas. Therefore, although the intellectuals' interest in Christianity emerged in the late 1980s a few years later than the increase of peasants' conversion, the former was not the outcome of the latter.

It is quite obvious that the upsurge in Christianity is just a phenomenon among the intellectuals of the age between 30-50. No matter how strange it seems to be, it means that most intellectuals who are interested in Christianity belong to the two generations raised in the most radically anti-Christian era, i.e. from the 1950s to the 1970s.

The older generation of the two (I am among them) was raised in the Communist "faith" and Maoist ideology from their childhood on. It was very easy and effective for the Chinese Communist Party to imbue them with Marxist-Leninist worldviews in the primary and middle schools. On the other hand, it was not so smooth and natural to "remould" the ideas in the even older generation of intellectuals through all the "political campaigns" which were launched again and again during the 27 years of Mao's reign (1949-1976). So, for my generation as educated young people, Christianity was nothing more than opium, an "illegal drug", for the people, and Christian missionaries were just spies for Western "imperialist invasions" and "wolves in sheep's clothing".

However, with their coming of age, the educated young people underwent the increasingly worse social conditions for all the Chinese from

the late 1950s to the death of Mao (1976). All their experiences, especially those in the "Cultural Revolution" (1966-1976), brought them thorough disillusion. Hence since the late 1970s, the so-called *san xin weiji*, i.e. Confidence Crisis, Trust Crisis and Faith Crisis, arose among young people, whose destructive impact can be deeply felt in everyday life and has become more and more serious and fatal in today's China.

The younger of the two generations did not experience those tragic and disastrous years that began with some enthusiastic communist faith and ended with some overall crisis. The most far-reaching influence to their spiritual life came from the great gap between what they were taught in schools and what they personally saw and heard everyday at home and in society. Therefore, they had never had the same faith and the same confidence and trust as the one the older generation once had. However, unlike the even younger generation who were almost born cynics with little influence by the ideals of 1980s, many of them were unsatisfied with the striking emptiness of faith and the serious poverty of spiritual life.

So, in late 1980s when some Christian books became accessible to them, many intellectuals had long been in search of the ground of spiritual being, not only for themselves, but also for the whole nation. They were desperately hungry for spiritual nutrition. And they had not found any satisfactory answers to their many haunting questions arising from the innumerable old and new problems in society. Some of them were of a conviction that all the societal problems had their causes in the spiritual dimension as well as in conventional and constitutional dimensions. A change of the system was needed for the resolution of the problems on the one hand, but on the other hand this change was itself in need of the transforming consciousness and spiritual condition of the people as the responsible subjects of act.

Christian thought on various important issues seemed to many intellectuals so novel, attractive, rich and penetrating, becoming something good, at least worth of studying, from having been something bad at most deserving to be despised. An obscure and formless monster turned out suddenly to be an angel with quite acceptable, even desirable, though still strange face and form! One can imagine how interesting, even exciting it was to them! So, they extended their attention from the few books, which

gave them some dim light of guide, to everything relating to Christianity they happened to read. And after a period of reading, some of them began translating, writing and editing.

The result is that there appeared nearly 2000 articles and 200 books about Christianity from late 1980s to middle 1990s, in striking contrast to the only 8 articles and 2 books that appeared from 1949 to 1978! And while all the publications in the field in those 30 years were full of abuses, hurls and despise of Christianity, the attitude towards Christianity of the authors and editors of this generation as a whole is undergoing a course from negative criticism, through objective description, to sympathetic appraisal. Thus, with the spread of the publications and their influence upon college students and young teachers, the 1990s witnessed a real Christian upsurge among the Chinese intellectuals.

II

What we said above is closely related to the social causes of the upsurge in Christianity, so here we should say something about the personal causes of it. Of course, every intellectual has his or her own causes of interest in Christianity, but we still could find something dominant in connection to the causes, especially in comparison with the causes of the Christian upsurge among the rural population.

While the peasants' interest focuses on the effects of Christian prayers and rituals upon their own actual life, many intellectuals got their interest because they supposed Christianity could be helpful to the transformation of the nation which they believe to be necessary for its future. This difference comes from the following fact: the peasants have long been in such a poor condition that they have to exert all their strength and move heaven and earth to earn their living and they have had no access to the wider life beyond their personal reach. At the same time, the intellectuals could spare some attention to a larger world than their own living.

In addition to that, the Confucian tradition of "taking the world as one's own task" has had very deep-rooted influence on the mentality of Chinese intellectuals. With this tradition as their "collective unconsciousness", the personal experiences of the intellectuals of this generation which

are really unique in the world history have given them such a lesson that their personal destiny is closely bound up with the nation's destiny.

This concern about the country and the people led some of them to the interest in Christianity. So we can read in the article "The Pilgrimage from Tiananmen Square" by Ian Buruma: *"Ten years after the uprising, some of its figures have found a new agent for change - Christianity"*²⁷. The researcher at the Woodrow Wilson International Centre conducted interviews with four of the five authors of a famous Chinese TV movie, *"Yellow River Elegy"*, which was blamed by the Chinese Communist Party hard-liners for helping to incite the 1989 rebellion. Two became evangelical Christians and a third one seriously considered it. Then the interviewer wrote: *"There are signs of a new religious fever in China today, including an upsurge in the popularity of Christianity - an indication, I think, of political despair."* Referring to Yuan Zhiming, the most famous of the four for his piety as Christian, the editor of the magazine highlighted the words: *"It has become clear to Yuan that China cannot be changed only politically. The root of democracy is the spirit of Christ. Only God can save the Chinese."* In fact, such an idea has come into the mind of more and more Chinese intellectuals. And from here we can see a very special cause of their interest in Christianity: their concern about their country and their people.

A second cause, which makes the intellectuals' interest different from the one of the peasants, is their study of or research in humanities and social sciences. During the years since 1949, the only area where one could access the fragmentary material about Christianity was the scholarly studies in these fields. Only in the study of the history of western philosophy, one could access some of St. Augustine's writings. Only in the study of history of political theories, one could access a bit of Thomas Aquinas. And only in the study of the history of "foreign literature", could one access the "Song of Songs" from the Bible!

So, it is no wonder that most present Chinese scholars in the field of Christian studies come from other fields of research. Of course, the few scholars who graduated from the Department of Religious Studies (including Christian Studies) of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences

²⁷ *The New York Times Magazine*, December 4, 1999.

played a special role, partly because their work signalled to the scholars in other fields the possibility of legitimate status for Christian studies in the system of humanities and social sciences. When university teachers and academy researchers in philosophy, history, literature and the like began to consider some need for new horizons in their studies, especially as they have been in some personal search of truth in the little Christian material available, it was natural for them to pay more and more attention to and put the energy and resources they had into Christian studies. That is why we can see so many "centres" or "institutes" for Christian studies or "religious studies" or "Christian culture research" set up in different universities and provinces in recent years. These are, besides the increasing number of publications, the most obvious signs of the current Christian upsurge.

III

Corresponding to the causes described above, there are some particular features of the Christian upsurge among Chinese intellectuals. The first one is the fact that the upsurge in Christianity is linked much closer with the spiritual condition of the society and the scholarly trend of the academics than with the sufferings of individuals and the persuasion of relatives and friends, circumstances which characterize Christian conversions among Chinese peasants. In other words, Christianity's rise and fall, to a great degree, depends upon whether the social situation is in need of some true meaning or faith and whether the spiritual orientation is strong enough in the academic circles.

The second feature is that in such an upsurge, the intellectuals concerned have a much wider horizon, more plural perspectives and more rational ways of thinking in connection with Christianity than the rural Christians. As their interest in Christianity began with their studies and research in humanist disciplines, they display strong, in many cases even exclusive, interest in the scholarly factors of Christianity, such as philosophical theology, the history of mission, apologetics and the inculturization of the doctrines.

The third feature is that the admirers rather than converts make up the majority of the intellectuals concerned, while the converts form a greater part of the upsurge in the countryside. And among the baptized Christian intellectuals, there are relatively more liberals and fewer churchgoers, in comparison with the rural and overseas Chinese Christians. Probably, this has also something to do with the low quality of sermons in the Chinese churches and with the strong effects of some Chinese cultural tradition and scientific ways of thinking.

