

MARXISM AND CHRISTIANITY WITHIN THE GREAT WALL

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Introduction

People associate the Great Wall with the ancient civilization of China, and with good reason, since Chinese culture has remained steady, stretching through time as long and unbroken as the Great Wall itself. In the thousand years that the Chinese culture has flourished, it has exhibited a remarkable ability to assimilate foreign intrusions. Even though several times throughout Chinese history minority nationalities have been in control of China, their victories have been limited to the battlefields and the reigns of state power and have rarely occurred in the homes and villages of the people. Even while in political control of China, the minority populations were becoming assimilated by the Chinese culture. While it is generally recognized that Jewish culture has a remarkable ability to survive even in the most oppressive situations, during 960-1126 quite a few Jews lived in Kaifeng City in Henan province in China, but today none can be found, having all long since been assimilated. The ability of Chinese culture to persevere is evident even in New York City where one can stroll around Chinatown and find Chinese culture thriving. Chinese culture has been so strong that Western religions have spent more than a thousand years attempting to convert the Chinese with only negligible success. Given the lack of success of invading cultures in China, how is it that Marxism could come to control China in only 30 years? How could a European political philosophy scale the Great Wall of China and established itself within the fabric of daily Chinese life in such a short time?

The Differences and Similarities between Marxism and Traditional Chinese Culture

Traditional Chinese culture, with feudal characteristics developed over several thousand years, and Marxism, with eighteenth century Europe as its crucible, appear to be completely unrelated, but history has brought the two together in China. In fact, socialism, apparently violating Marx's prediction, was not first created in a highly developed capitalist society, but in countries with slowly developed productive forces and feudal features. The idea that Russian socialism was created in the weakest chain of capitalist countries was acknowledged by Lenin in Imperialism: the Highest State of Capitalism. Here we will not discuss the whole of socialist theory, but only analyze and compare the differences and similarities between Marxism and traditional Chinese culture.

The Spread of Marxism in China

When Marxism, created in the middle of the 19th century, spread like wildfire in Europe, nobody noticed it in China. But when in 1917, "the October Revolution" occurred and the Lenin led Bolsheviks overturned the Provisional United Government by an armed uprising, as a neighbor China suddenly awakened. Mao Zedong pointed out that the October Revolution sent

Marxism to China. Before the Russian Revolution Chinese intellectuals had been propagating the Western ideas of "capitalism", "democracy", and "liberty" and introducing the technology and science of the Western industrial power. They argued that "Mr. D" (democracy) and "Mr. S" (science) would be able to rescue China from the bullying and oppression of the big imperialist powers. The October Revolution woke up a number of young Chinese intellectuals who were seeking another way out. In 1919, a young professor of Beijing University, Li Dazhao, first translated the Russian Manifesto of the Communist Party into Chinese. Li Dazhao set up a journal, New Young, to disseminate Marxist thought to the Chinese masses.

In 1921, a group of young intellectuals organized the Chinese Communist Party. Since Marxist theory argues that the worker class is the main force of the proletarian revolution, the Chinese Communist Party organized many strikes and even some armed uprisings in the main cities, but since the force of the Chinese Communist Party organized many strikes and even some armed uprisings in the main cities, but since the force of the Chinese workers was not large enough or strong enough, this early stage of Marxism in China failed. In 1927, Mao Zedong created the first rural revolutionary base to organize peasants for an armed struggle. This creation of a peasant revolutionary group by Mao Zedong was seriously criticized by many leaders of the Chinese Communist Party and the Third International for its apparent violation of Marxism. But Mao Zedong's organizing resulted in an army of several million. With this large force Mao Zedong first took over the villages and then the cities and successfully established a socialist China with Marxist-Leninism and the thought of Mao Zedong was written into the Constitution. The peasants, who were thought by Lenin to be petty bourgeoisie, were considered as the ally of the worker class by Mao Zedong, in fact, most of 40,000,000 members of the Chinese Communist Party have peasants' backgrounds.

Four Similarities between Marxism and Traditional Chinese Culture

Morality

In order to understand why Marxism was able to penetrate Chinese culture in such a brief period, we first need to examine the place of morality in both. In doing so we may be able to understand, at least partially, both the longevity of Chinese culture and the success of Marxism in China. In ancient China, the people revered four books titled "The Analects of Confucius," "The Book of Mencius," "The Doctrine of the Mean" ("mean" in this *case refers to "average") and "The Great Learning" (sometimes referred to as the "Bible of ancient China"). The Four Books are treatises on moral and ethical philosophy. Due to the importance of The Four Books, morality and ethics became the core of traditional Chinese culture. Take, for example, Confucius' well-known idea of " " (kindheartedness). This character has two parts " " and " ". " " means "people". " " means "two". Therefore, Confucius' idea of " " means the moral relationship between two people. Ancient China was a society of rule by benevolence rather than by law. This is not to say that there were not laws in ancient China, just that morality was stronger than law. In a complex relationship the Chinese considered how to fulfill their moral duty before considering their legal obligations. Even many political principles have their roots in moral duty. For example, the political principle "subjects must be loyal to their monarch" is derived from a moral duty located in the three cardinal guides ("ruler guides subject"). Chinese culture was firmly established on moral principles located in daily customs and traditions and reinforced through education. While foreign conquerors might control politics and economics their inability to alter basic moral principles made it difficult for these invading forces to have any lasting

