# What Should Theology Do While Lives Are in Mire and on Fire?

## A Suggestion and an Attempt to Address the Present Situation

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## Introduction

In January of 2020, when the Covid-19 pandemic was beginning in the city of Wuhan but had not yet spread outside China, I promised to give a keynote speech on invitation to a conference on Christian studies in Los Angeles. For this purpose, I wrote an essay titled "'Becoming All Things to All People' and Resisting Dehumanization – Sino-Christian Theological Studies in the Context of Contemporary China."[1]

In this essay, I emphasized that a Christian spirit, namely the love of one's neighbors or the love of all people, should feature amongst the basic principles of any Sino-Christian theology. This would also require us to leave the ivory towers of scholarship and face the important issues head on – those difficult problems that concern the Chinese people today, e.g., religious-cultural questions, political-economic problems, and the social-moral crisis linked to everyday life. Addressing these three clusters of questions, a contemporary Sino-Christian theology should endeavor to research in the areas of "cultural theology," "political theology," and "moral theology."

On March 6, 2022, ten days after the beginning of the war in Ukraine, I wrote a public letter entitled "What should China do while lives are in mire and on fire?," appealing to the Chinese government to fulfill its promise to guarantee the safety of Ukraine, to use its influence on Russia and to mediate for peace between the two countries.

On July 1, 2022, several weeks after China's Covid policies had lifted the lockdown on Shanghai City, I again faced the question for contemporary Chinese theology at a confer-

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1 This conference was later held online in June 2020. My essay was translated into English by Leopold Leeb and included in He Guanghu, *Sino-Christian Theology: Born in Sorrow, Grown in Grief*, edition cathay, vol. 77, Bochum – Freiburg: Projekt Verlag 2020, pp. 245-282.

ence in this field held in Yale. We must, I stressed, consider the following question: "What should theology do while lives are in mire and on fire?"

The idiom "lives in mire and on fire" (*sheng ling tu tan* 生灵涂炭) means that people are in an extremely terrible situation – they are, so to say, caught in a quagmire or atop a fire devil and unable to escape. The metaphor aptly addresses the situation in a war or a disaster.

Ukraine has been an independent and democratic country for thirty years, and although it has witnessed political quarrels and conflicts, its social life was generally peaceful. Now, the second largest country in Europe, with forty million inhabitants, has suddenly become a field of "mire and fire": It is subjected to bombing and missile attacks; countless of its families have been separated; men and women, old and young have been killed; a fourth of the population has become homeless refugees ... And such a disaster has been wrought just through the thoughts, desires, and decisions of one man living a thousand miles away from Kiev!

For nearly 150 years, Shanghai has been an internationalized metropolis. As a center of economic prosperity, her social civilization, living standards, and convenience long held a leading position in China, and even counted foremost in the world. Even during the Covid-19 pandemic, which caused a world-wide recession, Shanghai's people could remain proud of their city's achievements. Suddenly and overnight, however, 24 million people in this "Pearl of the East" found themselves trapped in a horrible "quagmire" – all inhabitants were prohibited from leading their everyday life: forbidden to take vehicles, to go shopping, even to walk out of their residence or to see a doctor. Hunger, depressions, suicides, even deaths due to lack of first aid and medication resulted, along with countless other tragedies beyond description. Parents and children, the aged and the sick were forced to separate, and countless residences were invaded by force for "sterilizing"! ... And all of this was wrought just through the thoughts, desires, and decisions from a place a thousand miles away from Shanghai!

Only a few months earlier, nobody in the world, except perhaps the few decision makers, could have imagined the cruelty and absurdity of either of these two events. Yet both of them happened!

Of course, in the long history of humanity, innumerable wars and plagues have snatched away countless human lives. The thoughts and ideas in the head of a single man have again and again led to a tragic turn in the lives of millions of people. However, after the Europeans had experienced the disasters of two world wars, they reflected on the lessons from these sufferings, gave up their hatreds of neighboring nations, and established institutions for peace. War, it was thought, was a thing of the past. After all this, a peaceful nation that had surrendered all nuclear weapons was suddenly attacked and invaded by the largest country on earth, the state with the second largest military machine, the brother nation "of the same culture and of the same race," shocking many neighboring nations and sending them scrambling to protect themselves ... Fear and horror abounded.

Only one month later, when the first wave had not yet subsided, another wave approached: After the overly strict epidemic control sparked chaos and incited popular disaffection in Xi'an and other cities in China, and when all other countries had opened

up due to the less harmful Omicron virus dominating the epidemic situation, Shanghai, whose dwellers had felt proud of the rationality of their city's "precise prevention policy," was suddenly and unexpectedly thrown into strict isolation and severe control, accompanied by a humanitarian disaster of unprecedented scale, surpassing the cases of Wuhan and Xi'an. This event caused innumerable sad stories and disastrous tragedies. … All these things are truly beyond imagination!

When all of this was happening, and even during the process itself,[2] we had to consider the following questions: What should a theological conference talk about? What should theologians talk about? We are reminded of the words "Can one still write poetry after Auschwitz?" and may ask: "Can one still write theology after Ukraine and Shanghai?"

We cannot act as though these things never happened! We cannot remain silent when facing all these tragedies! We must not continue to live in our ivory towers, as if theology were not at all related to the sufferings of human beings!

To do so would be to betray the "greatest commandment" of Christ – to betray the letter and spirit of texts like the "Lord's Prayer" and the "Letter to the Romans." To do so would be to simply confirm that the indifference of the people in China and the world toward Christianity is justified. We would be digging theology's grave, we would be burying its future!

In the present situation, if theology wants to continue to be Christian theology, to serve the peoples in China and in the world, and to express the encompassing love of God, it must explore what has led to "lives in mire and fire." It must reflect on the causes of this situation, and it must consider the pressing problems facing today's world. Therefore, we must seriously research the following three basic, critical, and urgent topics/themes, which can be subsumed under cultural theology, political theology, and moral theology:

a. Problem of nationalities: a comparative theology of nationalities.
b. Problem of institutions: a comparative theology of institutions.
c. Problem of human natures: a comparative theology of human natures.

The main cause leading to the mire and fire of the Russo-Ukrainian War (and many other similar wars in history and today) is the different narratives of their nationalities for Ukrainians and Russians, and their different ideas of the nationalities relating to the narratives.

The main cause leading to the situation of the people in Shanghai (and in China mainland and Taiwan, as well as other countries) is their different political, economic, and social institutions.

The greatest, deepest, and perhaps unsolvable problem facing the world is the differences among human natures, which are mixed to different degrees with demonic natures,

2 When this essay was written and the "Third Conference on Chinese Theologies" opened on July 1 at Yale Divinity School, the Ukrainian war was ongoing, and the lockdown of Shanghai was changed from general control to the control of certain regions. In September, when this essay was not yet finalized, the Russian army used thousands of bombs and missiles to destroy Ukrainian civil facilities, and had killed many civilians, although suffering great loss amongst its own soldiers. At the same time, the lockdown of cities or of houses already affected at least 300 million urban residents in China (covering many provinces, cities, districts, and counties), and the humanitarian disaster was still expanding.

and are origins of the creation of different narratives and their related ideas, and the establishment and implementation of different institutions.