Afterword

There is some truth in the old Chinese saying: "*Life comes from adversities, death from cosiness.*" We can say that it was the adversities that Christianity met in China that caused the Christian upsurge today.

John Keats (1795-1821), the English poet, told his sisters and brothers in a letter, that this world is not a 'Valley of Tears' as people think, but a 'Valley of Soul-making', giving us a convincing explanation of the adversity and evil in the world. This reminds me of the names of the two horserace courses in Hong Kong, i.e. "Happy Valley " and "The Racecourse". I think many people would agree that this world is not a happy valley, but a racecourse. And in the racecourse, adversities are inescapable. Although people often find out that adversity is the best teacher, they also often find out that this teacher can teach people good as well as bad.

Then, why did the best teacher bring us such a good gift, though among many bad things? Why did the Christian upsurge appear under an atheist regime rather than in the traditionally Christian countries of Europe? How could hope appear in a place where despair is spreading?

I can only find two words for an answer: a Miracle and the Spirit.

Chinese Christianity in the 21st Century

By Gao Shining

It is widely accepted that modernization in China took its beginning from the encounter with western powers in the late 19th century. During the same period Christianity began to spread throughout China alongside the western invasion. During more than 100 years of struggle for modernization in China, Chinese Christianity has undergone many changes. In this paper I will discuss some problems in the development of Christianity in China in relation to the transformation of its role in different periods, and give a general view of its prospect in the new century.

I. The Transformations of The Role of Christianity

A society cannot not be called a modern society without modern sciences, modern education, modern press and mass media, modern ideas and institutions including rationality, rule of law, democracy and management of economy concerning efficiency and so on. It is mainly Christianity that introduced into China these elements, which helped to transform a traditional society into a modern one. That is to say, Christianity played an important role in the beginning of modernization in China.

Initially, Christians came to China just with the purpose of spreading Christianity, but as a result, Christianity urged China into a transformation towards a modern society. We can find numerous examples to support this observation. Firstly, the missionaries introduced a lot of western scientific knowledge and technology to the Chinese people.¹ Secondly, it is with the schools set up by Christian churches that modern education materialized in China. Thirdly, the establishment of modern medical services and institutions in China, i.e. training of medical doctors, founding of hospitals and the introduction of the idea of public health support, was related closely to the activities of the missionaries. Fourthly, even the establishment

¹ Cf. Gu Changsheng: *Missionaries and Modern China*, Shanghai People's Press, 1995, p. 458.

of a modern press was the result of direct introduction and enthusiastic participation of the Christian missionaries. Fifthly, the modern life style and new customs, such as weekly workdays system, monogamy, and even the abolishment of women's feet binding, was related to the new influence of the Bible and the efforts of missionaries. Lastly, modernization requires such modern ideas and institutions as democracy, legal equality, rule by law, separation of powers, administrative efficiency and so on, and in China, the introduction, popularizing and practicing of all these were also related to activities of the missionaries. Many reformers and revolutionaries, from Hong Xiuquan to Sun Yatsen, were deeply influenced by Christian thoughts. In summary, in the beginning stages of transformation of China from a traditional society to modern one, Christianity played an active and important role in introducing modernization into China.

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, a chain of political campaigns hindered the modernization of China. During those campaigns, Christianity, with all other religions in China, was criticized and attacked severely. During the "Cultural Revolution" (1966-1976), the "criticism" came to its climax: many churches and temples were damaged or destroyed, and religious books were burnt. Many believers and church people were denounced as "demons and monsters" and were then forced to do manual labor, were put to prison or even to death.² All the remnant churches were closed and turned into schools, factories, storehouses and police stations. All religious activities were banned.

Since the end of the 1970s, with China's new reforms and openness, great changes have taken place. Modernization in China began to be on its way again. Chinese Christianity not only saw a revival but also developed vigorously and rapidly. According to the latest statistics, by the year 2000 the number of Protestants in China had already reached 20 million, with Catholics reaching 4 million. After 1979, churches have reopened at the rate of three every two days³, and there are now more than 12 thousand

² According to an investigation among 140 clergymen in Tianjin, Henan and Fujian, during the Cultural Revolution 37% were imprisoned. Cf. *Sociology of Religion*, China Social Science Documentation Press, 2000, p. 360.

³ Cf. Xu Rulei: "Chinese Christianity in 15 Years of Reforms and Openness", in *Christian Culture and Modernization*, Chinese Social Science Press, 1996.

Protestant churches and 26 thousands so-called meeting points". As for Catholics, there are 4600 churches. From 1980 to 1998, Chinese churches have printed 20 million copies of the Bible⁴, including various editions in languages of minority nationalities in China.

In summery, we can say since the late nineteenth century, Chinese society has undergone vast changes, and, in the midst of these social vicissitudes the role played by Christianity has changed accordingly: from acting (both consciously and unconsciously) as a matchmaker for modernity, to gradually becoming marginalized; from suffering severe criticism and nearly disappearing from Chinese social life during the Cultural Revolution, to gradually becoming a significant social force once again and, inevitably, becoming a participant in the making of history. Such a changing role testifies to the fact that each step in the development of Chinese Christianity is related to developments in Chinese Society. It is most likely that in 21st century China will continue on its course of modernization, and Chinese Christianity should have a contribution to make in China in this new century. The past, of course, is the foundation of the future, and thus it is necessary for us to begin by considering the place and the function of Chinese Christianity in the Chinese modernization process during the past few decades.

II. The Limits of Participation

Following the 1980s, the speed at which Chinese Christianity developed made it an undeniable force to be reckoned with in Chinese society. However, Christian participation in Chinese society did have its limits. If we say that the religious nature of Christianity made the limits inevitable, then the given context of Chinese Christianity and its own characteristics determined that this limited nature operated in every case; this means that there are objective limits as well as subjective ones, limits of scope and also of capability. Here, the expression "given context" refers to China's special political, social and cultural background. "Its own characteristics" refers to

⁴ Cf. Ye Xiaowen: *Telling the Truth about the Situation of Chinese Religions to Americans*, Religious Culture Press, 1999, p. 78.

the fact that in many people's eyes, Chinese Christianity has not yet entirely rid itself of its "foreign religion" label and is still a minority group within the population, while the profile of believers remains mainly old, female and illiterate.

In China, religion is seen not only as a matter of individual belief, but also as a political existence, and the same goes for Christianity. The state regulates religion, and political changes can determine religion's fate. This is a feature of church-state relations in China. In recent years, the government has proposed the policy of guiding religion "to adapt to socialism" and "to be compatible with socialism". The chief spirit of this sort of mutual adaptation and compatibility primarily calls on religion to adjust itself to adapt to socialism, which is to say that religion remains in the position of being led. In an environment so defined, Chinese Christianity participates in society simply, to a certain extent, because it exists, or, to put it another way, its participation is passive and other-directed. Even though Chinese Christian leaders have a small place in the high echelons of Chinese political bodies, with the opportunity for giving speeches and expressing their position, such opportunities are limited. Chinese Christianity's participation in the reform of Chinese society can be characterized with the saying "the heart is willing but the power is weak". What is more, Christian activity is limited to the church itself. It is very difficult for it to make its faith known to the whole of society, to propagate its doctrines, to act on its own initiative to influence society; even less can it expand its influence through the mass media. And consequently, in reality, Christianity's function in Chinese society is not large, and the impact it is able to have on society is exceedingly limited.

Traditional Chinese culture - Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist culture - retains an extremely widespread and deep influence in society. From its first entry into China, Christianity faced the question of how to merge with traditional culture, and there has been no fundamental resolution of the issue to this day. The intellectual origins of the clash between Christianity and traditional Chinese culture can be grouped under three points.