effect on ordinary Chinese life. Since Chinese culture was built around primary moral principles, as long as these principles remained unchallenged, Chinese culture remained remarkable consistent and unchanged. In fact, the basic moral commitments of traditional Chinese culture often became a cohesive force strengthening Chinese resistance. But if this is so, how was Marxism able to replace this traditional Chinese morality in only thirty years? To answer this question, we need to look more closely at the moral core of traditional Chinese culture. We must do so because, as the Chinese say, "Let he who tied the bell on the tiger take it off." In other words, whoever started the trouble should end it. In this case, in order to understand how Marxism was able to penetrate Chinese culture, we must first examine the foundation of traditional culture.

Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism are generally considered the three dominant Chinese religions. Confucianism and Taoism are indigenous and have influenced the Chinese people very strongly and deeply. Confucianism was created around 484 B.C. during the Spring and Autumn Period and the Warring States Period (770-221 B.C.). It came to occupy a dominant position in traditional Chinese culture after the Han Dynasty (after 206 B.C.) becoming an appealing religion for the broad masses of the people of China. However Confucianism is not a typical religion. It does not have a real creed and has no religious rules, religious organization, or religious activity: It has only its teachings. Of course, Confucian teachings resemble a creed. This is particularly so after the teachings were polished by the Confucian school of idealist philosophy of the Song and Ming Dynasties (960-1644) dissimulating these teachings into a systematic moral theory centered around the idea that the Universe was dominated by eternal "heavenly principles" which are independent of human will. The eternal "heavenly principles" included "the three cardinal guides" (ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife) and "the five constant virtues" (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity). Derived from these is the Confucian principle "Retaining heavenly principle and puncturing individual desires." One day Confucius was discussing ethics with his students when one of them, Yan Hui, asked Confucius how he should put the ethical principle of "Ren" into practice. Confucius responded, "Benevolence is the restraining of individual desire to bring one's words and deeds into accord with propriety." (By "propriety" he meant the feudal estate system which we will explain later.) Confucius went on to add, "You should not watch anything that is not in accord with propriety; you should not listen to any sound that is not in accord with propriety; you should not speak any words that are not in accord with propriety; you should not do anything that is not in accord with propriety" (Chinese Publishing House 1973: 49). In brief, individual desire was to be subsumed to the feudal estate and the Confucian moral system became the dominant measure of all things creating a clearly ordered, hierarchical society. "The three cardinal guides" applied to everyone and had priority over all other principles. For example, in order to uphold "the five constant virtues," people were asked to take an oath of fidelity to their friends, but since "the five constant virtues" must obey the "three cardinal guides" fidelity to friends must be subsumed to "ruler guides subject" so that while a man must take an oath of fidelity to his friend and a son must obey his father, if his friend and his father ask him not to obey their ruler, the man must disobey his friend and father and obey his ruler. In summary, Confucius's emphasis on the moral principles placed harmony and peace at the center of human action and, therefore, restricted individual desire and the benefits which arise from the pursuit of one's own desires.

This emphasis on harmony and peace at the expense of satisfying worldly desires is also found in Taoism and Buddhism. The founders of a sect of Taoism, Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu,

advocated "letting things take their own course," "conforming to nature," and "quiet heart and few desires." And Buddhism maintained "all spare directions are void" and emphasized asceticism, restricting the desires and standing aloof from worldly success. Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism complement each other in the formation of traditional Chinese morality which values righteousness, despises profit, stresses equality, regards harmony as superior to competition, and underemphasizes beneficial result from individual action.

Marxist moral theory. Marxism entered China around 1920 primarily through texts translated from Russian. As we all know Marx's concept of socialism was developed under the assumption that capitalism was fully developed and that economic productivity was highly developed. Under socialism, he argued, the life-and-death struggles of persons who owned capital would disappear that the contradictions between capitalists and labor would vanish, and that the inherent contradictions between social production and private ownership would be removed. In brief, under socialism, all contradictions which caused social conflict based on the seeking of profit would vanish. Under Marxist socialism, the assumption would be that all people would share prosperity together and that everybody would be equal. In this way, individual profit and social benefit would be harmonious and society would achieve unprecedented peace. In summary, Marxist moral theory embraces equality, benevolence, and communalism which is compatible with the traditional Chinese values of harmony, cooperation, and suspicion of worldly success.

An interesting comparison. The close agreement between traditional Chinese culture and Marxist morality made the acceptance of Marxism by the Chinese more likely. Marxism's emphasis on equality, benevolence, and shared wealth and the Marxist-Leninist orientation toward a centralized state and economy are all compatible with traditional Chinese culture. As such, to embrace Marxism the Chinese did not have to change their deep rooted, traditional morality. Now while traditional Chinese culture and Marxism have some points of compatibility, we are not arguing that they are congruent ideologies. Marxism was created in the highly developed capitalist economies while traditional Chinese culture grew in the soil of small production. None-the-less we do think that we can use the Hegelian concept of the "negation of negation" to show how these two different systems of thought became intertwined in China. Traditional Chinese morality with its roots in feudalism was negated by the introduction of capitalism into China during the Wuxu Reform Movement of 1898 (which served the interests of the liberal bourgeoisie and the enlightened landlords) and the Westernization Movement in the latter half of the 19th century (which introduced techniques of capitalist production). Capitalism with a morality oriented around individualism, competition, and profit was in direct opposition to traditional Chinese culture. However, with the introduction of Marxism, the negation of the negation of capitalism occurred, producing a return to values compatible with tradition but at a "higher" level.

