

**Preface to Tseng Shaokai 曾劭愷 (ed.), *Wenhua xuanjiao* 文化宣教 (“Cultural Mission”), Jidujiao wenyi chubanshe 基督教文艺出版社, Taiwan (planned for summer 2023)**

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## I.

When we use the term “Jidujiao” (Christianity) in its wider sense as encompassing Catholic, Orthodox, and ancient “eastern” churches, we can say it entered China in the seventh century, as everyone knows, but only one millennium later, in the seventeenth century, was it able to become rooted in the Chinese soil, and its survival would no longer be dependent on the benevolence or antipathy of a ruler (for example, Wuzong of Tang Dynasty, reigned 840–846 AD, tried and did rather successfully eradicate the Christian communities), nor would the Christian faith disappear with the end of a dynasty, as happened at the end of the Mongol era (1368), but not with the fall of the Ming Dynasty in 1644. This great permanence was hard to achieve, and one may ask, aside from the grace of God, by what kind of human efforts was it possible?

The answer is the “cultural mission” represented by Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) and other Jesuit missionaries, who were able to gain a foothold in the Ming Empire which was then in a state of self-isolation. Those missionaries could survive the invasion of the foreign Manchus in 1644 which brought about radical changes, and they even managed to gain a position in the royal court of the Manchus, the sworn enemy of the Ming Dynasty. Even more, the missionaries were able to continue their work and spread the faith also when the favorable attitude of Emperor Kangxi (reigned 1662–1722) changed to the opposite, and during the cruel suppressions of his successors; they could ensure that the number of believers in China did not drop until the mid-nineteenth century when Protestant missionaries commenced their work in China and the ban on Christianity was lifted. ... They were able to achieve all this because they took the “cultural mission” as their missionary policy.

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It is generally accepted that Matteo Ricci and his companions were well acquainted with the most advanced achievements of western culture and science in that era, and they were good at putting their knowledge into practice; they also seriously tried to understand the best elements of Chinese culture, and so they learned a lot from Chinese scholars in a humble way, which enabled them to become profound mediators and outstanding translators between the cultures of the east and the west ... . Of course, they did not give up the “announcement of the gospel” because of their “cultural mission,” otherwise Ricci would not have produced his book *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven* (*Tianzhu shi yi* 天主實義), and there would not have been any converts like Xu Guangqi and later so many pious and devout Christians on all social levels, including members of the imperial family and peasants in the rural areas. Nor was their manifest love for China a cunning trick (as some Chinese scholars say), otherwise the following historical events and many similar ones would have been impossible: Fr. Johann Adam Schall von Bell (1592–1666), a German, produced hundreds of cannons for the Chinese government and made the accurate lunar calendar for China, even though he was falsely accused and imprisoned; Fr. Andreas Wolfgang Koffler (1603 or 1612–1651), an Austrian, sacrificed his life in the effort to bring in a troop to save the defeated Ming Dynasty; Fr. Michał Boym (c. 1612–1659) from Poland died in a foreign land because he strove to fulfill the orders of the Ming court.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Manchu government formally protected Christianity, but the local officials and scholars opposed the faith, and in this hostile environment Christian communities began a precarious growth. Gradually they were even able to develop an ever deepening influence on nearly all aspects of Chinese society. The basis of these achievements was of course the “grassroot evangelization” done by missionaries in poor and remote rural areas among the men and women in the villages, for example the work of men like Hudson Taylor (1832–1905), but they also owed very much to the “cultural mission” among the city dwellers, among the scholars and officials, exemplified by the work of Timothy Richard (1845–1919).

In the first half of the twentieth century when there were much more open conditions in China, Christians were still a very small minority in the Chinese population, however, they did not only spread the gospel faith but also were able to cause an unprecedented and far-reaching profound transformation of the whole society through their efforts in health care and medical service, public and higher education, improvement of living habits and mores, press and publications, and so on. This meant great progress in terms of social life and spiritual life. Looking back at those years we are really obliged to express our gratitude to and admiration for men like Young John Allen (1836–1907), John Leighton Stuart (1876–1962) and innumerable other pioneers of the “cultural mission”! Of course, one must not overlook that in those decades there emerged many Chinese exponents of “cultural mission,” outstanding scholars like Ma Xiangbo (1840–1939), Wu Leichuan (1870–1944), Zhao Zichen (1888–1979) and Xie Fuya (1892–1991).