The first is its faith in a personal God and its doctrines, such as creation, original sin, and redemption, which are absent in Chinese culture and strange to it. The second is the Christian concept of equality, as in "all

are created equal before God". This, too, is absent from or differs in the Confucian tradition, which posits a distinction between close and distant relationships. The third is Christian monotheism and the great distance between this and the polytheistic worship and symbolic system of Buddhist and Taoist believers. Today, in a modern society where traditional culture still has a definite role to play, Christianity aims to expand its participation in the social process, and the continual search for a point of correspondence with traditional Chinese culture is still one important path by which Chinese Christianity can increase its own involvement.

In addition, the impact of the challenge to Christian social participation arising from folk religion should not be underestimated. Chinese folk religion has a long history and a broad base. For thousands of years, folk religion was an appendage of Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, and became entangled with them to form an important constituent of traditional Chinese culture. Along with reform and openness in Chinese society, Chinese folk religion, once seen as superstition, has undergone a rapid recovery, to become the liveliest faith at the grass roots. In rural villages in particular, folk religion of every description is ubiquitous, having nearly become the primary spiritual life of many peasants.

Thus, on the one hand, Christianity and folk religion are in competition for believers. In many areas temples to every sort of god are being rebuilt, a great number of the masses are enthralled with *fengshui* and various types of fortune telling. On the other hand, folk religion, to a certain extent, has an impact on and even transforms Christianity. The "folk-religionization" of Chinese Christianity is a common phenomenon in rural villages. The present characteristics of rural Chinese Christianity can be summed up as follows: the number of believers is growing rapidly, enthusiasm is high, the faith is pious, the emphasis is on rituals, the quality of faith is low, there is a lack of pastors, preaching is poor, etc.

"Folk-religionised" Christianity includes many components of folk religious beliefs and even feudal superstition. For example, God is viewed as a god of direct "cause, effect, and retribution", and this gives faith in God a pronounced utilitarian character. The Bible is taken as a protective talisman or as a magic weapon for defeating evil, Jesus is worshipped as a local god, a hearth god or a god of harvest. Christian liturgy and hymns are

joined to folk religious practices for weddings and funerals, where spiritual songs and dances are used. This supposed Christianity, combined with folk religion and superstitions, is not only low class, crude, and backward, but is obstructive to China's modernization process.

Apart from the causes on the side of society, we can find some other causes on the side of Chinese Christianity itself for its limits of participation in the society. The first one is its seclusion. Most of the Chinese Christians live in the poor and less-developed rural areas. They know very little about the outside world. For them, believing in Christianity is just for such utilitarian purposes as a safer living, overcoming poverty, diseases, floods, droughts and other disasters. Just a very small minority of them is so optimistic as to dream of getting rich. Compared with the people in the cities, they lack the modern mentality, and in fact, they have not yet entered modern eras, neither have they exerted any influence on the modern society. The second cause is the conservatism of Chinese Christianity in general. Of course, this kind of conservatism is related to the fact that a great majority of Chinese Christians has been greatly influenced by religious fundamentalism since the 1920s. Most varieties of liberal Christian thought have been unacceptable to them. For them, a radical distinction between believers and non-believers and between the "spiritual" and the "non-spiritual" is a vital support to the meaning of life. Their fundamentalist tendency hinders them in taking an active or positive attitude to society. These circumstances are, to some degree, responsible for making Chinese Christianity a cultural enclave, and hence unable to contribute much to the Chinese society at large.

So, we can say, with these limits of participation, Chinese Christianity remains at the margins of Chinese society. Nevertheless, however, we can see that it is beginning to change and play a greater role as "light" or "salt" in society. If Christianity "can be generally accepted as some cultural knowledge"⁵, it will certainly be able to make a great contribution to the development of Chinese society. Therefore, we expect that the new century will open a new road for Chinese Christianity.

⁵ Philip Wickeri, quoted from a presentation on Christianity in China, April 1992.

III. Chinese Christianity in the New Century

China is moving towards modernization, for which the Chinese people have struggled for nearly a century and a half. Needless to say, modernization is an extremely complex process, touching many aspects of life. In economic terms, results can already be seen: the market is flourishing, national power is growing, and the standard of living has obviously risen. At the same time, similar developments have not yet appeared in the political system or in the intellectual sphere. Moreover, we learn daily of all sorts of evils that have appeared along with the soaring economy: the decline in the moral level of society, loss of social order, environmental pollution, damage to the ecology, the spiritual crisis, etc. To put it succinctly, not everything brought by modernization has been good, and the number of people reaching this conclusion is increasing. It is precisely in such circumstances that, although its participation is limited, Christianity can continue to make up the shortfalls and right the wrongs of modernization. I will discuss the levels on which this is possible below.

Value and Morality. As we advance toward modernization, the Chinese people's material progress is quite startling, in certain institutional echelons, such as economics, administration, etc., huge changes have taken place. A breakdown of the moral structure of society and a loss of standards of value has accompanied the rapid changes. And the origin of this breakdown and failure is the wavering of faith and relativization of standards of value. Consequently, the latent moral crisis among the Chinese daily becomes more apparent. The moral level of Chinese society today has declined across the board. An increasingly complex illegitimate "guanxi"⁶ net undermines the principles of social fairness and equality; a prevailing atmosphere of corruption and decline, the absence of the merest trace of social morality, and doing as one pleases for one's own selfish ends has become a great obstacle to social development. China urgently needs to

⁶ "Guanxi" is a popular Chinese term for an established network of advantageous personal relations.

rebuild its moral value system. Christianity should have ample scope for its capabilities here. The lofty virtues Christianity espouses, especially the concept of 'love', are without doubt one of the most important resources for rebuilding the Chinese ethical system.

Christianity calls upon people to be humble and meek, to love others, to love God, a type of spirit that can limit human self-centeredness and self-aggrandizement, enabling people to overcome the ego and improve themselves. In fact, many people improve greatly in morals and restraint upon joining the church. Some seem like two different people before and after joining. Consequently for more and more people, including some government officials, Christian morality plays a positive role in dealing with life issues such as family, marriage, personal relationships, quitting smoking or gambling etc. Naturally, we wait for this role to gradually increase in scope, enabling Christian moral precepts to become one of the important factors in a new system of moral values for Chinese people.

Mind-body Balance. In the last 20 years, although Chinese society has paid more attention to people's mental and physical health, on the structural level China still lacks social institutions, which can help people to achieve a better psychological development. Clearly, religion can exercise its strengths in improving situations like this. People feel inadequate to the changes that have taken place in modern society. When people experience setbacks on the personal level, at work, say, or at home or in interpersonal relationships, their sense of loss is stronger than it ever was in the past and can lead to loss of life goals and meaning. Christian faith stabilizes and enriches believers' lives, and fills them with confidence in life.

Culture. More and more intellectuals and young people are paying much attention to Christian thought, Christian philosophy, Christian theology and their relationship to western ethics, literature, education, science, politics, and civilization. This will enable China to learn more from western culture in the future, which will certainly be very helpful to the reconstruction of Chinese culture in the new century.

IV. The Chinese Christianity in the New Century

Chinese Christianity possesses certain conditions for fulfilling its role in the areas mentioned above in the new century. The most important of these is that many knowledgeable persons within the Christian church are aware of these issues.

Firstly, since the reform and openness began, Chinese Christianity, in both its Catholic and Protestant forms, has been addressing the situation of lack of younger clergy that prevailed in the early 1980s, through enrolling students in seminaries at all levels to train clergy through specialized professional knowledge. In addition to this, the church has sent a number of young people overseas to study in recent years. These young believers undertake systematic study of western theology and philosophy, gaining personal experience of the role of Christianity in a modern society, and thus broadening their vision. The great majority of them are willing to return to China and devote themselves to the Chinese Christian enterprise. Without a shadow of a doubt, they will be the nucleus of Chinese Christianity in the new century. If the Chinese church cares for them and boldly makes use of them, they will certainly bring about a great improvement in the work of the church.

Secondly, the Chinese people have got a deeper understanding of Christianity in the past twenty years. More and more intellectuals have come to approach Christianity differently. Their attitude to Christianity has been going from criticism and rejection, through neutrality and objectivity, to sympathy and interest. Many scholars of religion have also expanded their research in Christianity from the history, creed and theology to the contextualization and the status quo of Chinese Christianity and its social roles. In recent years, numerous books on Christianity have appeared, including popular books, children's readings, encyclopedias and specialized works, so that more and more people have access to various windows on Christianity. Therefore, an increasing number of people in different areas are considering the spiritual power of Christianity in overcoming the drawbacks in modernization of China.