The Similarity of Ultimate Goals.

Marx's communist society is the ultimate human goal--a situation without the state, without classes, without religions, without law and court, without armies and police, without private ownership, without competition and division of labor. This utopia was simply a variation of the imagined good society which the Chinese people had been seeking since there was Chinese civilization. The Chinese people have always visualized a "Great Harmony." Confucius actually used the primitive communism of remote China as a model in describing how the public selected a sage to unselfishly serve everybody, where life was harmonious and without

competition and conflict. Mencius, the second most important Confucian scholar, said, "respect other's fathers and brothers as yours, love other's children like yours.... Every family with a five 'mu' (one is equal to 0.0667 hectares) house, plant mulberries around it so that in fifty years people may weal silk; and feed the domestic animals well so that in seventy years persons can have meat. Families who farm 100 'mu', even those with eight persons in a family, will have enough to eat. Set up various schools to educate youngsters to show filial obedience to their parents and respect to their elder brothers. The old people will not need to work hard but will still wear silk and eat meat. The multitude will not suffer hunger or cold" (Chinese Publishing House 1973: 188, 190). This image of primitive communism is central to much traditional Chinese culture. (It should also be pointed out that the spirit of primitive communism was also found in "The Great Harmonious World" by Sun Yet-sen, who was the pioneer of the Chinese capitalist democratic revolution).

When this harmonious and equal society where people share the wealth without exploitation, this "Great Harmony" of traditional Chinese thought became realized in a Chinese neighbor in the form of Marxism, the Chinese people responded with the slogan "No distinction between rich and poor!" It is not without reason that Mao Zedong said, "A single spark can a prairie fire start."

Some Similarity In Thinking

In Marx and Engels the dialectic is a central ordering rationality. All their thought is oriented around the idea that things are parts of contradictory pairs and that the world changes as a result of the regularity of these contradictions. The dialectic, of course, is found throughout Marxist thought, most prominently in the idea of historical materialism. Interestingly enough, the use of dialectical thought is very similar to the traditional Chinese philosophical mode of thinking. During the Zhou Dynasty (C. 11th century-221 B.C.), the Chinese intellectuals began to consider the world as organized around contradictory relationships. This thinking was written in the well-known book, The Book of Changes, and is known as the theory of "Yin and Yang." The Yin and Yang are two opposing principles of nature, the former feminine and negative and the latter masculine and positive, this law of the unity of opposites was the basis of all changes. The theory of the Yin and Yang is the theoretical base of traditional Chinese medical science, painting, Kungfu, and cuisine. In other words, this mode of thinking if found thought Chinese cultural life. The dialectic of Marxism found easy acceptance to a people used to thinking in terms of the Yin and Yang.

About Violent Revolution

One apparent contradiction in Marxist thought and traditional Chinese culture is in the Marxian notion of revolution. Marx believed that the establishment of communism required workers to organize an armed revolution and overthrow the forces of capitalism. Clearly violent revolution violates the Confucian principle "Ren" (benevolence) and, therefore, violates accepted Chinese cultural values. Perhaps it is here that communism found itself actually closer to the lived culture of the Chinese peasant than Confucianism because the Chinese peasantry had a long and continuous history of violent revolt occurring without interruption even in times of peace. Almost every dynastic change can be related to a peasant uprising. Even the longest dynasties, which laster up to 300 years, were overturned through peasant uprisings to that the peasant war became a decisive force of change in China. No wonder tang Taizhong, the emperor of the strongest Tang Dynasty in Chinese history, said metaphorically that the emperor was like a boat and the people were as water. Water can move a boat, but can also capsizize it. The peasant war

was one of the most important ideas of Mao Zedong, because he soberly realized that Marxism would not be victorious in China without one.

The Impact of Chinese Culture on Marxism

While the Chinese willingly assimilated Marxism into their way of life in such a way that Chinese life was significantly altered, Marxism did not survive unchanged. While Marxism changed Chinese culture, Chinese culture changed Marxism. Marxist-Leninism stresses collectivism and emphasizes the subordination of one's personal interests to those of the class. While the emphasis on class interest requires a shift from the hierarchical society of Chinese culture's feudal roots, Marxism's other values are close enough to traditional Chinese culture so that the people were able to embrace it. Of course, Marxism is not a religion but like Confucianism, it has a credo and a set of principles and, again as Confucianism was able to accomplish over two millennia ago, marxism has been able to infiltrate to the heart of Chinese culture. In the past 30 years Marxism has become China's guiding ideology and communism its banner. Marx believed that to achieve Communism required productivity to be highly developed in order to achieve maximum wealth. Lenin believed that under Marxism, nations would be so wealthy that they would be able to build public lavatories of gold. In China, however, there was less interest in gaining the material benefits of communism than in achieving its moral goals. The Western Marxist emphasis on the achievement of highly developed material production was replaced with the more traditional Chinese ideas such as "Don't be concerned if your country is poor, be concerned if your country is not a peace." This thought was reflected during the Cultural Revolution when the call was raised, "Pursue poverty along the socialist road."

