

Globethics Repository

The logo for Globethics, featuring the word "Globethics" in white sans-serif font on a blue rectangular background.

Pax Romana and Pax Sinica: A Tale of Two Empires

This page was generated automatically upon download from the Globethics Repository. More information on Globethics see <https://www.globethics.net>. Data and content policy of Globethics Repository see <https://repository.globethics.net/pages/policy>.

Item Type	Article
Authors	Choong, Chee Pang
Publisher	Nordic Forum of Sino- Western Studies, Helsinki
Rights	With permission of the license/copyright holder
Download date	2026-09-22 06:25:07
Link to Item	http://hdl.handle.net/20.500.12424/166762

Pax Romana and Pax Sinica : A Tale of Two Empires^①

CHOONG Chee Pang

(Previous Principal of Trinity Theological College ,Singapore)

Abstract: For the ancient Romans the *Pax Romana* had to be maintained at all costs for the socio-political stability of the great Roman Empire. Modern China's current quest for a "harmonious society" seems to have been prompted by a similar concern, hence the *Pax Sinica*. There is no question about the legitimacy of the respective concerns of the two "Empires" for this matter, although fundamental questions on the means by which the *pax* is maintained may justifiably be raised. Recognizing the vast contextual differences between the two Empires, this paper does not attempt to do a *comparative* study in this paper in any technical sense. Yet what links the two cases together is the consistency of the Christian understanding of the "two kingdoms" and the nature of powers and authorities throughout the ages. While recognizing the *raison d'être* of China's quest for socio-political harmony and stability, the paper takes a strong view that the end alone should not be allowed to justify the means without equality and justice. "Ancient wisdom" in both Chinese and Biblical resources are readily available for those who are seriously and sincerely committed to such a laudable project. But its use will require a great deal of modern wisdom, as well as *political* will and *moral* courage.

Key words: *Pax*, stability, harmonious society, Christianity, Confucianism

Author: CHOONG Chee Pang, Ph. D. ,Aberdeen University. Researcher, Institute for Religions and Society in Asia, Oxford, UK. Former Principal of Trinity Theological College, Singapore. Theologian, the Geneva-based Lutheran World Federation(LWF). Visiting Professor of Peking University, Fudan University, Chinese University of Hong Kong. Email: choongcp@singnet.com.sg

Introduction

The theme of the Colloquium, "*Harmonious Society and Ancient Wisdom*", was largely prompted by China's current quest for a "harmonious society". This paper will try to follow the guideline of the Colloquium, *i. e.* , to be "critical" and "constructive" at the same time. While the title of the paper may suggest that it is a sort of "comparative" study, it is actually not so in any technical sense. The respective historic-socio-political contexts of the two empires are so vastly different that any serious comparison between them would run the risk for being too superficial and hard-pressed. Yet, a very significant link seems to exist between the two empires, as modern China's new quest for "harmony" (和谐) and strong determination to

① A presentation in the International Biblical Studies Colloquium, (Peking University , May 31 to June 3 ,2010).

maintain socio-political “stability” (安定) do appear similar to the old Roman Empire’s uncompromising and near pathological commitment to the *Pax Romana* ideology,^② The term “*Pax Sinica*” has been coined by this paper largely for convenience. Crucial to the position of the paper is the Christian understanding of the “two kingdoms” and the nature of power and authority, which remain basically unchanged for the last two thousand years, although this long tradition, being dynamic and not static, should be constantly re-interpreted, understood anew and faithfully applied, in response to the ever changing situations of the time.

At the crucifixion of Jesus, Pilate wrote an inscription in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, and put it on the cross. It read, “Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews” (John 19. 19. Greek: *Iesous ho Nazoraïos ho basileus twñ Ioudaiōn*). The Roman governor apparently intended to use this public display as a ridicule to Jesus as well as an insult to the Jews, whom he hated deeply. However, the public could well read it as a formal “verdict” on the perceived socio-political “crime” of “Jesus of Nazareth”, who had either personally acknowledged to be the “King of the Jews”, or acclaimed to be so, or both, and hence posing a great threat to the stability of the Roman establishment. But was Jesus really a threat to the *Pax Romana*? The concern of this paper is not confined to the finding of a possible answer to this question of history. It is also interested to see if such a question could have any relevance to China’s current quest for a “harmonious society” from a Christian perspective, and here lies again a possible link between the commitment of the ancient Empire to the *Pax Romana* and modern China’s determination to maintain the *Pax Sinica* at all costs.