Thirdly, the correct administration of Chinese religious policy is an important aspect. If a good environment can be maintained, there is hope for the efforts of Christianity to participate in the process of social progress.

However, on the other hand, also the traditional Chinese culture, including Chinese religions as cultural power systems, has a real influence upon the modern society. In the interaction with Chinese culture and Chinese religions, Chinese Christianity should enhance the spirit of “loving your neighbour”. It should try to seek for a common ground and engage in dialogue with Chinese religions and culture. In this way Chinese Christianity could join the healthy agents and powers in the reconstruction of a healthy society. We might say that as a dependent part of the overall system of Chinese society, the more Christianity participates in the social process, the more hope there is for its future.

Faith and Values

Case Studies of Chinese Christians

By Gao Shining

Generally speaking, each society has certain value systems that correspond with its social structure. In traditional societies, it was often the mainstream religions that took the role of providing value systems. As most people lived their lives according to some common standards of values, there was a high degree of conformity in their value judgements. Ancient Chinese society also followed this pattern of social order.

However, today's social structures have undergone great changes due to the modernization process. These changes are accompanied by corresponding changes in value systems. China, which has such a different cultural background from the West, has been faced with a process of economic modernisation in the last twenty years. What kinds of changes of values have taken place during this time? These last twenty years have also seen a revival of Christianity taking place. There has also been a gradual increase in the number of Christians coming from highly educated backgrounds. How do they respond to these social changes?

I

In China, it was Confucianism that provided the traditional society with its value system for a long time. Since the announcement of the Peoples' Republic in 1949, Confucianism has been criticized as being conservative, counter revolutionary and feudal in its ideology. Attempts have been made to remove its influence from all spheres of social life. However, due to the deep infiltration of Confucian culture into the everyday life of the Chinese people, the masses still unconsciously follow these value systems to a great extent. However, Confucianism no longer serves the role as the main provider of social values.

As for the other religions of China, none of them have ever been able to take up a leading "spiritual" position in Chinese society. At the same time,

during the nearly thirty years after 1949, all religions experienced increasing levels of criticism and threat. They were severely criticised as “opium of the masses” that served for the counter-revolutionary ideology. By the time of the “Cultural Revolution” (1966-1976), this type of criticism reached its peak. So, the different religions were naturally more concerned with their survival than influencing the common value system of society.

During this thirty-year period, Confucian tradition and all other religions were “temporarily dead”. What was it then that provided Chinese society with a standard of common values? It was the political propaganda and moral education of communist ideology.

All the Chinese people living through that time, from kindergarten to university, were told that communism would establish the perfect society. For the masses, “perfect” meant having whatever they wanted. This type of thinking is most common in my generation, as we never had what we wanted. At the same time, all the textbooks stated solemnly that,

“Communism is a society where material and spiritual products are vastly rich, the material and spiritual needs of the masses can be greatly fulfilled. It is a society where each gives according to his ability and takes according to his needs.”

In those days, many people, especially the younger generation, were greatly enthusiastic about communism, holding the belief that communism would one day be realised. They were willing to serve communism with hard labour, and even to sacrifice their lives for communism. This is what is known as “Communist faith”. The establishment of such faith took place through propaganda and education. This type of propaganda and education became an integrated part of the everyday work of schools, factories and businesses, all social institutions, and all levels of government. It became an important component of the social structure.

At the same time values that corresponded with such a faith, as well as with social norms of such a faith were gradually established. These include attitudes like doing one’s best in one’s work, working for the collective good rather than for personal gain, serving others, hard work and plain living etc. Any type of thinking that conflicted with such values and

anything that involved personal interest was criticized as capitalist ideology.

However, this type of faith depended on political propaganda and education and there was a great gap between the propaganda and the realities of social life. Hence, it could never be really firmly established. All sorts of events and conditions developed into the ‘Cultural Revolution’, by many called a disaster, and the majority of people realized that these beliefs were built on falsehood, lies, empty words; the related value systems and even social norms were suspended and began to collapse gradually.

Simultaneously, all aspects of Chinese society were under political control and in a so-called “centralized situation”. The masses lived with an experience of complete lack of choice both in their daily life and intellectual life for an extended period of time. With the sudden acceleration of openness after 1978, the explosive release of accumulated desires led to a state of almost uncontrollable chaos. The disintegration of the traditional value system created an enormous vacuum.

When things that in former times were not allowed or not even available suddenly now appeared abundantly, there was a natural response of taking whatever one needed, or total acceptance of whatever appeared. With the rapid social changes, even the last remnants of any traditional values that had existed deep in the hearts of the common people were abandoned. In the modern China of today, the phenomena of both the economic development and social norms breakdown can be observed. A rich materialistic life and a spiritual poverty are coexisting, which many people of insight are worried about. Some scholars point out that the reconstruction of social norms and the quality of the population will be the key to the development of society.

As we look back at the last twenty years of reformation and openness, we can say that the majority of common Chinese people underwent a general spiritual change, that may be divided into four stages:

1. The late seventies to the early eighties.

Due to disappointment with their original ideals, there was an experience of crisis in faith, confidence, and trust.

2. The mid-eighties to the late eighties.

A period of reflection combined with criticism of the past took its beginning. There was a renewed search for the ideals of truth, goodness and beauty. A minority of people even tried to resume a sense of the sacred, to seek a higher spirit.

3. The nineties.

The wave of openness in market-economies created a new trend to “put all eyes on money”. Many became richer than rich while poor in spirit.

4. The turn of the century.

This was period of self-centredness. Most people, especially the younger generation who had grown up under the “one-child-only” policy, were generally only concerned about themselves: my feelings, my needs, my personal gain. Their life goals became more practical, worldlier. The new value system, especially for young people, has become to make as much money as possible, to enjoy life as much as possible, to follow the latest trends and to satisfy one’s needs.

It is under these social conditions in China of the last twenty years that the revival of Christianity has attracted many intellectuals and high-educated young people. They began to search anew for the meaning of life, seriously choosing and keeping this new faith. Thus, their faith has influenced the values of their own and those around them.

II

As we know, the development of Christianity in China reached its highest peak in the last 20 years. In recent years, I have come in contact with urban Christian friends through my research in sociology of religion. Their personal experiences and changes of values to some extent show how Chinese Christians have dealt with the relationship between faith and

values in contemporary society where cynicism and materialism are the major trends. Naturally, there are differences in their knowledge and behaviour as Christians; however, the majority of them differ only in degree in this matter. That is to say, for most of them, their faith has had a positive effect on the formation of the value systems, differentiating them from other non-Christians. To further illustrate the present situation, I will present below a number of case studies that are divided into five categories.

Type 1: Complete Integration of faith and values

This type of Christians holds faith as the core of their value system, as the first principle in life. They would give up everything else to maintain their principle.

Mr L, in his seventies, a Catholic, was much influenced before 1949 by various religions and theologians, and later by the famous preacher, Wang Mingdao. After 1949, he was imprisoned for over twenty years. After his release, he worked as one of the staff in the storeroom of a small factory. In the ethos the 1980s, most people were only concerned with working less for more, but Mr L was an exception. His work had no set hours; he did any jobs that others needed done. Every day when everyone else had left, he would voluntarily clean up the place as well as act as night caretaker. Although he was one of the least acknowledged of the staff, he was the busiest person. Whenever the managers of the factory had any undesirable jobs, they were allocated to him, whenever anyone else needed help, they would look for him. Despite having an income that only enabled him to live from hand-to-mouth, he never hesitated to spend money on theological books or to help others. Since he had no family, and living alone in the factory, he knew all about the activities of the managers of the factory: they gambled at night, hired prostitutes, and abused their employees. Often, he could only stand by and watch helplessly. He put up with these circumstances, as it was the only way to maintain his source of income. However, after much thought, he made the decision to resign, to give up his salary and his living quarters, and he rented a small house in the countryside and lived on his savings. When I

heard about his situation, I was very touched and asked friends to find him a light job in Beijing, so that he could live out his last days more peacefully. According to most people, this was a most rare opportunity not to be left aside: to be able to move from a small place to Beijing, with a stable environment and helpful friends. What surprised me was that Mr L did not accept all my arrangements for him. He reasoned that there were a lot of people around him that needed his help!