The Western conception of the individual that is found in Marxism is another area where the Chinese adapted Marxism to their own culture. In The Communist Manifesto Marx and Engels argued that a freely developed individual was a prerequisite for a freely developed society. (Wang & Wang 1986). But in China nobody has paid any attention to that thought, on the contrary, individual development has been completely negated. Chinese culture had traditionally submerged the individual's freedom and independence to the good of the whole, while in the West this is often reversed. For example, in the West, if twins dress alike people fear that they will lose their individual character, so Western twins often wear different clothes. But in china where people don't care about individual character, twins always dress alike. The emphasis on commonality is so strong in China that all of China is on Beijing Time. One more example of how Marxism was changed in China can be found in Engels well known statement that marriage without love is an improper marriage. The Chinese people have argued endlessly about this statement. Interestingly while nobody says that Engels was incorrect, neither does anybody dare to affirm his position on marriage without love because the cultural emphasis on harmony is so strong that as long as the couple does not divorce, the marriage is considered perfect and good.

As can be seen by this brief discussion the Chinese people have basically accepted Marxism. This is particularly so in those areas in which Marxism is compatible with traditional Chinese culture. On the other hand, in many ways Marxism has been altered in China and frequently those changes have brought Marxism more in line with the ancient Chinese traditions.

Traditional Chinese Culture and Christianity

Christianity in China

Since the fifth century, Christianity--in the form of Nestorianism, Yelikewen, and

Catholicism--has existed, but not flourished, in China. Christianity in China may be divided into four stages: The Nestorian stage, from the fifth to ninth centuries--the Yelikewen stage, from the eleventh to thirteenth centuries--the Roman Catholic stage, from the sixteenth to eighteenth centuries--and the Christian stage, from the eighteenth century to the present.

While Christianity entered even earlier, it did not penetrate into the interior of China until the fifth century. At that time the Nestorians engaged in missionary work in Luoyang City. One missionary, a Persian named Arobien, crossed northern China to the capital of the Tang Dynasty, Chang'an (not Xi'an City). Arobien became the archbishop of China, he translated the scriptures into Chinese and he built the "Great Qin Temple." The Emperor of the Tang Dynasty, Gaozong, issued an imperial edict requiring the Chinese to tolerate Nestorianism. In fact, Gaozong even praised Eastern Christianity giving Arobien a very high and courteous reception by the imperial government. For the next two centuries, Nestorianism spread throughout China until Wuzong, an Emperor of the Tang Dynasty, issued an imperial edict prohibiting both Buddhism and Nestorianism. Following this edict the Nestorian missionaries were driven out of China. While Buddhism would recover in 843, it was not until the end of the eleventh century that Nestorianism returned to China, but this time under the name of Yelikewen.

During the eleventh century China was ruled by the Liao Dynasty--a dynasty centered outside the Great Wall between Mongolia and Manchuria. Nestorianism was tolerated under the Liao Dynasty but was called Yelikewen by the Chinese as they attempted to pronounce the Mongolian name that meant "people with a good lot." During the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), Yelikewen became one of the prevalent religions in China. At the same time that Yelikewen was gaining a strong foothold in China, Franciscan monks arrived in China to engage in missionary work. Both the Franciscans and the Yelikewen were accorded courteous reception by the rulers of the Yuan Dynasty, and their followers numbered over thirty thousand. After the Yuan Dynasty was toppled and replaced by the Ming Dynasty in 1368, Yelikewen died out.

The Society of Jesus, a Roman Catholic organization, sent an Italian, Matteo Ricci to China. Ricci traveled through Macao (occupied by Portugal), Shaoqing, and Canton (all cities in the Guangdong province) in 1582. He lived in Beijing in 1600 where the Ming Dynasty Emperor, Shen-zong, interviewed him in 1601. Ricci wrote several books which helped spread Catholicism, but Ricci did more than just spread the word of Christ, he also taught the theories and findings of Western science. Together with Xu Guangqi, a well-known Chinese scholar, Ricci translated European scientific works. By introducing Western science while being sensitive to Chinese customs, the rulers of China permitted Catholicism to exist and develop. By the time Ricci died in Beijing in 1610, he had many followers including quite a few famous Chinese scholars. By 1664 the Society of Jesus had 164,400 followers. Other Catholic groups, such as the Franciscans, had established missions in China, but by this time pressure began to be put on the Chinese Christians to abandon the Chinese customs which required them to offer a sacrifice to their ancestry and Confucius. In 1704, the Holy Roman See prohibited Chinese Christians from offering sacrifices to their ancestry. Kang Xi, an Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, responded by ordering that any missionary who did not comply with the rule of Ricci could not live in China. In 1732, Yongzheng, another Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, simply banned Catholicism from China altogether. By 1773 the Vatican had given up on China and the Pope canceled the Society of Jesus in China. After two hundred years of missionary work in China, Roman Catholicism had left completely defeated.