Pax Romana

The *Pax Romana* lasted from about 27 BCE (beginning with Emperor Augustus) until AD 180 (the death of Emperor Marcus Aurelius). With the exception of some sporadic rebellions and disturbances, the Empire was blessed with much peace (*Pax*) during the first half of the first century AD, which covered the entire active life of Jesus. Relative safety in travels was not only much appreciated and cherished by all those who benefited from it, even though the

② The Roman authorities were determined to use any brutal means to try to maintain its socio-political stability, including crucifixion, which was quite readily used against rebels or would be rebels. See Martin Hengel, *Crucifixion in the Ancient World and the Folly of the Message of the Cross*, (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976). Luke 13. 1 has a reference to Pilate’s murderous act: “At that very time there were some present who told him [Jesus] about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices.”

rapid spread of the Gospel of early Christianity was partly due to this *Pax*.

But the *Pax Romana* was certainly not based on any universal value of human equality and justice, democracy and freedom. In fact, the contrary was true. In Roman society people was rigidly divided into two big categories, namely, the upper society (*honestiores*) and the lower stratum (*humiliores*), and only the former would be entitled to social honors and privileges as well as the protection of the law. ^③

“Jesus of Nazareth”, being an ordinary Jew, obviously belonged to the very low stratum (*humiliores*) of the Roman society in Palestine. Pontious Pilate, the Roman governor, therefore showed no respect for the Jewish identity of Jesus, and was equally insensitive to his religious feeling even before he interviewed him, in the early hours on the day of his crucifixion. ^④

Jesus was the promised “Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9. 6) and the first Christmas message was that of universal “peace” (Luke 2. 10-14). ^⑤ That the “Prince of Peace” should be accused of and eventually died for his socio-political “sedition” must be one of the greatest ironies in human history.

There is also another sort of irony in Chinese history. For about two thousand years, from the Han Dynasty (汉代 *Handai*) to the end of the Qing Dynasty (清朝 *Qingchao*) in 1911, Confucianism, including its teaching on harmony (和 *he*), had been the state ideology of imperial China. Qin Shi Huang (秦始皇 *Qing Shihuang*) or Shi Huangdi (246-210 BCE), generally regarded as “First Emperor” of ancient China, and who succeeded in unifying China, was notorious in China’s long history for being a “tyrant” and for the burning of the Chinese classics as well as the burying of many of the literati alive, has now been hailed as a “hero” (英雄

^③ For Gaius, men were just either “free” or being “slaves”. See, for example, Gaius, *Institutes*, vol. I. 9: *Et quidem summa divisio de iure personarum haec est, quod omnes homines aut liberi sunt aut servi.*

^④ The Jewish leaders and their followers had earlier refused to enter Pilate’s *praetorium*, “so that they might not be defiled, but might eat the passover.” (John 18. 28). Consequently, Pilate had to go *out* of the *praetorium* to meet with them, and apparently did not complain about the Jews’ refusal to meet him inside the *praetorium*. But such “courtesy” was not given to Jesus, who was also a Jew, as Pilate interrogated Jesus *inside* his *praetorium*, although Jesus himself might not feel “defiled” by it (18. 33). The Roman governor also blatantly insulted the human dignity of Jesus when he “took Jesus and scourged him”, and allowed the soldiers to plait a “crown of thorns” and place it on his head as well as putting a purple robe on him. (19. 1, 2)

^⑤ “And the angel said. . . I bring you good news of a great joy which will come to all the people, for to you is born this day. . . a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. . . And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying,
‘Glory to God in the highest,
and on earth peace among men with
whom he is pleased’ ” (Luke 2. 14)

yingxiong), especially for the “unification” of ancient China. ^⑥The irony is that those burned classics (books) would most probably have included the Confucian classics, on which the ancient idea of “harmony” (和 *he*) was most promised, and upon which the modern idea of “harmonious society” (和谐社会 *hexie shehui*) found its inspiration and justification. Some critics seem to think that the Chinese authorities’ quest for a harmonious society and its promotion of “national [classical] learning” (国学 *guoxue*), especially Confucianism, including the founding of many “Confucian Colleges” at home and abroad, may all be parts of a grand design, socio-politically motivated. Like the old *Pax Romana*, the modern *Pax Sinica* must also be maintained at all costs. Some cynics even suspect that national unification and stability of modern China are actually being used as a pretext for the continuous justification of the one-party system, the so-called “dictatorship of the proletariats”.