Type 2: Non-integration of faith and values

This type of Christians regards faith as important for their personal spiritual life. But due to their circumstances, they are not able to integrate their values with their beliefs.

Mrs W, more than forty, with master degree, is now a successful real estate agent. She was baptized abroad many years ago. She told me she had been a “Sunday-Christian” for a long time. In her opinion, “life means eating and sleeping, job means money earning, and faith means going to church.” So, for her, faith is important as a habit but can hardly play any role in her life. She was proud of having a Mercedes Benz car and of the fact that she was traveling abroad so often. “Everything I have got depends on my efforts”. What she said most often is “God wouldn’t like us to live in poverty. We should do what we need to do.”

Type 3: Conflicting between faith, values and acts

This type of Christian is very dedicated, but due to their circumstances and professional requirements, they often have to go against their belief to conduct business according to the prevalent values. Due to this, they think they are guilt-stricken. But their self-criticism, to some extent, is a precious phenomenon in contemporary Chinese society.

Mr Y is in his thirties, a lawyer who is at the height of his career. He faithfully reads the bible and prays everyday, and he actively participates in Christian house meetings, giving all kinds of help. During one meeting, he told about his own anguish and the pressure he was under: The success

or failure of a lawyer in China does not only depend on his gathering of evidence or knowledge of the law, but rather on the “relations” with the officials, including the judges. He often had to be involved in secret dirty deals otherwise he would almost certainly lose his case. In his own words, he describes it as “having to jump in even when you know it is a fiery pit.” It caused him great anguish. He invented a method to smooth his conscience and resolve the conflict between his faith and acts that betrayed his conscience – “First make a report in the morning and confess at night”. Each morning before he got up, he would first pray and announce that he would unfortunately be forced to do things that would be against God’s teachings; each night before he went to bed, he would sincerely confess his wrongdoings and ask for forgiveness. This method worked for him and he felt a bit better when doing things against his conscience.

Type 4: An immature Christian faith begins to query the better-established worldly values.

These are usually new Christians whose faith is less well developed, and who are constantly being challenged by the material world and constantly doubting their own faith.

Ms S is about 24 years old and worked for a company after her graduation from university. She had a good income and often benefited from “unexpected windfalls”. She was very straightforward in telling me her reasons for becoming a Christian – because someone had told her that Jesus was an omnipotent God; that one only had to believe in him and he would give you your heart’s desires. She admitted that all she wanted was money for a flat and her wedding, and that was why she got baptised. What puzzled her was that soon after she became a Christian, not only did she not earn more; she even lost a substantial amount of “windfall”. The details of the story are: Her company often gave out “windfall money”, which all the staff knew came from improper and illegal sources, but which nobody ever refused, hoping rather to receive more. Ms S struggled with this for a long time and at last gave up the extra bonus. She had a big quarrel over this with her boyfriend so that they nearly separated. Her colleagues were

greatly puzzled by her behaviour and the only positive evaluation was that, “she must be a Christian”. Even though this decision to give up the large amount of money was a voluntary one, she was miserable for several days, harbouring a secret hatred of God, even shouting at him when she prayed at night. She felt she had been duped into becoming a Christian. After scolding God, she would be filled with fears that she might end up in hell, and would start to tearfully beg for his forgiveness. From her point of view, her faith put her at odds with everyone else in society. She told me that she really did not have a proper understanding of her faith. But when others judged her as “being a Christian”, she felt she did have a faith.

Type 5: The new belief completely takes over the old value system.

This type of Christian was formerly at the bottom of society. After acquiring their new belief, they gave up their former life, becoming almost completely new persons.

Mr G is 23 years old. His father teaches in a university and his mother is also a teacher. He received a good education from his childhood and always had good grades in secondary school. Later, under the influence of bad companions, he began to steal, progressing from small items to cars. He had been arrested several times and imprisoned by the Public Security Bureau. Finally, due to his frequent stealing, he lost his job. With the deterioration of his morals, his relationship with his parents also deteriorated and he seemed to have given up on himself, abandoning himself to a hedonistic way of life. In 1991 he went to a church with his mother for the first time, wearing such odd clothes that he attracted a lot of attention. But with the support of the church, Mr G recognized his wrongdoings and started actively participating in the activities of the church, even volunteering to serve in an Old Age Home. After his baptism in 1999, he became a praised Christian.

III

Following these case studies I would like to present some analysis.

1. Christians with a firm faith are able to firmly resist all kinds of temptation, holding onto their higher ideals. As they have a faith, they see an ultimate goal in their spiritual pursuit. They are able to choose a lifestyle that cannot be evaluated according to either materialistic profit or personal gain or loss. Their faith enables them to make choices that differ from those of the majority of people in this present society with pluralistic values. In their daily life they are able to obey ethical rules that are based on their value systems. When the majority of other people are ruled by materialism and self-centredness, they are able to experience a sense of meaning and fulfilment in their lives. Their behaviour, whether to give up own personal benefit or to suffer hardship at own will, stems from inner motivation. Less mature Christians who are not so firm in their faith are more easily influenced by their environment. This influence in turn will weaken their faith. This is true of those Christians mentioned as Type 2 of the case studies.

2. When people use the phrase “That person must be a Christian”, it highlights two issues in China today. Firstly, it is not easy to be a true Christian. This is not only because Christians are a minority in an atheistic society, but also because their behaviour conflicts with the main social trend of profitable, worldly, self-centred, materialistic value systems. On the one hand, the value systems and ethical standards of Christians are mocked as being laughable, stupid, abnormal, giving them a lot of psychological pressure. On the other hand, they are under a lot of temptation that may weaken their faith. Secondly, although Christians in China are a small minority, their outstanding behaviour marks them out from the rest of the society where everyone looks out only for himself or herself, pursuing money and power as a goal. These Christians become a powerful alternative model.

It is much harder to be a Christian in China than in countries with a Christian tradition, or even in Hong Kong. Even if Christianity has shown signs of weakening in these countries, they have had over decades to build up a value system that influences the whole of society. At least, Christianity has not lost its influence on the deep infrastructure of basic social norms. In

Hong Kong, even though Christians are also a minority, Christian churches and organizations have their own voice, giving witness through their actions, and therefore, Christianity has an openly acknowledged and positive image. The situation in China is vastly different. Christian churches are only allowed to meet in designated places to speak their message; their voices cannot be heard in other social circles. More important, due to the many years of propaganda, there is still a generally negative attitude towards religion, especially towards “foreign religions” like Christianity. There is still a tendency to regard it as weird and treat it with avoidance and suspicion.

And Christians are reluctant to openly admit their faith. According to a survey of Christians in Beijing, less than half of believers are willing to let others know their religious faith. On the other hand, due to the increase in Christians since the 1980s and the introductory work of academics, a more positive knowledge of Christianity is developing quickly. Hence, in the particular circumstance of China, to say that someone “definitely is a Christian” is almost equivalent to saying that this person is “as good as nobody else can be”. This is to say that they have a great admiration for the higher character of a Christian. In reality, many people have witnessed to a profound change since they became Christians, becoming more ethically aware and self-controlled.

3. It is necessary for Christians to strengthen their faith if they are to survive and resist temptation in this environment ruled by worldly values and self-centredness. An important means to solidify one’s faith, apart from reading the Bible, is to have sufficient spiritual discipline and fellowship. According to the intellectual Christians that I have interviewed, their fellowship time of spiritual sharing is vital to them. Apart from worship and prayer, the time spent talking together and sharing is of great importance. Of the intellectual Christians that I have contacted, some belong to established churches; some participate in both established churches and house meetings and more people only in house meetings. One of the reasons for this is that the established church has many limitations with regard to what they can do pastorally with their members. This is one of the major factors for the development of the house churches.