After the Opium War, and English Christian named Robert Morrison arrived in Canton

(Guangzhou). Morrison translated the Bible into Chinese. Following Morrison, many denominations of Protestant and Roman Catholic Christians entered China from Europe and North America. After the Qing Dynasty was toppled in 1911, China was bogged down in endless civil wars. The warlords needed the support of foreign forces and, therefore, various Christian denominations had a chance to enter China. During World War II, China had no alternative but to open itself to any religion. Even Song Meiling, wife of Jiang Jieshi (Chiang K'ai-shek), was converted to Christianity. By 1949, Catholics numbered about three million and Protestants numbered about 700,000. After the Chinese Communist Party came to power in 1949, the Christian groups continued to be tolerated because freedom of religious belief had been written into the Constitution. While their existence was tolerated, they were reconstructed into national religious organizations such as the "Chinese Catholic Association" and were administrated by a governmental department called the Bureau of Religious Affairs. During the Cultural Revolution all religions were forbidden, but today, the door is open to religions once again.

If one analyzes the history of Christianity over the fifteen hundred years that it has attempted to infiltrate China, one will find that there is a pattern in which after an initial period of growth there is a decline. Unlike Buddhism which eventually became one of the main religions of China equally accepted by the masses and the elites and able to influence government and politics, Christianity has been noticeably unsuccessful. Now, while it might be pointed out that as a Western religion, Christianity had little chance of survival in the Eastern cultures of China, we would like to point out that Marxism is also a product of Western culture and yet, in just a decade, Marxism was able to spread thought China and rival Buddhism as a way of thinking. And while it may be true that, today, Christianity is in a stronger position than it has ever been, it has certainly walked with difficulty and suffered many a setback.

By definition a foreign culture differs from traditional culture. When a foreign culture enters into a society, the result of their collision may take any of three forms: (1) the two cultures remain exclusive, neither accommodating to the other, (2) the two cultures merge, both accommodating to and assimilating with the other, (3) the two cultures partially accommodate and assimilate each other. Buddhism and traditional Chinese culture, and Marxism and traditional Chinese culture are examples of the third type. Each partially accommodated and assimilated the other so that today Buddhism and Marxism have become a part of Chinese culture while Chinese culture has altered the foundation of both Buddhism and Marxism. Christianity, on the other hand, seems to be an example of the first type. Neither Christianity nor traditional Chinese culture seems to have accommodated or assimilated the other. While the Italian Matteo Ricci attempted, and seemed to have some success, adapting Christianity to traditional Chinese culture, eventually neither Chinese culture nor Christianity seemed able to change for the other. Nestorianism died out very quickly after it had been banned suggesting that it did not have a very deep following among the people since Buddhism was banned at the same time, but made a relatively quick recovery. Yelikewen vanished with its Mongolian sponsors at the end of the Yuan Dynasty. In both cases, Christianity, after showing some initial successes, quickly disappeared.

The Roman Catholics and Protestants have shown more success than either Nestorianism or Yelikewen. This may be because they have shown more willingness to accommodate to traditional Chinese culture. For example, Ricci actively accommodated Christianity to Chinese culture. He applied himself to the study of classical Chinese thought, he wore Confucian clothing

and called himself a Confucian scholar. Ricci even adopted the strategy of publicly attacking Buddhism in the name of Confucianism. His books which argued for Christianity were annotated with Confucian thought. He translated "God" into the Chinese "Tian Zhu" (meaning "the Emperor of Heaven") and merged Tian Zhu with heaven leading to a very Chinese concept of God. Limido also was willing to allow his followers to offer a sacrifice to Chinese ancestry and to Confucius because he believed that such offers were a mechanism for descendants to fulfill their filial duty. Finally Ricci respected the Confucian teachings enough so that he gave permission to Chinese Christians who passed their imperial examinations to have a salute in a Confucian temple. The Roman Catholic Pope, Alexander, announced on March 23, 1656 that believers could be free to attend to Chinese etiquette if the circumstances didn't impair essential belief. At this stage Catholicism had made so many accommodations to Chinese tradition that some preachers and Chinese followers thought that Catholicism and Confucianism came from the same divine source. For example, Zhang Xingchuai wrote a book, Checking the Similarities and Differences Between Catholicism and Confucianism in which he said, "The Western Confucianists [i.e., the Catholics] know how to honor the Emperor of Heaven, their work will be suitable to our Confucian truth since it understands Confucian roots."

When a Christian movement was willing to make concessions to Chinese culture it was able to spread faster and wider than those denominations which refused to accommodate. We can conclude that to the extent that Christianity conformed to traditional Chinese culture, its preachers were accorded a courteous reception and it was able to gather followers, on the other hand, when Christianity seemed to challenge traditional Chinese culture it was banned and its missionaries were driven out. But even when Christianity has attempted to accommodate to Chinese culture, it has not met with overwhelming success in China. Today, Christianity had still not found many converts among the Chinese people. This is so whether we are talking about the Chinese in China, Taiwan, Singapore, Hong Kong, Macao, Malaysia, even Chinatown in New York City. We believe that the Chinese have been slow to accept Christianity because even when Christianity attempts to accommodate to Chinese etiquette there are just too many dissimilarities between Christianity and traditional Chinese culture. While the two may have adjusted to the other somewhat, any accommodations were only on the surface; the essential oppositions in their thought have never been able to be removed. So that when in 1704, the Pope announced that Chinese Christians could not associate "God" with "Heaven" or "the Emperor of Heaven," that they could not display in their churches signs which read "Revering Heaven," that they could not offer sacrifices to their ancestry or to Confucius, Catholicism disappeared in China in just thirty years. At heart there are just too many essential differences between Christianity and traditional Chinese culture to ever make it easy for each to accommodate to the other.