As everyone knows, the strained environment of Mainland China from the 1950s to the 1970s led to serious shrinking, even dying, of Christian activities, and all the churches entered a state of “hibernation.” From the 1980s to the 1990s, Christianity was allowed a revival and some development, which was mainly visible in rural churches which coura-

geously stepped out of their underground existence and grew up rapidly. Around the turn of the century, the more obvious and important was the growth of Christian communities in the cities and especially the “house churches” which bubbled up and developed gradually. Another fact which should not be ignored but is less well known is that the emergence of city churches with more members having higher education was a side product of the movement of translation, research, publication and spread of Christian knowledge, which was known as “Christian culture fever” in those years. It also had invisible but deep relations to the search for a way out of the spiritual predicament. Even if one must say that most of the scholars involved in it were not Christians and were not following an agenda of “cultural mission,” but seeing from an objective viewpoint, their work had the effects of a cultural evangelization.

## II.

When I read the first article of this collection, an inspiring essay by Dr. Shehe 舍禾, I felt that it was a corroboration of my considerations concerning the significance of “cultural mission.” However, my first feeling was deep admiration, as I was profoundly moved.

As to the many profounder questions related to “cultural mission,” Pastor Chen Zongqing 陈宗清 has given a very detailed account in his “introduction” to this collection, which I not only appreciate very much but which also inspired me to recommend this book to the readers.

Of course, the main reason why I want to recommend the collection is its content: the Chinese church leaders and intellectual champions in their respective fields of theological knowledge have contributed outstanding essays covering almost all aspects of this big issue, including not only conclusive reviews of the past practice and history of “cultural mission,” but also creative visions of the theory and future of cultural evangelization! I believe that any reader will agree with me after a short perusal of its table of contents. Concerning these issues, the present volume can open up many layers of reflection and many aspects of related matters, and here is the exactly irreplaceable value of this collection.

## III.

Anthropological, archeological and historical researches have revealed that human beings have been creating “culture” already for tens of thousands of years, but that they have created “civilization” only since several thousands of years ago. The two concepts are very different though they are closely related to each other. Culture is a specific way of life peculiar to human beings and different from all other living beings. Civilization is a whole system of political, economic and social institutions and other mores, emerging from a certain culture and pertaining in a certain region.

Chinese culture is the specific way of life of the Han people and the assimilated parts of the way of life of the surrounding peoples. Chinese civilization is the whole system of political, economic and social institutions and other mores originating in Chinese culture and belonging to Chinese territory.

Recently I have been pondering on some basic issues of “Chinese culture” (*Zhonghua wenhua* 中华文化 which should be called *Huaxia wenhua* 华夏文化, to use a term which has less ethnic and geographic connotations). What are the true connections of this culture to the “Chinese civilization” (*Zhongguo wenming* 中国文明) which has been actualized on Chinese territory or mainland for several millennia?

A friend invited me to give a speech to a group of Chinese Christians (most of them are quite proud of “Chinese culture” which is often confused with “Chinese civilization”), and she wrote me two questions as the speech topic suggested to me (each of the six speakers was assigned a topic concerning Chinese culture): “Chinese culture: What is its spirit? Where does its soul return to?” (*Zhonghua wenhua: linghun he zai?* 中华文化, 灵魂何在? *Hun gui he chu?* 魂归何处?)

The first question is very clear: What is the spirit of Chinese culture? But the second question must have a hidden premise: The soul has already gone, or it will soon go (leave), only then can it go to or return to some place. Only if the body has died or will soon die, can one ask how it will be reborn! Therefore, I changed my topic in this way: “What is the spirit of Chinese culture? Where will the soul of Chinese civilization return to?”, as in the use of these metaphors, Chinese culture or *Huaxia* culture should be the soul (i.e. *hun* 魂 in Chinese, *psyche* in Greek), Chinese civilization should be the body (i.e. *ti* 体 in Chinese, *soma* in Greek), and both should be different from the spirit (i.e. *ling* 灵 in Chinese, *pneuma* in Greek).

Now that many elements of “Chinese culture” or *Huaxia* culture are still preserved among the Chinese throughout the world, and some elements are alive in the cultures of Japan, Korea, Vietnam and some other nations, therefore, the thing which has died or will soon die is not Chinese culture. Then, what is it? The answer can only be “Chinese civilization.” As we all know, cultures can start, develop, spread and get renewed; civilizations can be born, grow, decline and die – many cultural traditions of ancient Egypt, Greece and Rome have been preserved even until today, but their civilization systems have died since long ago. The civilizations of Mesopotamia, of Maya, Inca and Aztecs, and most of the thirty odd civilizations enlisted in Arnold Toynbee’s *A Study of History* have died or disappeared many centuries ago. According to Toynbee, most civilizations have died because of their inner corruption, making them unable to respond to challenges from inside or from outside. The cause of their death was always some kind of “suicide,” rather than some kind of “murder.” In other words, a civilization is like a human being: going from birth through aging and disease to death is very normal. However, the decline of a civilization is a process of loss of spirit.