Therefore, theologians should do comparative research from a Christian perspective on the different nationalities, institutions, and human natures (including demonic natures), describing and analyzing them, and providing some conclusions and suggestions. This is what I mean with the terms "comparative theology of nationalities," "comparative theology of institutions," and "comparative theology of human natures."

In the following paragraphs, I will attempt to outline the first topic/theme, i.e., that of nationalities, and to give a rudimentary conclusion and suggestion.

## I. A Comparative Theology of Nationalities

A theology of culture should also do research on the issue of nationality, and a theology of politics must do the same.

As everyone knows, the war in Ukraine is directly connected to the political cultures of Ukraine and Russia, and to the relationship between the two nations, to the understandings of this relationship in the minds of the populations and in the minds of their leaders. Beginning with "Kiev Rus," the two nations and the two states had a history of unity and separation, of love and hatred, which has lasted for a thousand years. In the last thirty years, however, these two different tendencies have gradually fuelled antagonism: On the one side, there was an effort to "escape from control," whereas on the other, there was the wish to "keep control," and the two trends can be shown very clearly.

At first sight, the lockdown in Shanghai has nothing to do with views of nationality. But as this event is a climax of many other similar cases in China, one should consider the general reaction and enduring attitude of the Chinese people towards the governmental policy. One then finds that the matter is, indeed, intrinsically linked to the question of nationality. The Chinese media has many slogans with nationalist colors, and nationalist propaganda such as "The virus originated in the USA" and "Some people introduced the virus from abroad" helps spread a confrontational attitude towards the West. During the pandemic, narratives such as "Western governments did nothing, whereas the Chinese government exhibited great responsibility" and "The American policies failed, whereas China was most successful" were widely circulated among the Chinese. The propagation of these ideas certainly helped to maintain the strict control and lockdowns.

Therefore, theology, including Sino-Christian theology, must explore, in the areas of cultural and political theologies, the problems of nationality or of "different nationalities"; it must research, from a Christian perspective, the relationships between nations and the ideas of nationality; and it must produce, on the basis of Christian faith, a judgment and a suggestion on the question of nationality.

Since the characteristics of the different nations are so manifold, their relationships are ever changing, and the ideas of nationality vary in different situations (as the two momentous events mentioned above can show). We should thus research different ideas of nationality as they are found in different nations, not only in one nation. I have therefore called this research "theology of nationalities." And since this research must adopt a com-

parative methodology, even if it seeks to arrive at general conclusions, it must first make comparisons between different nations – I thus want to call it "comparative theology of nationalities."

## II. A Clarification of the Position of the "Nation"

A starting point for this kind of research may be the question of the position of the nation, related to the idea of "nation" itself, amongst the manifold large communities of human beings in the world. In an age when the concept of the nation has undergone many changes, and its position has been confused with many other human communities, the first step of this research must be to clarify both the concept and the position.

In the traditional understanding, which reflected historical realities, a "nation" means a group of people, smaller or larger, where the individuals are bound by blood ties, live in the same region, have the same ways of social administration and material production or distribution (i.e., the political and economic institutions), observe the same customs and habits, practice the same religion and culture (way of life), use the same language, and claim the same nationality or state affiliation.

In other words, the individual person of any nation becomes a member of the nation by way of these ten factors, which create close bonds or a kind of unity: blood relationship, geographical region, politics, economy, habits, customary rules, religion, culture, language, and nationality claim.

However, the developments in human history and the vacillations of social conditions will always change these basic factors. The modernization process of the world is constantly speeding up the transformation of the ten elements, and this is challenging the traditional concepts of the nation and confusing its position. All this is forcing us to make a new appraisal and a clarification.

Firstly, the easy transportation, fast transmission of information, and great changes in social and political conditions have led to large-scale migrations and peoples from different nations living together, even to great increase of inter-racial marriages. Thus, the blood-ties and geographical boundaries of nationalities are becoming blurred. (The younger generations are getting accustomed to both migration and inter-racial marriages.) Secondly, although there is a certain reverse of the general trend, the long-term tendency is a mutual assimilation of political and economic life, especially the trend to globalization, which accompanies modernization. This has already blurred the political and economic distinctions and will continue to do so. (Isolationist policies are often only the work of a few rulers and certainly not the wish of most of the peoples.) In the third place, the ways of modern material and spiritual life have been accelerating the transformation of traditional customs and habits, and thus have already blurred the distinctions between different nations. (Many phenomena of reviving old traditions are in fact only a last spurt of vitality before the final collapse.) In the fourth place, the pluralization of religion and culture within one nation, and the changes of religions and the merging of cultures between different peoples, have been blurring the religious and cultural boundaries between nations. (It has become fashionable to change one's denomination or religion, and the interest in

exotic cultures has become rather widespread.) Therefore, the last border lines between nations, which are also the most clearly defined and the most permanent marks defining nationalities, are the traditional language and the state affiliation/identity claim. At least this will be the case for increasing numbers of people.

Even in the case of language and state affiliation, there are obvious changes today. Firstly, in the past, the national language was basically the "mother tongue"; today it has ever more frequently changed to the "habitual language" of persons. In the past, the two were usually the same, but that is not necessarily the case today, especially for the second generation of immigrants (or for those who must use the "standardized national language" [*guoyu* 国语]). Secondly, in the past, the state affiliation was based on the internal consent of a person, but today it is much more based on the external decision of authorities. Passports and other such documents increasingly emphasize a political or administrative relationship, state affiliation, or citizenship, rather than cultural and natural ties. For example, the passports of different nations do not show the ethnic affiliation of the holders.

Facing all of these profound changes, we must reconsider and clarify many questions, especially the changing concept of the nation and its relative position. The concept seems to be becoming more simplified today, meaning merely a group of people defined only by use of the same habitual language and by holding the same state affiliation. The manifold natural characteristics and cultural and historical features of nations are gradually becoming excluded, and acquired factors (the habitual language in place of the mother tongue and the state affiliation / nationality claim are man-made) as well as political affiliations are increasingly important. For those nations that are in a culturally or politically disadvantaged position, this is an enormous threat.

Therefore, we must on the one hand accept that the national characteristics are increasingly less important for daily life, and on the other hand we must be aware that the plurality of nations and cultures is endangered. However, some basic conditions for preserving a nation's characteristics, e.g., the standardization of the mother tongue as a national language, and the change of a nation's affiliation into a state's affiliation, need a certain political basis (e.g., the nation's independence and sovereignty, or the nation-state entity). Many related objective facts[3] and the situation of the world, including Ukraine, will tell us that the protection of national characteristics is mainly dependent on national independence and autonomy in political terms.[4] Therefore, the relationships between nations, especially the relationships between dominant and weaker nations, must come to the foreground of discussion in cultural and political theory.