A Comparison of Christianity and Traditional Chinese Culture

Four Differences

Christianity and traditional Chinese culture have some basic differences which has made it difficult for the Christians to get more than a foothold among the Chinese people even after a thousand years of missionary work. There are four major differences that we would like to explore: God and heaven, human nature, how they believe, and for what they believe.

God and heaven. Christians believe in a God who created all things in the universe and, yet, is not a part of it. This sense of a God who is above or outside of the universe is quite outside of Chinese tradition. We might say that whereas the Christians believe in God, the Chinese believe in Heaven. Now while this, perhaps, oversimplifies a very complex idea, Heaven, for the

ancient Chinese, referred to both a natural and supernatural entity. It is said that the sky was so high, huge, and mysterious that people were unable to touch and understand it, and yet, it related to people's everyday life. Now even though human beings were unable to control Heaven, they were able to create many things on earth. To further explain our point, let us examine two ancient Chinese characters: 大, which meant "big" and 天, which meant "sky" or "heaven". ("big") was a pictographic character often found on ancient bronze objects. It symbolizes a spirited person with outstretched arms and legs. One might wonder why anyone would take the symbol of a person to represent the concept "big". After all mountains are big, the earth is large, and the sky is huge. Why not pick the symbol of the mountain or earth or sky or some other large object? Probably because humans are, in their own way, great as well. People create history, society and civilization. Now if we look at the character for "sky" or "heaven" we see that it contains two parts--a spirited person with outstretched arms and legs (大) and the sky above (气). The Chinese did not feel that they understood the relations between human beings and heaven. While they believed that humans are great, the sky above the people is even greater. During the Spring and Autumn Period (770-221 B.C.), Confucianism captured this idea in the saying "Heaven and people combine into one." They emphasized that "people" must always be in harmony with heaven. During the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.--220 A.D.), Confucianism put forth the idea that "if Heaven, earth and people could become one, peace would result." Even though Heaven was mysterious, humans could achieve their ideals in the earthly world. There was no need to leave the world to achieve spiritual oneness. During the Song Dynasty (960-1279) the Confucianists thought heaven was spirit and truth. With all of these variations in Confucian thought the most lasting and typical way in which "Heaven and people became one" was the person of the "Son of Heaven"--the Emperor. Since the emperor was the symbol of Heaven and his words became the "principle of Heaven," heaven became located on earth and in human form. As such "people" remained the focal point even if a huge and mysterious heaven remained above their heads.

Perhaps the most successful "Christian" movement in China employed a Chinese concept of heaven. The Qing Dynasty was hated by many Chinese people because the rulers were of a minority nationality located outside the Great Wall. Following the Opium War (1840-1842), Hong Xiuquan organized the Society of God to revolt against the Qing Dynasty. His Taiping Revolution (meaning "revolution for peace" or "peach revolution") was the largest peasant uprising in China's history and was based on radically transformed "Chinese Christianity." While he held power (1851-1864), he established the "Taiping Heavenly Kingdom." The "Heavenly Kingdom" was not a paradise in another world, but the very earthly kingdom of Hong Xiuquan, on which could be touched and seen and which people could enjoy in their life on earth. Furthermore, the "God" of Hong Xiuquan was not the Western God, but "Heaven" in the Chinese tradition. Hong Xiuquan, himself, became the "Son of Heaven," his regime was the "Heavenly government," and his words were "heavenly principles." And even though Hong Xiuquan owed something to Western Christianity he did not allow any foreign representatives of the Western church to influence his "Heavenly government."

In summary, the "heaven" of Confucianism constrains the development of Christianity in China. Since traditional Chinese culture emphasized the unity of heaven, earth, and human beings, the Chinese have found it difficult to achieve the necessary harmony between the Christian God and Chinese ways. Traditional Chinese culture pays great attention to life on earth; it deals with concrete matters of the world and tends to ignore the non-earthly world of the Christian heaven. This fundamental difference between what Christians believe and what traditional Chinese believe makes it very difficult for Christianity to succeed in China.

Human nature. According to the Christian story of creation, God created Adam and Eve who ate the forbidden fruit of wisdom and, as a result, were driven out of paradise. Ever since, the descendants of those first humans have had to shoulder the burden of original sin. According to Christian doctrine, God so loved humans that he sent his only son to provide a way for them to be rescued from their sin. Anyone who believes in Jesus as the son of God will be redeemed. The concept of "original sin" implies that human nature is evil and that humans can only be absolved when they turn away from their own nature and rely on God who is outside human nature.

Contrary to the Christian sense of human nature, the traditional Chinese idea is that human nature was originally kind. The three characters which begin the Confucian Classics read "At the beginning, human nature was good and honest." The basic goodness of human nature was taken up by Mencius, the second most important Confucian scholar in a well-known dialogue with another Confucian scholar, Gau-tzu.