The rapid development of Christianity in China, especially the participation of more highly educated Christians, has led to increased demands on the Church. However, the Church in China (mainly the urban Church) still has many limitations with regard to satisfying the spiritual needs and demands of Christians.

Firstly, the number of believers is increasing, but the number of pastoral workers and churches are limited. For example, the protestant churches in Beijing comprise nearly 40 thousand believers, yet there are only 8 churches (5 in urban area and 3 in the rural area) in this huge city. Every Sunday Gang Wa Shi Church (a big church in Beijing) holds four services and receives over 3500 believers. Under these conditions, it is impossible to take care of cell group fellowships. The pastoral workers are engaged not only in Sunday worship services, but also in administrative work and cannot give attention to the spiritual needs of the individual believers. The situation of “proclaiming, but not being pastors” is very serious.

Secondly, for the urban believers who do not face basic problems of material need, the social changes they encounter bring about some more complicated and varied problems such as psychological and emotional problems. This puts more demands on the quality of care available from the pastoral workers. Often, the qualities of the pastoral workers are lagging behind the needs of the congregation. This is especially true for the believers who are more highly educated. They often find the sermons uninteresting and irrelevant to the conflicts between their faith and lifestyle that they encounter. Some of the church members I have talked to spoke frankly that the pastors were unable to help these intellectual Christians to deal with their faith problems, as their common response to questions was “go to pray or read the Bible”. This has led to a decline in believers. According to research among protestant churches in Shanghai, the number of highly educated people under forty being baptised has increased. But, the number of people attending worship activities is quite small, with many never returning after a few initial visits. Apparently only about one third of young believers continue attending church activities. There are many reasons why they do not return to attend church activities, but the major

one is that there is a big gap between expectations and reality, that the church cannot meet the needs of the younger believers.

Thirdly, great changes have taken place in the social life and in the people's thoughts, but the forms of church activities have remained as before. As a natural consequence, the house churches have flourished. House meetings are usually small (never more than twenty participants), and everyone has a chance to expound on their faith experiences. There is a lot of discussion and sharing. House meetings incorporate singing of hymns, Bible reading, preaching and giving of testimonies, but mostly prayer. Conversely, there are other problems within the house churches, such as the preaching. When some pastoral workers have not received any particular theological training or education, their interpretation of the Bible may be quite arbitrary.

Of course, church life is also important with regard to spiritual growth. Christians whom I have interviewed admit that, despite the pastoral inadequacies of the church, it still plays an important role in building up the faith of believers. The church has a large congregation, the rituals are orthodox, solemn, the sermons can be enlightening, the testimonies are many and varied, and they can even make many new friends. For those believers who participate in both church activities and house meetings, the two forms are equally important. At the present time, the established church and the house churches do not have any relationship. Even those Christians who participate in both types of meetings avoid letting others know about their "double identity".

In conclusion, there are three main characteristics of the value system in the society of present day China.

1. The traditional value systems are gradually disintegrating.
2. The contemporary value systems are diversifying, becoming more pluralistic.
3. The "lower" cultural values are becoming more widespread.

At the same time, the effect of Christianity on these three areas is:

1. To sustain, to some extent, the traditional values, including the best of the Chinese traditional values.
2. In the context of pluralistic value systems, to provide an extra choice for the people.
3. To influence society through a higher set of values, at the same time stemming the trend of deteriorating social values.

A Religious Spirit: The Hope for Transnationalism in China Today

By He Guanghu

Political Nationalism and its Current Influence

Every fair observer would admit that there has been an upsurge of nationalism in China during recent years, especially apparent during events of nationalist stimulation from outside or from within the country. Also, every knowledgeable observer would recognize that this upsurge might be dangerous to the future of China as well as to the future of the world.

During Mao Zedong's reign (1949-1976), the Chinese people were told by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party that they had an "internationalist duty" to "liberate the exploited and oppressed peoples all over the world", that was to say, to help and support all peoples in their struggles against imperialism (i.e. the West in general), revisionism (i.e. the Soviet Union and all other countries following the Soviet Union) and reactionaries (the ruling classes of all other countries that were not Maoist). This was some kind of Chinese communist internationalism. Whereas Marxist internationalism focused on the union of workers of all the nations, Mao's internationalism stressed the independence of peoples and nations from "Western imperialism". In retrospect, however, looking at the United States-China and the Soviet Union-China relations in those years, one will find that there was a strong nationalism hidden in the internationalist ideology and terminology.⁶³

Since the early 1980s the economic fruits of Deng Xiaoping's reforms have reconfirmed and justified the people's doubt about the past official

⁶³ The main cause of the Chinese support of the anti-US forces in 1960s and the anti-Soviet events in 1970s was similar to that of the French support of the American independence war in 1770s. Mao deemed any anti-US and anti-West events in Asia, Africa and Latin America as fires in "the back yard of the imperialism". The then premier Zhou Enlai spoke about Vietnam as the front against imperialism, and Albania as the front against revisionism. Cf. Mao Zedong Xuan Ji, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, Vol. V, Beijing, 1978. See also the editorials of Hong Qi, *Red Flag* and Renmin Ribao, *People's Daily* during the 1960s and 1970s.

ideology, including the above-mentioned internationalism. During the Sino-Vietnamese War in 1978, the rumor was spreading, that in Vietnam, the Chinese troops found, that innumerable trucks, sacks of rice, artillery and machine-guns in the enemy's hands were produced by Chinese workers and peasants. These goods were offered by the Chinese government in the so-called "internationalist spirit" when Vietnam fought against the US troops. Deng's realistic domestic and foreign policies also helped Chinese nationalism to emerge from the water surface. And the revival of the study of cultural traditions motivated by some intellectuals has, to some extent, strengthened the trend.⁶⁴

As it became apparent that the communist ideology was declining among the common people, the Party's propaganda organs began to highlight the patriotism which came to mean, eventually, nationalism. Due to the Party's monopoly status in the mass media throughout China, such propaganda has, to some extent, caused the upsurge of nationalism. In such a situation, the weak voice from a few intellectuals, alarmed by the dangers of nationalism, has been swallowed in the propaganda of the so-called patriots⁶⁵. So, one can hardly see any signs or traces of moderation of the upsurge, and it is even harder to see any signs of transnationalism which points to a better future for the world as well as for China.

However, hope, I think, does mean to seek the invisible things, not the visible ones.

Transnationalist Consciousness and the Religions in China

On the one hand, we can easily detect many manifestations of nationalism in

⁶⁴ Many authors and editors have recently contributed to a certain arrogant attitude, represented by the well-known scholar at Beijing University, Prof. Ji Xianlin, and his remark: "The 21st century will be the Chinese century". This remark caused some debate as well as a lot of applause. Cf. the debate in influential periodicals, e.g. Dong Fang, *The Oriental*, during the mid 1990s.

⁶⁵ During the Kosovo crisis in 1999, in response to the demonstrations against NATO's bombing of the Chinese embassy in Belgrade, I wrote an article expressing a viewpoint different from that of the authority. The article was refused by five of the least government biased magazines, and caused many more verbal attacks than friendly comments after a friend managed to publish it on the internet.

politics, economy, culture and other fields of social life in China, even in the religious institutions.⁶⁶ On the other hand, we must not forget that a non-nationalist religious spirit still exerts some influence upon millions of people in China today, and that the religious spirit behind the various religious institutions, if understood rightly, no doubt has, though to varying extents according to different religions, been cultivating transnationalism, rather than nationalism.

Buddhism

Even the illiterate Chinese Buddhists in the remote rural areas know that Buddhism originated in India rather than in China. So, no matter how much stress put on the Chinese transformation of Buddhism by many scholars,⁶⁷ Buddhism itself could not possibly cause arrogant attitudes among the common people.