3 Some comparable facts are these: There are important differences in the UK's policy to the Celtic language, the US's policy to the Spanish language, and the PRC's policy to Mongolian and Uighur languages, etc., and in registration/non-registration of the population's national/ethnic origin in France, Canada, and China. However, these questions should be discussed under the theme "comparative theology of institutions."

4 In the former Soviet Union, under circumstances where the independence or autonomy of nations was not truly realized, up to a hundred languages of different nations were displaced by Russian as the official language, and the nationalities of all peoples were replaced with "Soviet." The Soviet Union even proclaimed that it had wiped out all nationalities (which it called the result of capitalism) and become the only "Soviet nation"!

Of course, concerning the position of the nation and the relationships of nations, a theological viewpoint must be rooted in the Christian faith. According to the Bible, God created all nations from one origin.[5] If all nations are equally God's created children, then their relationships should be like those of brothers and sisters. This basic principle is determined by the nature of Christianity itself, since Christianity is a universal religion, and its aim is close to what we Chinese call "*datong shijie*" 大同世界 ("a world of great unity"). However, this "great unity" (*datong* 大同) is certainly not a "monolithic" unification, but a "harmony in diversity," as described by the Chinese phrase "*he er bu tong*" 和而不同. According to the British theologian John Macquarrie (1919–2007), the Christian vision of the world's end should be a "commonwealth of free and responsible beings united in love."[6]

The word "commonwealth" used by Macquarrie had been employed for many years by the "British Commonwealth of Nations." The word points to a kind of harmony of diverse individualities on many levels. Regardless of what the British Commonwealth of Nations was like in the past and of how it has changed throughout history, today its main spirit and actual situation seem to remind us of some kind of harmonious relationship on many levels. It is a voluntary and not a forced union, a union of extremely diverse individuals (persons), towns (cities), counties (shires), provinces (states) – a union of different nations, races, and independent states. It has one monarch, but no unified government, not to mention a centralized institution.

Proceeding from all this, and in a theological perspective, we could clarify the position of the nation as following: The nation, as a free community (i.e., it has the right to join a state or to become an independent state) of free human beings created by God (i.e., they have the right to choose a habitual language and nation-state affiliation), is of equal status with other similar communities; a nation can form a state, which might be a part of a federation or commonwealth or union and thus holds a second, even third (compared with the whole humankind) level position among major kinds of human communities.

## III. An Inquiry into Nationalism

Just as many threats or dangers in the world originate in one's own self concern, so too are many dangers to the independence and development of nations and to the plurality of nations the results of nationalism, especially the extreme nationalism of a dominant nation. (The war in Ukraine is an evident example.) An inquiry into nationalism is thus an indispensable task of a comparative theology of nationalities.

If we understand nationalism as a natural concern for maintenance and promotion of the features, interests, and developments of one's own nation, it would be as universal and reasonable as other human natures. However, as a large-scaled collective phenomenon, the developments and transformations of nationalism are often very dramatic and complicated. It is both intimately related to the life of one's own nation and influential to the life of other nations, so that it needs a serious and profound discussion.

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5 "Hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." (Acts 17:26)

6 John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology*, London: SCM Press 1968, p. 359.

The nations of antique ages existed as "clans" and "tribes." Perhaps they did not have all the above-mentioned ten elements defining the nation, but they did have some, such as common blood ties, geographical regions, languages, customs, convictions, or ways of economic life. Their most evident divergence from later nations was simply their small size. Of course, we are here discussing related ideologies, what has been called "clan thinking way" or "tribalism." Even if tribalism was later seen as meaning ideas characterized by limit horizon, isolation, and backwardness, in its own age, it consisted of the natural concern for maintenance and promotion of the features, interests and developments of one's own tribe, though it was a bit vague, spontaneous, and unconscious. We can thus say that **"clan-tribalism" is nationalism in its nascent phase**.

Under some advantageous natural and historical conditions, some clans/tribes could form tribe unions, and then become "states."[7] The biggest development of this historical period was the establishment of different political institutions (such as aristocracy, monarchy, and democracy), and in different degrees the breaking through tribal borderlines (so that the struggles between governments and opposition parties within one state would often be more intense than tribal conflicts). The accompanying ideological form was literally "state-patriotism" – with no meaning, as the modern Chinese term "*guojiazhuyi*" 国家主义 or the English term "statism" possess, of "centralized totalitarianism" or "supremacy of state." However, it does have a similar meaning to modern "patriotism" – the wish to protect the special customs or ways of life in one's own state. This was most obvious in the case of the Greek poleis, which had different political institutions. And in those times, some neighboring peoples had a common origin and were similar in respect to the ten elements mentioned above, so that in modern discourse they were called a nation. For example, the peoples living in the central plain of China during the Zhou period were or are called the "Chinese nation" (*Huaxia minzu* 华夏民族), and the Greeks living in different poleis in the classical age were or are called the "Greek nation." Related to this, a natural and reasonable "nationalism" was then often expressed as cultural identification or political alliance, namely a collective "state-patriotism" in the form of association or cooperation. This was clearly expressed by words such as "the distinctions between barbarians and Huaxia" (*yi xia zhi bie* 夷夏之别), as well as by the actions of Chinese "alliances of the monarchs" during the Spring and Autumn Period, and of Greeks during the "Persian-Greek War." We can thus say that **"state-patriotism" is nationalism in its fixing phase**.

Under certain historical conditions, some states could obtain a dominant position or hegemony among different states, and even develop into "empires." No matter whether or not the ruler is called "emperor," an empire controls several or even numerous states or nations, with a central government. The Persian Empire, Roman Empire, Chin (Qin) Empire, Han Empire, and Mongol Empire all qualify. What we call "imperialism" are the theories and practices/actions that served to achieve control of (or simply to unify, conquer, or oppress) other states/nations. On the surface, hegemonism and imperialism exceed

7 In the Chinese language, the very popular word for "state" is "*guojia*" 国家, but this word is made up of two characters with very different meanings, namely "guo" 国 (state) and "jia" 家 (household, family). Since the word "guojia" confuses the public and the private sphere, it is also confusing the basic principle that the family is the basis of the state. I prefer to use another word for "state" in the Chinese version: "*bangguo*" 邦国.

nationalism, but in fact they are brought about by the excessive nationalism of dominant nations. What we call "extreme" or "excessive" arises when the aims and methods chosen to care for, protect, and promote the characteristics, interests, and developments of one's own nation exceed the "general and reasonable" extent, so that one not only demands the autonomy/independence and equal status of one's nation to other nations, but also claims superiority over, or priority to, those nations, and resorts to force, threat, or violence in order to achieve the aims of one's nation or its rulers. We can thus say that **"hegemony-imperialism" is nationalism in its excessive expansion phase**.