Gao-tzu said, "Human nature is like a swift current, if there is an opening in the east, it will flow east; if there is an opening in the west, it will flow west. Human nature is just like the current, it may not be divided into kind or evil, but it flows in which ever direction is open.

Mencius responded, "Yes, the current does not necessarily flow east or west, but it is necessary for it to flow down and not up. Human nature is just like water. Just as water always tries to flow downhill, people try to be kind. But if you use your hand to beat water, it may make the water splash over your head; if you swish water, the water can flow backwards and even flow uphill. While it may not be the nature of water to flow uphill, an external force can make it so. So too can people be made to do evil, even though it is not in their nature. A person's nature to do good can be altered just as the water's nature to flow downhill, can be changed. (Chinese Publishing House 1973: 221).

This difference between a Christian sense of human nature and a Chinese sense is fundamental. Since, according to Christianity, people are, by nature, evil, their only hope for redemption is to believe in Jesus and God, wait for the afterlife, and accept God's beneficence or wrath on earth. For the Chinese, however, since basic human nature is good, humans are capable of cultivating earth and bringing heaven and earth together. In other words, heaven is possible on earth due to human effort, not God's intervention.

The moral life. Christians pray to beg God's forgiveness. So long as believers regularly attend church, and confess their sins, they will be forgiven by God. In Christianity, people are often likened to lambs incapable of divining their own purpose or direction and completely dependent on care from their shepherd, Jesus. People are too fallible to be trusted and must, instead, trust only in absolute correctness and forgiveness of God.

The Chinese tradition advocates self-cultivation to achieve the perfect human life. The core of the confucianism is "Ren" () meaning "humanity," "benevolence," or "kindheartedness." "Ren" (contains two meanings: One is "gain your humanity through yourself." suggesting that if one wishes to achieve humanity, one must be benevolent; that is give of oneself. Another way to self-cultivation is to build and keep honest relations with others through the self-cultivation of the good. In the Doctrine of the Mean it is stated that "Honest relations are cultivated through one's self. Honesty is to be drawn from one's natural instincts through careful contemplation. Besides the spirit being honest, all things of the world are also permeated with honesty; therefore, honesty is not only for self-cultivation but also for all things on earth. Honesty is

internal and through self-cultivation yields kindheartedness, and honesty is also external and through the development of wisdom achieves all things on earth. Kindheartedness and wisdom are the intrinsic things of human nature, they are the things which unify the external and internal" (Zisi 1973: 597).

These two understandings of human nature--one evil and, therefore, dependent on an external God for salvation and the other good and, therefore, dependent on self-cultivation for the achievement of a state of spiritual happiness--create extremely difficult barriers to overcome. To ask the Chinese, who are committed to self-cultivation, to confess to God and await salvation in the next world is unlikely to have much impact.

Happiness and life. In Chinese homes one is likely to find a statue of a smiling Buddha who appears content and at peace. In many Christian homes one finds a figure of a bleeding and suffering Christ nailed to the cross. These crosses can appear quite horrific to nonChristians and may cause them to ask, as the Chinese scholar Li Zehou asked, "Why?" Why bring into your home such an image of horror and suffering? Could it be because Christians think life is painful and since Jesus was leaving the world, his suffering was only a passage to a better world? Such an idea seems compatible with Christian belief, but it is, as we now see, quite incompatible with Chinese belief. While the Christians focus on the pain of corporeal life shown in the image of a crucified Jesus, the Chinese center on the potential happiness of life revealed in a smiling Buddha.

Christians believe that they can only find happiness if they achieve the Kingdom of God which is not found in this world, but only the next. For this reason, Christians pay great attention to the future world, the world after death. The Chinese, however, traditionally emphasize the thought "joining the world" which orients them toward this life and not the next. The famous Chinese architect, Ji Wufou, once said, "The things which people make can last a thousand years, however, the people who make them will die within a hundred. Therefore, people should build comfortable and beautiful buildings in which to live, this would be enough! (Feng & Zhou 1986: 311).

The art of making pills began long ago in China. Practiced primarily by Taoist and Buddhist monks, this "primitive chemistry" was developed in an attempt to achieve immortality. Why would the religious figures of China seek immortality while any search for immortality in the West was considered inspired by the devil? Because in China, life in this world is seen as holy, whereas in the West, the only holy life is found in the afterlife.

The emphasis on this world instead of the afterworld is also reflected in Chinese ethics. In the Christian West, ethics has been closely associated with religion, but in China, ethics has traditionally been separated from religion. The major schools of ethical thought which existed from 770 B.C. to about 200 B.C. focused on human relations rather than religious duty. For example, Confucius and Mencius stressed human nature, Guancius emphasized the economy, and Sunzi stressed the division of labor in society. Most Chinese ethical systems encouraged people to join in society and to address the needs of people in this world, so that the Christian emphasis on the other world and the renunciation of this world remains quite foreign to the Chinese way.