Although some scholars and Buddhists are proud of the fact that the Vietnamese, Koreans and Japanese received their Buddhism from China, it is unlikely to lead to a nationalist exclusivism or chauvinism. Also, they have to acknowledge that China's Theravada Buddhism in Yunnan Province was received from Burma, Thailand and Sri Lanka. Frequent recollections of that part of history cultivate friendly and close Chinese relations to those nations. Therefore, in striking contrast with the deep-rooted anti-Japanese attitude, which is very common among the Chinese, one can see quite frequent and friendly exchanges of visitors between Chinese and Japanese Buddhist circles, even before the China-Japan diplomatic relationship was re-established.⁶⁸ As for the Chinese attitudes towards the Tibetan culture, one

⁶⁶ This was apparent in some actions of the Chinese religious delegation during the "Millenium World Peace Conference of the Religious and Spiritual Leaders" held by the United Nations.

⁶⁷ Nearly every Chinese scholar in the field of Buddhist study concludes that original Buddhism was transformed into so-called "Chinese Buddhism" after it entered China. Cf. among the innumerable works, Ren Jiyu, ed., *Zhongguo Fojiao Shi, A History of Chinese Buddhism*, 4 volumes, Beijing, since 1983.

⁶⁸ The Buddhist leaders and scholars from the two countries meet regularly for bilateral conferences. For example, the Institute for World Religions of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and the World Daily in Japan have co-organized the "Chinese-Japanese Symposium on Buddhism" biannually since the 1980s.

can also feel some great difference between those of the Buddhists and of non-Buddhists.

In the final analysis, the Buddhist negation of this-worldly things does logically mean that the nationalism, even the nation itself, is void and therefore worthless of commitment. As one of the most influential Chinese monks in the last decades, Master Yinshun, said: "The Buddhist morality is based on the rock of *prajna*, the selfless wisdom, [...] is not to behave exclusively for the benefits of myself, my family, my temple, my country or my nation, but to treat everything from the perspective of the whole human race and all living things."⁶⁹ After all, only this proposal, the transnationalist appeal, could embody the Mahayana Buddhist spirit: *maitrya* and *karuna* - having love and compassion for all the living, and being always ready to offer happiness to all the peoples and to save them out of sufferings.

Christianity

Christianity, which may be the most powerful religion in today's China with regard to its institutional character, may, however, not be as deep-rooted and widespread as Chinese Buddhism,⁷⁰ has not got rid of its label of "yangjiao" (foreign religion) in China, after nearly one century's efforts made by Chinese Christian leaders and intellectuals to tear off that label.⁷¹ On the other hand, the conversion to and the acceptance of a "foreign religion" do really signify that many people think something more important than the

⁶⁹ Master Yinshun, "Buddha in the Human World", pp. 318f. Quoted from Deng Zimei, "Science and Technology From a Buddhist Perspective", in He Guanghu (ed.), *Duihua: Ru Shi Dao yu Jidujiao, Dialogue: Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism and Christianity*, Vol. II, forthcoming.

⁷⁰ As the fastest developing religions, Christianity has grown in membership with marvelous speed for the last two decades (just to mention Protestants, reportedly from less than one million to twenty millions or more), and Buddhism has built and rebuilt much more temples though it has no formal statistics about its believers. Cf. Ying Fuk Tsang, "The Development of Christianity in China: In Perspective of Social Classes" (unpublished paper, presented to the "Christianity and the 21st Century" Conference, Beijing, September 19–21, 2001); Chen Cunfu, "Secularization, De-secularization and the Religions in Today's China" (Presented to the above-mentioned conference).

⁷¹ Cf. The works of L.C. Wu, T.F. Liu and others in the early 20th century, the works of T.C. Chao, F.Y. Xie and others in the mid-century, and the works of K.H. Ting, W.F. Wang and others in the late 20th century.

nationalist distinction.

Whereas the Christian elite has paid so much attention and energy to the development of so-called “indigenous theology”⁷² and a Chinese form of Christianity, the common people, especially the educated young people, have been attracted by Christianity just for its foreign forms: they prefer the churches in occidental styles, the Western oil-paintings and icons, the music by J.S. Bach and the Christian thought expressed by Western writers and thinkers.⁷³ The reason is quite simple: in such a way, Christianity has rendered them not only a new and religious alternative in their spiritual life, but also a new and transnationalist horizon in their esthetical and intellectual life.

Looking only at the surface of things, one may conclude that Christianity in China has become very nationalist. The very names of the national organizations of Catholics and of Protestants in China⁷⁴ and the utterances of their leaders do undoubtedly give people such an impression. However, if we take into account the whole experience of the Chinese Christians and their political, economic and cultural situation in the last century, we would reach a different conclusion and might recall the American poet Henry W. Longfellow’s line: “Things are not what they seem”⁷⁵. They seem so, only because they have to seem so. Otherwise they might not be there. So, is it not a paradox if we say that the more nationalist the national Christian organizations seem, the more transnationalist the common Christian individuals are? Perhaps the more nationalist utterances for Christianity’s existence just signify the sharper consciousness of its transnationalist spirit. After all, the Chinese Catholics are aware of the Roman authority over all the Catholics throughout the world, and the Chinese Christians know that their faith is never “of, by and for” any single nation, and their Lord is over all the nations.

⁷² The terminology was the ideal of the above-mentioned Christian intellectuals and has become commonplace among Christian leaders today.

⁷³ Even a great part of the scholars who are nowadays active in the field of Christian studies did in fact approach Christianity through their studies of Western literature, art, history, philosophy and so on.

⁷⁴ The names of the only national organizations of both Catholics and Protestants include the word “patriotism”. This is of course a result of the special political situation in China.

⁷⁵ H.W. Longfellow, “Praise of Life”.

Islam

In China, Islam is held quite distinctively by ten minority ethnic groups, which have a total population of 18 millions.⁷⁶ Most of them are situated in the northwest provinces, including Xinjiang Autonomous Region, and Yunnan, a southwestern province of China. Among them, however, the largely Muslim Hui people in particular also live in many other provinces and big cities, including Shanghai and Beijing. Hui people and three other small Muslim ethnic groups take Chinese characters as their written language, and the Hui minority has even not an oral language of their own but use Chinese language. So, Islamic belief is nearly the only difference between Hui and Han peoples.⁷⁷ Such a situation has brought about some ambiguous characteristics relating to transnationalism and Islam in China.

Firstly, for some ethnic groups, especially for the Uygur people in Xinjiang, Islam can be seen as a justification for their nationalism against the nationalism of the Han people on the one hand, but may also be an encouragement for their transnationalist links with the crescent zone nations from Central Asia to Turkey on the other hand. In their separatist activities, they have made use of Islam in such a double way.

Secondly, for the Han people, Islam associated with the nationalism of, for example, the Uygur people, could be a stimulus to their own nationalism or chauvinism. And at the same time, Islam among Hui people and in their neighborhood in big cities, though not so apparent, may be a cultivator of their transnationalist attitude towards foreign nations. In fact, as to the social function of Islam, one can find some subtle difference between the opinion of the people in the northwest area and that of the people in the rest of China.⁷⁸

⁷⁶ Cf. Qin Huibing, "Chinese Islam and Social Harmony", presented to the "International Symposium on Religion and Peace", Sept. 14-16, Beijing. This conference was co-organized by the Institute of World Religions, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, Beijing, and the Catholic University of Sacred Heart in Milan, Italy.

⁷⁷ The Han ethnic group constitutes the vast majority among the various ethnic groups in China.

⁷⁸ It will be interesting and significant, in connection with this question, to compare the articles concerning Islam in *Xinjiang Shehui Kexue, Social Sciences of Xinjiang*, published by Xinjing Academy of Social Sciences, Urumqi, with those in *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu, Studies of World Religions*, published by the Institute of World Religions, CASS, Beijing.