The Western Roman Empire collapsed due to inner and outer conflicts, including the intrusion of barbarian tribes. The Eastern Roman Empire declined and disappeared due to the attacks of powerful enemies and internal weaknesses. The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation never exerted a lasting and effective imperial control. Throughout the whole medieval period of European history, hegemony-imperialism was therefore always weak and ineffective – it could never last long. This actually cleared away the obstacles to the growth of a new kind of nationalism in Europe. This nationalism demanded that the nation be congruent with the state, namely that the nation should be independent in a unified region and should establish an autonomous political body, namely a state possessing sovereignty. After the 14th century, the social, economic, cultural, and political developments of Europe provided the actual conditions for such a demand, and thus there gradually emerged the political bodies of "nation-states" that continue to prosper today. After the Peace of Westphalia in the 17th century, an international system gradually emerged based on sovereign states as the basic units, and this, too, has lasted to the present time. Compared with the excessive nationalism of the hegemony-imperialist form, this kind of nationalism is evidently natural, mature, and reasonable. We can thus say that **"sovereign-nationalism" is nationalism in its mature and stable phase**.

In the following centuries, the more dominant European nation-states – such as Spain, France, Britain, Turkey, Germany, and Russia – had attempted to develop different kinds of hegemony or imperialism when their state power reached a climax. In Asia, Japan developed a kind of imperialism that was somewhat similar to European models, possibly because Japan adopted the policy of "leaving Asia, joining Europe." In comparison with this, two other cases should be analyzed, which diverged strongly from European or Western style imperialism. One was the surprising expansion, loose inner relationship, and quick disintegration of the Mongolian Empire. The other was the gradual consolidation, repeated disintegration, and repeated reconstruction of the Chinese Empire. In any case, a model from which we can learn something about the overarching tendency of history may be the decline or fall of Western hegemony-imperialism after two world wars, and its radical transformation. This hegemony-imperialism was a kind of excessive and expansive nationalism, and such nationalisms of different nations were bound to clash with each other and ultimately lead to destructive and fatal wars. The most important lesson humankind could learn from two world wars was that any nationalism must break through its own limitation, or at least that humankind must radically give up any excessively expanding nationalism!

Many European statesmen and stateswomen have accepted this lesson. With the support of the majority of peoples in all European countries, and through many years of step-by-step and persistent efforts, they have finally realized an unprecedented thing, which was a fantasy dream only a few decades earlier: the establishment of the great union – the "European Union." Most European nations opted for membership. The European Union is on a level above the autonomous political bodies of the different nation-states, but it has not reached the level of a global association, such as the United Nations, which should embrace all nation-states on the earth (an ideal the UN itself has far from reached). The idea and system of the European Union resembles the federalism that has been a political reality for the West. The USA is typical of federalism, although it is an exceptional case in world history. Besides this, since the European Union embraces political bodies of greater historical and cultural diversity, European federalism can be seen as a kind of upgraded federalism, which we may call "unionism."

Federalism has been well established in Europe, North America, and Oceania. It is also in the process of being practiced in some regions of Asia, Africa, and Latin America (such as Japan, South Africa, or Brazil). One of its important features is that it breaks through the limitations of nationalism – federalism is even practiced in Malaysia with its history of conflicting ethnic groups and in South Africa where problems of tribalism were rampant. Federalism and unionism have already become a beneficial development of world politics. Addressing the theme under discussion, we can say that **"federal-unionism" is a nationalism that overcomes its own isolation and breaks through its limitations**.[8]

Seen from a Christian perspective, all past forms of nationalism were beset by grave shortcomings; only the "federal-unionist" form is an ideal model of the relationships among nations, and thus gives a reasonable and desirable direction for nationalism's development.

Firstly, as shown above, Christianity claims that all nations on earth are created by God "from one origin."[9] Thus the relationships between the different nations should be like those between brothers and sisters: They should be free, autonomous, independent of each other, and at the same time intimate, mutually supportive, and helpful. Only when the nations of the world are associated with each other according to the pattern of "federal-unionism" – keeping freedom, independence, and sovereignty, as well as caring for the whole and being associated into one body – will the essence of their relationship be in accordance with the possession of a common origin. Only in this way can we finally walk toward a global commonwealth, where the diverse characteristics and space for development of all nations are preserved. This is the only direction for further development of nationalism in line with Christian principles.

Secondly, Christ placed "loving one's neighbor" and "loving others like oneself" at the core of God's commandments.[10] Christian teachings thus oppose any kind of "clan-tribal-

8 Of course, historical developments are often disorderly and illogical. For example, on the surface, the unionism of the Soviet Union ("The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics") regressed due to its failure. However, the cause was that its unionism was not true, as its fifteen "union subjects" never had sovereignty – they were not real "subjects" – meaning that Soviet Union was in fact an empire with centralized totalitarian rule.

9 Acts 17:26.

10 For the Old Testament, see Lev 19:18; for the New Testament, see Mt 22:34-40, Rom 13:9, Gal 5:14, James 2:8, etc.

ism" that harms the neighbor, any collective narcissism of "state-patriotism," any arbitrary bullying of "hegemony-imperialism," and any collective egoism of "sovereign-nationalism." Although Christian churches at certain times misunderstood these relationships and betrayed the principles of their own faith, although they committed wrongs and made mistakes, in sum one can say that all the above forms of nationalism do not conform with the Christian spirit of "loving one's neighbor" and "loving others like oneself."

Thirdly, according to Christ's teachings, all Christians wish that the will of God "be done on earth as it is in Heaven."[11] God sent Christ down to the earth to save humankind from sins. Therefore, the spirit of Christianity determines that it must oppose the increasingly sinful "evils" of selfish nationalism. All forms of nationalism prior to the "federal-unionism" described above were flawed by the sinful nature of humanity. They helped to advance collective sins, have already brought about countless disasters, and are presently still bringing about even more tragedies (as we can see today in the Ukrainian War and in the Covid pandemic). They may lead to unprecedented, gigantic disasters that humanity may prove unable to bear (such as a hot nuclear war)!

All this leads us to the following question to be discussed.

## IV. A Critique of Nationalism

The essence of nationalism is a collective egoism, and this results in the support of the majority of people in a certain nation (nationalism is always the nationalism "of a certain nation," and is in confrontation with the nationalism of other nations).[12] Nationalism thus serves one human group or nation, but is placed among other groups or nations, and therefore necessarily meets the restriction and opposition of some other nations; furthermore, it will encounter the restriction and opposition of an absolutely larger group, namely the whole of mankind.[13] In sum, the nation's nature and position determine the intrinsic contradictions of nationalism as follows:

A. Unification and separation: The care, protection, and promotion of the characteristics, interests, and developments of a nation through nationalism will advance that nation's inner identification and unification, but they will simultaneously separate that nation from other nations and create antagonism. These two opposite tendencies mutually reinforce each other. The first tendency is beneficial for that nation and promotes its development, but the latter tendency is harmful for that nation and for the whole of humankind and may impede its progress.