A Similarity

While we have been concentrating on some of the important differences between Christianity and traditional Chinese culture, there is also at least one interesting similarity--the

emphasis on duty to others (particularly superordinates). For example, both Christian and Chinese works proclaim that a wife should obey her husband, that children should show filial obedience to their parents, that one should value righteousness and oppose benefit, that people should love each other, and that one should sacrifice one's own interests for sake of others. Such similarities help explain why Christianity has had some acceptance among a few Chinese. One example will amplify the way in which Christianity, when it accommodates to traditional Chinese culture, can find, at least some, acceptance in China. Christianity teaches that people should love each other, should help each other, and should live in harmony with each other. These two beliefs often become intermingled so that a Chinese Christian may associate Christian love with filial piety. Today in China Christians ask people to love each other and to love all people on earth, but first one has the obligation to love one's parents. This equation of Christian love with filial piety can be found in a Christian gospel sung in the Anhui province.,

Advise people to show filial piety

We must work hard to repay our parents for their great kindness

They wiped our bottoms clean and held us to urinate

They made a dry bed but slept in a wet one

If a son has a boil, it will give his mother a scare

She will not eat, will not sleep

But the whole day, the whole night, she will pray.

But if the son recovers, his mother will still worry too much

When he was four or five, he left her arms,

She called for him all the time, yelled for him all the time

Not only did she worry when he swam in the river

But she also worried when he climbed the tree for the bird's nest

When he was fifteen or sixteen, he developed his own ideas

He would not respect his elders, nor would he love his youngsters

He forgot the great kindness of his father and mother.

He had a wife and saved their wealth

He had a son and held him in his arms

He let his son wear nice clothes and hats.

While his son walked

He never stopped saying, "Honey, Honey"

Now that you know how to love children

Why do you forget that your parents loved you?

The bitter well can't offer sweet water

The brambles can't bear grape

The thorn bush can't grow wormwood.

Will there be retribution for evil or for good?

There is a cart ahead

There will be a trace behind

The unfilial will continue to bear unfilial

(Anhui Academy of Social Science 1985)

While the original charm of the *cong* is lost in English, we are still able to recognize filial love in this Christian gospel. Christian love requires one to love all people including, of course, one's parents. In Chinese philosophy there is no assumption that children will naturally return that love. This creates a potential problem and is the reason so much attention is given to the command to love one's parents. For if children can not love their parents, how can they love all people? The Chinese might point to the plight of old people in Christian America to emphasize the importance of their emphasis on the love of parents. For these reasons with good, old-fashioned Chinese sensitivity, Christians in China often equate love with filial piety.

CONCLUSION

Until now we have focused on the ideological factors which impede the development of Christianity in China, but we would be remiss if we left the impression that only cultural differences account for the difference in the acceptance of Christianity and Marxism in China. Clearly there are some social forces at work too. One social factor is the historical centralization of power in China since the Qin Dynasty (221 B.C. - 1911 A.D.). The Emperor (known as "the Son of Heaven") and his bureaucratic apparatus ruled with a legitimacy derived from "heaven" in which the Emperor had absolute power and did not need the authorization of a church. The centralized state was so powerful that any serious (and even frivolous) threat to the Emperor's power was eliminated; therefore, every religion had to submit to the power of the Emperor as absolute ruler.

This patriarchal feudal system formed the social base of Chinese ethics. The three cardinal guides (ruler guides subject, father guides son, and husband guides wife) and the five constant virtues (benevolence, righteousness, propriety, wisdom, and fidelity) were derived in support of the patriarchal order. The whole society was organized around the idolatry of heaven, earth, ruler, parent, and teacher and supported by moral commitments to loyalty and filial piety. While it is also true that Europe was long ruled by patriarchal monarchs, moral authority was separated from the state and located in the Church, so that in Europe morality and state power were divided while in China they were one and the same. This division between morality and state power became even more separated in the form of Protestantism which posited the idea that all people are equal before God--an obvious problem for the tightly governed, patriarchal societies of China.

Since the kings of Europe had to share power with the Church, the Roman Pontiff assumed a position of secular power as well as religious. Given the secular power of the Church, the rulers of China adopted a cautionary attitude toward Christianity. They had to proceed in a manner which would safeguard their rule and limit Christianity. Kang Xi, an Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, adopted such a cautionary attitude towards Catholicism when he accepted the Western calendar but then drove the Christian missionaries out of China when the Pope prohibited the Chinese Christians from offering sacrifices to their ancestors. While Kang Xi was willing to change technical matters, the moment he felt an attack on his power, he eliminated that

threat. This emphasis on patriarchal social relations within a centralized social and political system created a problem for Christianity in China. For this reason, Christianity in China has been limited to those realms that did not challenge the social basis of political power.

A word or two might also be mentioned about the lack of a developed commodity economy in China. Europe's development of a commodity economy following the Reformation has created an even larger discrepancy between Protestantism and traditional Chinese culture. While there was a capitalist economy created during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), it never was able to develop fully. This failure to develop a commodity economy has, of course, continued under the present Chinese regime. The failure to develop a commodity economy made China infertile ground for Protestantism which seems more compatible with capitalism than with China's small-scale peasant feudalism or with socialism.

We believe that these social factors are important in the relatively unsuccessful attempts to bring Christianity to China, but even without these factors the lack of compatibility between Christianity and traditional Chinese culture would still make Christianity an unlikely social success in China. On the other hand, Marxism even though a western idea, contains many crucial similarities to traditional Chinese culture and even with the inevitable ebbs and flows of political power is likely to remain a powerful force in the culture and daily lives of the people within the Great Wall.

NOTES

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