Finally, the conflicts and terrorism relating to fundamentalist Islam outside China have also helped bring about some ambiguous or confusing feelings. That is because of the government's condemnation of terrorism in its occasional official statements and the attitude of official media in their reports of terrorist events. Nevertheless, all this and some scholars' interpretations in favor of Islam, however, have functioned as improving some transnationalist consciousness in the common mind.⁷⁹

Confucianism and Taoism

With the fall of the Qing Dynasty in 1911, Confucianism as an established religion also lost significant power.⁸⁰ However, as the most deep-rooted and widespread religion supported by the various governments for thousands of years, it has still some profound influence upon the Chinese mentality and spiritual life.⁸¹ Some professors at universities in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the United States who see themselves as contemporary neo-Confucianists have done much to restore the influence of Confucianism,⁸² and so have many Mainland Chinese scholars in the field of Chinese culture and some local patriarchs and community leaders in rural areas who are leading the restoration of ancestry worship and other clan activities.

Taoism as an institutional religion, though it is sanctioned as one of the five legal religions in China, has never recovered from its decline more than one century ago. However, as a strong element in many folk beliefs and a religious philosophy attracting many intellectuals, Taoism is still a spiritual power for the Chinese, with no less influence than Confucianism.⁸³ On the

⁷⁹ Cf. Wu Yungui's articles in the recent issues of *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu* and No. 3, 2000 of *Zhongguo Zongjiao, Religions in China*, published by the State Bureau for Religious Affairs, Beijing.

⁸⁰ Cf. Li Shen, *Zhongguo Rujiao Shi, A History of Confucian Religion*, Vol. II, Shanghai, 2000.

⁸¹ Cf. He Guanghu, "Zhongguo Zongjiao Gaige Lungang" *A Thesis on the Reformation of Chinese Religions*, in Dong Fang, *Oriental*, No.4, 1994, Beijing. An English version appeared in the journal *Inter Religio*, No. 1, 1995, Hong Kong.

⁸² Among others are such outstanding scholars as Mou Zongsan, Tang Junyi, Xu Fuguan, Liu Shuhsien and Tu Weiming. The most significant of what they have contributed to scholars of humanities in Mainland China, I think, is the acknowledgment of the religiousness (in the word of Tu Weiming) of Confucianism.

⁸³ Cf. Ren Jiyu, ed., *Zhongguo Daojiao Shi, A History of Taoist Religion*, Shanghai, 1992 and Lu Guolong, *Daojiao Zhexue, A Taoist Philosophy*, Beijing, 1998.

one hand, when their native Chinese origin and typically Chinese character is stressed,⁸⁴ the two religions could help enhance Chinese nationalism. On the other hand, however, there are at least three factors in them, which could be potential seeds of transnationalism among the Chinese.

The first one is the Confucian idea of “one family under heaven”. From the teaching of Yan Yuan, a famous disciple of Confucius in the 5th century BC, “all the peoples are brethren”, to the ideal about “Great Harmony” or “Great Union” of Kang Youwei, an influential Confucian thinker at the time of turn between the 19th and 20th centuries, one can find numerous arguments in support of the idea that is sometimes termed “cosmo-politanism”.⁸⁵

The second one is the Taoist despise or neglect of patriarchs, rulers and nations and their conventions. Lao Zi, who was the first Taoist philosopher and was esteemed as the founder of Taoist religion, criticized the nation’s institutions as an outcome of man’s fall from the great Tao.⁸⁶ And Zhuang Zi, who was the most splendid Taoist writer and was revered as a Taoist immortal, did eloquently argue for the equality and unification of all the things in the world, including states or nations.⁸⁷

The last but not least factor is the belief and argument of many contemporary Confucianists and Taoists that the two religions’ doctrines, with their philosophies and practices, have some universal value. The spread of their works has begun to have some remarkable effects on the common people. So, when they find that, for example, the national flag of the Republic of Korea has a design similar to the Taoist emblem, or that some western philosophers⁸⁸ and physicists praise the Confucian wisdom or Taoist insights, even that Kungfu or Qigong is spreading in the West, the common Chinese people would have some kind of pride. Therefore, they would pay more attention to the religions’ universal elements rather than their particular ones.

All these religious trends, possibly with some more, would help

⁸⁴ This is just what most Chinese scholars in this field have been doing.

⁸⁵ Cf. Sheng Hong, “Nationalism and Cosmopolitanism”, in Wei Wan Shi Kai Tai Ping, *Create Peace for All Generations*, Beijing, 1999.

⁸⁶ The Book of Lao Zi, Chapter 18.

⁸⁷ The Book of Zhuang Zi, Chapter on the Equality of Things.

⁸⁸ From Voltaire to Heidegger.

cultivate some kind of cross-ethnic or transnationalist consciousness in the Chinese people.

The Role of Scholars of Religious Studies

A religious spirit can help cultivate transnationalism on one condition only, i.e. that the latter is understood as a necessary conclusion derived from the former. And this does in turn presuppose that a religious spirit is rightly understood as something universal or beyond the nationalist distinction.

In fact, however, millions of average religious believers think the spirit of their own religion is different from, even opposite to, that of any other religions. So, in the case of a religion held by just one nation, the religious spirit could be taken as justification of its nationalism.

Fortunately, among all the five religions which have governmental sanction and influence all over the country, namely, Buddhism, Protestantism, Catholicism, Islam and Taoism, four are held by many people within and outside China, and just one, i.e. Taoism, the smallest of the five, can be called a purely Chinese religion. However, one can observe some ambiguous thought currents, even in the former four, concerning whether their characters are Chinese or universal, and, hence, whether their orientation should be towards nationalism or transnationalism. Of course, the expressions and manifestations of the issues in one religion are greatly different from those in another.

As the issues involve different historical, political, social, ethnical and cultural situations of different religions, it is too complicated, difficult and problematic for the people in religious organizations or for the religious professionals to get some clearance about them. And if we take into account the fact that the religious professionals are, generally speaking, so occupied by their own administration and so poor in number, funding, training, publication, authority, public relation and academic learning,⁸⁹ we can understand why they just publicly say, in this matter, what they heard from some officials and scholars in the field. And, since what officials say should

⁸⁹ For example, there are altogether less than 20 seminaries training the clergy for more than 20 millions Protestant Christians in today's China.

be in line with the political need, it would depend upon the role of the scholars to get some balance, not to mention to provide some clarity about the matter.

Although many scholars of religious studies have argued for and repeated some conclusions in favor of a nationalist orientation, some scholars have appeared who recognize that there are common elements among different religions, and some of them have realized some kind of universal spirit of religions.⁹⁰ This is linked up with their profession, namely the scientific or comparative study of religion would have been impossible if there were nothing in common among the religions of the world. Furthermore, even those kinds of religion held by one nation tell us through their mythologies that their god(s) created the first human being who was the ancestor of the human race, not only of the nation. And even if one could not recognize that the religious spirit behind the varying institutions must be the supreme One, he or she would agree with John Macquarrie when he said that the great religions of the world are closest to each other in their ethical teachings,⁹¹ or with Hans Küng when he pointed out that all the great traditional religions have offered some common basis for a minimum ethic which he has then called a "global ethic".⁹²

Therefore, in my observation, there will be more and more scholars approaching the conclusion that circumstances causing conflicts among nations are contradictory to the religious spirit or the core doctrine of religions. Undoubtedly, nationalism is such a circumstance. In other words, transnationalism is a logical or necessary inference of a universal religious spirit. With the spread of a religious spirit, we can see hope for the growth of transnationalism in China.

Judging from the series of symposiums or conferences held in China in recent years,⁹³ my hope does not seem a castle in the air. Perhaps, it seems a

⁹⁰ Cf. for example, He Guanghu, *Towards a Global Religious Philosophy*, in He Guanghu Zixuanji, *The Selected Works of He Guanghu*, Guilin, 1999.

⁹¹ Macquarrie, J., *Principles of Christian Theology*, p. 503, SCM Press, London 1979.

⁹² Cf. H. Küng & K.-J. Kuschel (eds.), *A Global Ethic*, SCM Press, London 1993.

⁹³ Among them, to mention a few, are the Chinese-Western (former Chinese-American) Symposiums on Philosophy and Religious Studies, held at Beijing University biannually since the 1990s, the Conferences on the Global Ethic, held in Beijing respectively in 1997

castle under construction. However, I do hope this time that “Things will be what they seem”!

And finally, I would like to recite another line from the same poem of Longfellow: “Learn to labor, and to wait!”