B. Cohesion and expansion: Nationalism by nature enhances the inner cohesion and solidarity of the respective nation, but under certain conditions, it will lead that nation to develop outwardly and expand, and thus lead to conflicts with other nations. These two opposite tendencies are also mutually reinforcing, but they have beneficial as well

11 See Mt 6:10.

12 Perhaps the history of the relationship between the nationalisms of India and Pakistan, the two countries that once fought for independence together, may be the best explanation of this point.

13 The recent invasion of Ukraine by Russia was opposed and condemned by most UN members and faced sanction from the international community. This may serve as an illustration of this point.

as harmful effects on the respective nations, and the latter tendency is an obstacle to the development of all humanity.

C. Independence and hegemony: The nature of nationalism encourages the respective nation to shake off the control of other nations, and to realize independence if the conditions allow it; but under certain conditions it could lead a nation to hegemony and to control of other nations. The former tendency will naturally be beneficial for that nation, if it succeeds, but the latter tendency will be harmful for that nation while it will trigger conflicts with other nations, and so it may bring disaster to that nation and to the whole of humanity.

All these intrinsic contradictions show that nationalism can bring harmony as well as conflict to humanity's social life. It could bring about harmony within one nation, and it could create conflict between nations – as is more evident in the age when nations come much closer to each other. This little world has become a "global village," and the small and large nations which mutually rely on each other have become one "community." Accordingly, the positive effects of nationalism are decreasing, whereas its negative effects are increasing day by day.

History shows that whether nationalism produces positive or negative effects depends on whether it contains itself within reasonable limits and remains a moderate nationalism, or whether it expands and inflates itself to an unreasonable degree and turns into excessive nationalism. The former only demands an equal position or equal rights with other nations, including the right of independence and self-governing, but the latter demands privileges or a position superior to other nations, even the power to exploit and control them. In our age, namely an age of modern civilization, it also depends on whether the methods that nationalism chooses to use to achieve its aims are reasonable. A reasonable aim should be achieved only with a reasonable method, which first of all means a peaceful and non-violent one. After all, being civilized means to control and limit one's own actions.[14]

In fact, moderate nationalism with reasonable aims and civilized methods does not obstruct the peaceful coexistence of different nations. It is excessive nationalism with extraordinary aims (ones often expressed in magnificent terms and presented as a great narrative) and with unprincipled methods (often covered up but finally unable to be concealed) that will frequently bring about tragedy for the nation concerned, for neighboring nations, and even for many other nations. Sometimes it will not only create a "clash of civilizations" (as Samuel Huntington's book warned), but also transform a "conflict within a civilization" (like the one in Ukraine triggered by Putin) into the destruction of a civilization, even into the opposite of civilization!

14 One of the Chinese scriptures, *Book of Changes* (*Yi Jing* 易经), describes this with the phrase "Civilization based on limitation is the human phenomenon" (*wen ming yi zhi, ren wen ye* 文明以止, 人文也). We can see that in a state or nation, some groups want to separate, and others want to unite. This is very common in history; but in modern times, the judgment about whether these demands are civilized/reasonable should depend upon which methods are used to realize them. For example, compared with the violence employed by the Northern Irish Republican Army, the independence party in Scotland is reasonable for it is resorting to a vote of the citizens. In the same years, to maintain their unity, the former Serbian authorities used force, thus were opposed by many nations, whereas Canada used legal measures, thus fulfilling the criteria of the age of "civilization."

As everyone knows, the emergence of Christianity itself was the result of overcoming nationalism's limitations. As a universal religion "for all people," Christianity is by its nature opposed to nationalism, which is "for some people."

Although Christianity certainly does not oppose some moderate nationalism or "patriotism,"[15] just as it proclaims human sinfulness beyond national borders, it also announces that salvation by God does not depend on nationality. Even if Jews were the "chosen people" and the kinsmen of Jesus, the disciples and the first Christians, Christianity treated them and the "gentiles" on equal terms. Christianity used the baptism of the Spirit to substitute the circumcision of the Jews. Exactly because its aim was and is to save all of humanity and not only one singular nation, it must also overcome and break through the separating walls between peoples and become a universal religion.

Soon after its birth, Christianity broke free of the limitations of the Jewish nation, and as the new faith spread to the "gentiles" it became a common spirit, welcoming all nations. During the period of persecutions in the first three centuries, Christianity gradually became the common religion of the nations governed by the Roman Empire. In the even longer period of the Middle Ages, it was the common religion of peoples living in the vast regions of Europe, western Asia, northern Africa. Even in a politically fragmented Europe it became a highly unified or transnational "Christendom." Only during the time of the Reformation, when nation-states emerged, did the religious reformers in some states, with their ruler's support, resort to nationalist positions. To a high degree, this was also the result of the conflict between the Catholic Counter Reformation and the nation-states. Perhaps it was precisely the overlap of religious division and national independence that led to the historical lesson of the Thirty Years' War. However, as religious conflicts became more and more moderate, and the tolerance in religion together with the separation of State and Church became reality, Christianity could (apart from a few wartime cases) generally restore the ideal of a community of nations, which implies an opposition to nationalism or at least a non-nationalistic position.

To sum up, Christianity's doctrine and its "spirit," its history, and its "birth" have determined its basic opposition to nationalism. Seen from its very nature and very existence, Christianity itself is a critique of nationalism.[16]

## V. A Critique of China's "National-Statism"

In the history of humanity there has appeared a kind of deformed phenomenon not enlisted among the examples mentioned above (in the third section), one that I have called "statist-nationalism" or "national-statism."

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15 The heart-breaking words in the beginning of Chapter 9 of *Romans* express Paul's most honest and rational patriotism, namely the profound feelings for the "kinsmen according to the flesh." Wang Weifan, one of the few contemporary theologians in China mainland, in order to emphasize the convergence of Christianity with "patriotism," wrote many moving essays based on countless passages from the Psalms and the prophets.

16 For a more detailed critique of nationalism from a Christian viewpoint, see He Guanghu, "Jiduan minzuzhuyi yu jiduzongjiao xinyang" 极端民族主义与基督宗教信仰 (Excessive Nationalism and the Christian Faith), in: He Guanghu, *Yue ying wan chuan: zongjiao, shehui yu rensheng* 月映万川: 宗教、社会与人生, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press 2003.

This kind of nationalism was penetrated, supported, distorted, and manipulated by "statism,"[17] and in fact it has already been totally reduced to the ideology or political tool of a despotic political power.

Before and during the First World War, the nationalisms of many peoples in the West, including the nationalisms of many Christians, were sometimes incited through propaganda from the governments, but basically or generally were spontaneous, and emerged naturally. In the period between the two world wars, however, modern totalitarian states controlled society and public opinion, leading to an enormous transformation. The result was that the populations of the Axis states (Italy, Germany, and Japan) developed a deformed nationalism that was penetrated, supported, distorted and manipulated by state power – it was "statist-nationalism." Of course, the degree of the popularity, intensiveness, and manipulated nature of this nationalism varied between these three nations, and it also spread to other states apart from these three.