Many people see the civilization of India as one of the old great civilizations which can be compared with the Chinese civilization. Indian civilization has spread Hinduism and Buddhism to many parts of the world but, according to my observations, the old Indian civilization, built on the caste system and including corresponding political, economic and social institutions, has died or will soon die, because it is incompatible with the present democratic politics, market economy and egalitarian society (where even a person from the lowest caste can be elected president) in India. And in the similar way, the old Chinese civilization, which has spread some cultural elements of Confucianism, Buddhism and

Daoism to many parts of the world, can be said to be dead or at least to be moribund and facing the end! This is because Chinese civilization centered on the totalitarian power of the “Son of Heaven” (*tianzi* 天子, the emperor), with corresponding political institution (as Mao said, “hundred generations have kept the Chin’s political institution” [*bai dai jie xing Qin zhengzhi* 百代皆行秦政制]), economic institution (as *The Book of Songs* said, “All land belongs to the king” [*pu tian zhi xia mofei wang tu* 溥天之下莫非王土]), and social institution (also as *The Book of Songs* said, “All people are subjects of the king” [*shuaitu zhi bin mofei wang chen* 率土之濱莫非王臣]), and all this is in confrontation with modern civilization and with political democracy, economic freedom and social rights which are urgently needed for the life and the development of the Chinese people. This dying condition is caused by the “loss of spirit,” which is exactly what the Chinese idioms mean: “Losing one’s soul and mind” (*shi hun luo po* 失魂落魄) and “Soul flying away and mind being shattered” (*hun fei po san* 魂飞魄散)!

Any body of civilization needs to have the soul of culture, and the latter needs to have the spirit of heavenly revelation. The body of Chinese civilization originally had the soul of Chinese culture, and the soul of Chinese culture originally had the spirit of the “mandate of heaven” (*tian ming* 天命), which was what Christian theologians called the “universal revelation.” From the expression “mandate of God” (*di ming* 帝命) in the oracle bone inscriptions, through the expression “mandate of Heaven” (*tian ming*) in *The Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 诗经) and *The Book of History* (*Shujing* 书经), to the expression “God of August Heaven” (*huangtian shangdi* 皇天上帝) on the tablets in the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, countless documents show that the “spirit” (*ling* 灵) of Chinese culture was the belief in God and the “mandate received from Heaven” (*shou tian zhi ming* 受天之命).

However, around three thousand years ago, the *Rites of Zhou* (*Zhou li* 周礼) decreed that “If you are not the king you cannot offer sacrifices to God” (*bu wang bu di* 不王不禘), which meant only the “Son of Heaven” (only the king or emperor) was entitled to practice the rites to God. Then this led to an estrangement of the Chinese people from God. It also led to the evacuation of “God of heaven” who was originally a personal god; in this way the idea of God gradually became very remote, abstract, vague and empty. Furthermore, around two thousand years ago, the first emperor of the Chin Dynasty (221–207 BC, also the first of China) implemented centralized rule, becoming an autocrat with absolute totalitarian power and authority above all laws. As such a political institution, with the really absolute monarchs who were called the “Sons of Heaven” even if they were villains, has been persisting for most of the time in Chinese history, all the people finally became the “slaves” (as the Chinese word *chen*, the subject, originally means) of the rulers. Therefore, the concept of the “Son of Heaven” which was originally an empty fiction became a real supreme power and highest authority in this world, all the people could see no more “sacred” authorities other than this one, and had to subject to this power, no matter how absurd it looked. This can be compared to the genetic defect in a baby’s brain which resulted in a cancerous tumor in adulthood and affected the functioning of all organs, and the disease finally spread to the whole system of the body, causing the death of the person.

The idea of the “Son of Heaven” was originally a fictional and empty concept in Chinese culture, but surprisingly it could exert such a real and central and fatal influence on Chi-

nese civilization! This shows how vital the pervasive impact of culture could be, whether it be the positive impact of good and beneficial elements or the negative impact of evil and vicious elements, therefore, those who work as evangelizers must not overlook these influences. Of course, this also shows that the theme of this book has a profound significance.

Chinese culture has gradually been estranged from the belief in God for a long time. It could return to its origin and make a new start, if it prepared to receive a new Spirit and a new Mandate, that is to accept the special revelation from God, to convert to the Savior and to extol Jesus Christ, the really true “Son from Heaven”, the Son of God.

The vocation of Chinese “cultural mission” is just to help Chinese culture approach this destination.

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Chapel Hill, North Carolina

(Translator’s note: Professor He’s thesis of the gradual alienation of the Chinese people from their original belief in the personal God [Shangdi 上帝] and in Heaven [Tian 天] is very close to the thought processes of Matteo Ricci, and in conversation Professor He also confirmed this affinity, he is aware of it. Professor He has also repeatedly stated this view in previous papers).