Nationalism in China has a history that is unique and totally different from the nationalisms found in the West or any other nations. This special history led to the emergence of elements or features of "statism" that are far more striking, dominating, and stronger than those of other nations, so that it should even be called "national-statism."[18]

Around the 11th century BC, during the "Yin-Zhou Revolution" (the Zhou tribe conquered the Yin/Shang tribe), nationalism in "Chinese civilization"[19] was in a nascent state. Yet this incipient and vague nationalism was already being eroded by "statism." In this age, the population in China's central regions thought that because their rites were dignified and their garments were beautiful their culture was superior, and they thus called themselves "*Huaxia*" 华夏 ("the beautiful and magnificent").[20] At the same time, they called the somewhat less developed surrounding tribes "barbarians" (*manyi* 蛮夷). All this dis-

17 The English term "statism" is often translated as "*guojiazhuyi*" 国家主义 in Chinese, but this Chinese word is often confused with "nationalism" (because the Chinese people frequently confuse the nation with the state – for example, they often call the citizens of Singapore "*Zhongguoren*" 中国人 [the same as they call themselves as citizens of China]), and this translation does not express the meaning that "the state is the supreme and the state power controls all the economy and society." I therefore translate "statism" as "*guoquanzhuyi*" 国权主义, thus emphasizing its meaning that "state power has supremacy over the rights of the citizens," which is in confrontation with democracy (*minzhu zhengzhi* 民主政治) and the theory of the "civil rights " (*minquan zhuyi* 民权主义) propagated by Sun Yatsen.

18 See He Guanghu, "The Dragon and the Dove: Nation[al-]Statism and Catholic-Protestant Christianity in China," in: He Guanghu, *Sino-Christian Theology. Born in Sorrow, Grown in Grief*, editioncathay vol. 77, Bochum – Freiburg: projektverlag 2020, pp. 171–184.

19 I here define Chinese civilization as "the overall system of political, economic, and social customs and institutions originated in Huaxia culture and realized in China proper." It consists of two phases, i.e., 1. the System of Yin and Zhou, from the 13th century BC to the 3rd century BC (namely from the time of the first records on oracle bones until the collapse of the Eastern Zhou); 2. the system of Confucianism and Legalism, from the year 221 BC (the establishment of the Chin/Qin empire) until the year 1911 AD (the end of the Manchurian/Qing dynasty). This second period was marked by the combination of Ruist (Confucian) traditions on the outside and Faist (Legalist strategy) in the core. After 1911, nearly seven decades of revolutions wiped out traditional Chinese culture. In 1949, a new "overall system" was established in China. In the first three decades (1949–1978), it was "Marxism plus Leninism"; in the following four decades, it was "Western market plus Leninism"; then it shifted to and has become "national-statism plus Stalinism." None of these "originated in Huaxia/Chinese culture."

20 "China has magnificent rites, therefore it is called Xia; it has the beauty of garments and elegance of expression, therefore it is called Hua" (中国有礼仪之大, 故称夏; 有服章之美, 谓之华); see Kong Yingda 孔穎達, *Shisan jing zhushu* 十三经注疏. *Chunqiu Zuozhuan zheng yi* 春秋左传正义 (An Explanatory Book for *Chunqiu Zuozhuan*), Beijing: Zhonghua shuju 中华书局 1980.

played the earliest form of national awareness. Yet all Chinese people were then being ruled by the monarchs of scores of feudal "states"; these real rulers gradually weakened the power of their suzerain, the king of Zhou, and became the most powerful entities of the actual world the people could see. (The hereditary institution of the monarchies also led to the phenomenon that "clan thinking way" was stronger than "tribalism" in this period.) Furthermore, the population had much more contact with the other feudal states rather than with the "barbarians," meaning that any vague awareness of belonging to the "Chinese nation" (*Huaxia minzu* 华夏民族) was eclipsed by the clear and intensive awareness of belonging to one of the feudal states, such as the State of Lu, State of Qi, State of Jin, or State of Chu.

Compared with the contemporary "state-patriotism" of ancient Greece, which was the nationalism in its fixing phase, it would be more evident that the nascent and feeble nationalism of China in "Spring and Autumn Period and Warring States Period" (8th century to 3rd century BC) was penetrated and overwhelmed by the statism represented by powerful rulers of the feudal states. Greek poleis had different kinds of political institution, such as aristocracy, democracy, and monarchy, while contemporary China had only one institution: absolute monarchy. Even in Sparta, which was the most "militarist" of the Greek city-states, the power of the king was limited in many ways, so that it was ridiculously weak in the Chinese eyes, compared with the monarchs of vassal states in China of that time. Therefore, the statism in China impeded the formation of "nationalism in its fixing phase" or the emergence of state-patriotism. Statism fosters only some false or provisional, rather than real or true, patriotism. This could be seen from the attitudes and relations to other states of all the states (Qi, Lu, Song, Chin, Chu, etc.) in the Spring and Autumn Period. It could also be seen from the morale that talented men (including Confucius himself) changed their service and loyalty to different states very easily.

Similarly, unlike the Greco-Roman (and later Western) hegemony-imperialism that was "nationalism in its excessive expansion phase," in the five centuries before 221 BC China had many different "hegemonic powers," e.g., the famous "Five Hegemonies of the Spring and Autumn Period" (*Chunqiu wu ba* 春秋五霸), and throughout the following two millennia China had many "empires," but the mechanism of their emergence and existence was not nationalism. Rather, it was the expansion of the political power of a state or a ruler. Firstly, the hegemonies did not emerge in opposition to the peoples outside the Chinese (*Huaxia* 华夏), but because of the expansion of power within the states of the Chinese nation. Secondly, the Qin Empire did not come into existence via an expansion of the *Huaxia* nation, but via the malign expansion (that developed into "militarism") of one state within the Chinese nation. In the third place, the Han Empire was also not the result of an expansion of the Chinese nation, but was caused by insurrections against the Qin Empire's abuse of state power. Moreover, the Han Empire was corroborated by the institution of "Outward Confucianism, Inside Legalism." (Of course, after it had established itself, this empire also attacked other nations and tried to expand.) In the fourth place, the following two millennia saw the repeated collapse and revival of many "empires," but with the exceptions of the Mongol and the Manchu ones, most of these were not the result of expansion of the nation. Rather, they were the result of the idea of "supreme power of the

state," as represented by the emperor and expressed by popular sayings like "conquer the land and become the emperor" (*da jiangshan dang Huangdi* 打江山当皇帝).

Towards the end of Middle Ages, there appeared in Europe "sovereign-nationalism," i.e."nationalism in its mature and stable phase," but this development never took place in China. Why? Precisely because the Chinese emperors pursued and maintained monarchic power or "state power" at any price, this pursuit suppressed anything else – it even suppressed considerations concerning the interests of all the peoples. In order to maintain their power (in the name of state power), the rulers even frequently preferred to sacrifice the interests of the nation. This was the "inner cause" of many "unequal treaties" signed with foreign nations in the 12th and 19th centuries. A well-known example is found in the Qing Empire, whose rulers from the mid-19th century onwards sought only to maintain their imperial rule, while showing blithe unconcern towards the interests of the Chinese people.

From the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 20th century, owing to the nation-wide crisis caused by the actions of the Manchu rulers and Western invasions, and to the impact of nationalism introduced from the West, China for the first time saw the rise of real nationalism. In the 1930s and 1940s, the military aggression of Japan once again incited China's nationalism. The nationalism of this early period was needed by the revolutionary party Tongmenghui 同盟会 (then "Kuomintang" 国民党, KMT) for getting political power first from the Manchu court and then from the warlords. Thus in Sun Yatsen's *Sanmin zhuyi* 三民主义 (Doctrine of the three principles of the people), we could find nationalist slogans such as "Expel the Tartars, restore China" and "Overthrow imperialism." Similarly, the nationalism that surged during the anti-Japanese war was then needed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which strove to win political power from the (US-supported) KMT government. The CCP's alliance with the Soviet Union could help maintain the new ruling power, so they naturally needed to lead nationalism in their desired direction, as expressed by Mao Zedong's slogan: "Down with the U.S. imperialism and all its running dogs!"[21]

After 1949, this kind of nationalism was totally in the control of the party leadership, and would thus turn only against those foreign nations that the party wanted to oppose or attack. In the 1950s and 1960s, it opposed the USA and all capitalist states ("imperialism and all reactionaries"), as expressed in all media, school textbooks, and the "demonstrations" organized by the government. In the 1960s and 1970s, it opposed the Soviet Union and its socialist allies ("socialist imperialism and revisionism"), as proclaimed by all media and government organs and by the mass rallies of the Cultural Revolution. From the 1980s until today, this is expressed only at certain times. When demonstrations are allowed by the government, boycotts or even attacks on certain foreign shops occur, but the targets are only certain determined foreign nations. (For example, when the Chinese Embassy in Serbia was attacked by NATO missiles, NATO was targeted. When South Korea installed the "THAAD" anti-missile equipment, South Korea was targeted. Yet when the Russian government confiscated the goods of Chinese merchants, and when Chinese sailors were

21 See *Quotations from Chairman Mao Tse-tung* ("*The Little Red Book*"), www.marxists.org/ebooks/mao/Quotations_from_Chairman_Mao_Tse-tung.pdf.

killed by Russian cruisers, there were no reactions at all.) Moreover, these expressions of nationalism disappear as soon as the Chinese government normalizes the relationship with the concerned foreign nations (such as Japan and France)! This shows clearly that China's nationalism is not *truly* excessive: It is not as intensive and strong as it first appears, but is only an external guise of "national-statism." Statism is its true core. This can also be readily perceived in the increasingly frequent expressions of satire or mockery (*tucao* 吐槽)[22] of nationalist propaganda or nationalist discourses. Much such mockery has been poured out by netizens on the internet or social media.

Of course, since these "national-statist" institutions are now dominant, China's nationalism is in no position to "overcome the limitations of isolation" or to "break out from oneself" and move on to a kind of "federal-unionism."

However, we should pay attention to the following fact: China's real problem is not its nationalism, which seems strong, but its statism, which controls its nationalism and is becoming increasingly severe. This statism has taken the state and its political power as the aim or purpose, although the state and its political power should only be the means or methods to serve the one who is sovereign, namely the people.[23]

The beginning of Christian preaching may be "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand!"[24] Therefore, the purpose of human life should be the heavenly kingdom, not any earthly state. Jesus Christ proclaimed: "My kingdom is not of this world."[25] Accordingly, none of the states of this world are a purpose – they are all only means, and their value is only relative, not absolute.

The basic political theory of the Bible, Christian tradition, and theology have never described the state as the purpose, but as a means for higher purposes, namely as one of the means or instruments to provide the conditions for human life, and as one of the means that help humans to sanctify themselves. On the levels of the universe and of persons, God is the last aim. The ultimate aim of persons is thus to walk toward sanctity, to be reconciled with God, to receive the grace of justification from God, and to become a citizen of the kingdom of God. On the level of the state, nations, and secular matters, the human person is the last aim and must never become a tool or a means for achieving other purposes. All other factors, including the state and the government, must be means in the service of the human person.

According to the Biblical narrative, God granted state or monarchical power rather unwillingly in response to a request of the people in a helpless situation,[26] and accord-

22 Recent several statistical surveys, including that by the *Global Times* (*Huanqiu shibao* 环球时报), seem to show that the Chinese population's support of a military operation to unify Taiwan has decreased by 30 percent.

23 See He Guanghu 何光滬, "Dangdai Zhongguo de guojia mubiao – yi zhong jiduzongjiao jian fei zongjiao jiaodu de sikao" 當代中國的國家目標——一種基督宗教兼非宗教角度的思考 (On the National Goals of Contemporary China: A Reflection from Christian and Non-Religious Perspectives), in *Dao Feng: Jidujiao wenhua pinglun* 道風: 基督教文化評論 (*Logos & Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology*) 2014, no. 41, pp. 71–101.

24 Mt 3:2, 4:17.

25 Jn 18:36.

26 1 Sam 8-10.

ing to Thomas Aquinas, God set up the king "unwillingly" and "angrily."[27] The prophet Samuel immediately pointed out many defects and dangers of monarchic rule, and he clearly stated laws the king should obey. From this one can see that kingly power is but an unavoidable evil of human societies, and the king's power must be limited by the law. Furthermore, since Christianity claimed Jesus to be "the Lord of lords, and the King of kings,"[28] Jesus also suggested to "give to Caesar what belongs to Caesar, and to God what belongs to God."[29] Kingly power can of course not have a supreme position, but should be limited within a certain framework.

Authoritative fathers of the early Church, e.g., Irenaeus of Lyons and Augustine of Hippo, claimed that the origin of the state lay in humanity's fallen state, which necessitated the use of a rational institution to limit sins and to respond to the needs for safety and order in social life. Since these fathers saw "peace on earth" as beneficial for "peace in heaven," they perceived the state as a means of God to realize the great plan of salvation.[30] The greatest medieval theologian, Thomas Aquinas, also pointed out that within the state a person only needs to realize his or her earthly happiness, but the higher purpose would be the salvation of the soul and eternal happiness, which depended on the Church. Thus, the state was only a means to achieve the temporal and earthly purpose.[31]

The theologians of the Reformation, such as Martin Luther and Jean Calvin, also held that the state was not the aim but only the means for a secular purpose, which was in accordance with the Bible and with Christian tradition. Luther's theory of "two kingdoms" was based on similar ideas in Augustine's "City of God": The secular city is beset with evils, and thus needs the authority of a government. In the spiritual realm, however, all people are free and equal, and one's conscience would have priority over any secular authority.[32] Calvin also thought that the state was only an outward means to obtain salvation; the government's task is to maintain peace and justice, to cultivate faith and mutual trust in business matters, and to protect the worship of God, because any ruler should be the servant of God.[33] Based on Calvin, the more modern political theorist John Milton clarified the concept of state power (or monarchical power, sovereignty) and its relationship to the people. He argued that "seen from the natural order, the rights of the people are supreme,"[34] and

27 *Akuina zhengzhi zhuzuo xuan* 阿奎那政治著作选 (Selected Political Writings of Thomas Aquinas), trsl. by Ma Qinghuai 马清槐, Beijing: Shangwu yinshu guan 商务印书馆 (Commercial Press) 1982, p. 130.

28 Rev 17:14.

29 Mt 22:21; Mk 12:17; Lk 20:25.

30 R.W. Carlyle – A. J. Carlyle, *History of Mediaeval Political Theory in the West*, vol. I, p. 117 (quoted from the Chinese translation in Cong Riyun 丛日云 (ed.), *Xifang zhengzhi sixiang shi* 西方政治思想史 [History of Western Political Thought], vol. 2, Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe 天津人民出版社 2005, p. 63).

31 See the book in footnote 27, p. 66.

32 Lude 路德 (Luther), "Lun shisu quanli" 论世俗权力 (On Secular Power), in: Xu Qingyu 徐庆誉 (trsl.), *Lude xuanji* 路德选集, vol. 1., Hongkong: Jinling tuoshibu 金陵托事部 1954, p. 446.

33 Jia'erwen 加尔文 (John Calvin), *Jidujiao yaoyi* 基督教要义 (Institutes of the Christian Religion), vol. 2, chapter 6, trsl. by Qian Yaocheng 钱曜诚 *et al.*, Beijing: Sanlian Press (Sanlian shudian 三联书店) 2020.

34 Mi'erdun 弥尔顿 (John Milton), *Wei Yingguo renmin sheng bian* 为英国人民声辩 (A Defence of the People of England), Chinese translation by He Ning 何宁, Beijing: Commercial Press (Shangwu yinshu guan 商务印书馆) 1958, p. 109.

he also held that the state, represented by the king, is only a means in the service of the higher purpose of the people.

The Christian tenets claim that state power or kingly power is subordinated to the rights of the people. It is only a means or instrument at the service of the people, and should not become an aim or purpose. In this respect, the overwhelming majority of important non-Christian (and even non-religious) political theories are converging with this claim, and in fact they are mutually supportive, thus forming a kind of universal claim. I will here use only three examples to explain this.

The "second greatest sage" of Confucianism, Mencius, said "The people are the most important, the state comes second, and the ruler is the least important,"[35] which means that both the ruler and the state are subordinated to the people. As to Mencius' statement "to be a king through protecting the people, no one can resist it,"[36] its inherent logic is that "protecting the people" is the king's basic function. The ancient Chinese expressions "*ren zheng*" 仁政 (benevolent government) and "*wang dao*" 王道 (the way of the king) mean that the principle of "a benevolent person loves the people" (*renzhe ai ren* 仁者爱人) is applied to politics, i.e., "a virtuous person acting in a benevolent way can be king" (only by using moral standards to act out the principle of "loving the people" can one govern the state). "Therefore, if a wise ruler deals with the property of the people, he will allow them to have enough to serve their parents, and allow them enough to feed wives and children, so that in years with rich harvest they have enough food for their whole life, and even in years of adversity they can escape death," so that the population has "no regret in leading one's life or mourning one's death, and this was the beginning of the kingly way."[37] These discourses concerning the happiness of the people are the proper description of the purpose of the state, and were further developed by the great masters of the Confucian school during the late Ming and early Qing, masters such as Wang Fuzhi王夫之, Huang Zongxi 黄宗羲, or Li Zhi 李贽.

The English thinker Thomas Hobbes has been called the "father of modern political science," because he did not base his theories on religion, but only used methods of reason to discuss the state's significance. He described the state as a man-made "Leviathan," a huge monster mentioned in the Bible; yet its purpose was still, he said, "to protect the natural human beings."[38]

Although there were debates about whether Hobbes' position was Christian or atheist, it is a fact that he held that human nature would lead to "a war of all against all," concluding that the emergence of the state served the purpose of providing "peace and order" for the people. He thus saw the state not as a purpose in itself, but as a means to serve the people – a conclusion in agreement with Christian political theories.

Finally, we may consider the Marxist view, which is generally looked on as an atheist ideology, concerning this question. Chinese readers should be familiar with the idea from

35 See *Mengzi* 孟子 (Mencius), chapter "Jinxin xia" 尽心下.

36 *Mengzi* 孟子 (Mencius), chapter "Liang Hui wang shang" 梁惠王上.

37 *Ibid.*

38 Huobusi 霍布斯 (Thomas Hobbes), *Liweitan* 利维坦 (Leviathan), trsl. by Li Sifu 黎思复 *et al.*, Beijing: Commercial Press (Shangwu yinshu guan 商务印书馆) 1985, p. 1.

their textbooks that the state is a "means" (even though a "means of class oppression"), or that the state is a "historical phenomenon" and will culminate in "extinction," which is the end to be pursued by human beings. Seen from this viewpoint, the state is certainly not a purpose, and lacks any absolute value. Karl Marx once attacked Bruno Bauer for "only criticizing Christian states and not criticizing the state as such."[39] Marx claimed that medieval Christian states were the first type of state, namely incomplete states or "non-states," and that modern democratic states were the second type of state, namely complete states. Marx said: "The institution of political democracy is a Christian institution, because here the human being, not only one, but each one, enjoys sovereignty and is the supreme being."[40] However, he suggested a "third type" of state, namely "states no longer existing," since in that situation the alienation embodied by the state would no longer exist, and humanity would have been liberated. This demonstrates that Marx held a negative view of the state, and that he denied the value of the state in general.

To sum up, the Bible, Christian tradition, Christian theology, and most political theories in antiquity and modernity, in the West and in China, all agree that the state is but a means or instrument at the service of the people, and that it certainly cannot be the purpose/aim which "instrumentalizes" the people or controls and makes use of them.

If this is so, then we should raise a question: Why should a phenomenon as irrational and tragic as "national-statism," which was produced in a controlling and distorting manner by the power of some states or rulers, have existed not only in some states in certain periods, but also in certain countries for many centuries?

To answer this question, we need to reflect on the phenomenon's institutional causes, and to consider the different institutions in different countries and their sources in different human natures. This means we should do some research in "comparative theology of institutions" and "comparative theology of human natures," which is urgently needed in today's world.

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Revised at Renmin University of China, Beijing.

39 See Makesi 马克思 [Karl Marx], "Lun youtairen wenti" 论犹太人问题 [The Question of the Jews], in: *Makesi Engesi quan ji* 马克思恩格斯全集 [Complete Works of K. Marx and F. Engels], Chinese edition, transl. by Zhong Gong Zhongyang bianyiju 中共中央编译局, vol. 3, Beijing: Renmin Press 人民出版社 2002, pp. 167–168.

40 *Ibid.*, p. 179.