Whatever the case may be, the very idea of a “harmonious society” is itself a clear contradiction to the “struggle” ideology of orthodox Marxism, which was supposed to be an on-going process. Is this another “characteristic” of Chinese socialism?

The teaching of Jesus on powers and authorities

The Biblical understanding of powers and authorities is firmly based on its consistent doctrine of creation and belief in God’s sovereignty over the whole earth and all the nations. Israel as Yehweh’s special “chosen” people has in no way changed this Biblical conviction. As such, even Cyrus, the “pagan” king of the Persian Empire, was regarded as Yahweh’s “anointed” (Isaiah 44:28); and Artaxerxes, king of the same Empire (465-425 BCE) was instrumental for the re-building of the wall of Jerusalem and the restoration of the Jewish community led by Nehemiah and Ezra. Yahweh is the ultimate source of all powers and authorities. The final judgment is Yahweh’s absolute prerogative, on which all Biblical eschatologies are constructed. It is also on the same faith tradition that the New Testament doctrine of the “two kingdoms” is taught. The teaching of Jesus, Paul and Peter on powers and authorities, were thoroughly consistent with this Biblical tradition.

The teaching of Jesus on world powers and authorities in the Gospels could be said to be quite “incidental”. But behind this “occasional” teaching was undoubtedly a long and solid

^⑥ This seems to be the “message” even in Zhang Yimou’s controversial and popular film, *Hero* (英雄 *yingxiong*).

Biblical tradition that has been just referred to earlier. The incident is found in all the synoptic gospels, (Mark 12:13-17; Matthew 22:15-22; Luke 20:19-26), where Jesus was confronted with the politically very sensitive and controversial issue of taxes paid to Caesar, the Roman Emperor. The response of Jesus to the question, “Is it lawful to pay taxes to Caesar, or not?” (Mark 12:14, RSV), has consequently led to the Christian teaching on the so-called “two kingdoms”. The famous answer of Jesus, “Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar’s, and to God the things that are God’s” (Mark 12:17), are commonly regarded as Jesus’ most powerful and firm statement on the respective legitimacy of the “two kingdoms”. While most civil authorities throughout the ages seem to have little difficulty accepting the Christian position as a broad and universal principle, their respect and acceptance for the latter, *i. e.*, “render to God the things that are God’s”, are often reluctant and inconsistent.

If worldly authorities, including that of modern China, had difficulty coping with the “two kingdoms”, or handling the things of Caesar and God at the same time, the same would more or less be true with the Christians themselves in dealing with their “dual identity”, namely, being citizens of *both* the kingdom of God and of the present world order. The present writer could vividly recall an occasion where a young Chinese scholar, who was born and bred outside mainland China, greatly surprised many when he solemnly reminded himself as well as his audience of the need to constantly choose between God and Caesar in their life and witness. ^⑦

The difficult and often costly choice between God and Caesar is unavoidable as long as one respects the legitimacy of both kingdoms and tries to keep the two in dialectical tension. The choice is both theological as well as existential, a struggle through which great and true pastor-theologians were made. Karl Barth and Dietrich Bonhoeffer were among those who had gone through it both before and during World War II. ^⑧

Equally important and difficult for modern China to handle is the building of a “harmonious society”, which could accommodate “differences”, and not simply paying lip service to the laudable Confucian belief in *The Analects* 13:23: “君子和而不同 *junzi he er butong*” (《论语》子路 13:23).

^⑦ The year was 1981 when the official delegation of the TSPM (Three-Self Patriotic Movement) and CCC (China Christian Council) came to Hong Kong for the first time after the “Great Cultural Revolution” to meet with representatives of world Christian community. The young scholar, an Asian representative, was invited to lead a morning devotion at the YMCA on Waterloo Road, Kowloon, Hong Kong. The Bible reading was taken from parts of John 18 & 19: *The encounter between God and Caesar*.

^⑧ See Choong Chee Pang, *Is the Separation of Politics and Religion a Myth?*, (Hong Kong: CABSA, 2008), 168-170.

As in most societies, accepting “harmony” (和 *he*) is relatively easy, but respecting and accommodating “differences” (不同 *butong*) would be far more difficult, even risky. But one cannot just have harmony (和 *he*) and disregard difference (不同 *butong*). “和为贵 *he wei gui*” and “君子和而不同 *junzi he er butong*” will continue to be in “dialectical tension” in modern China, and it will take a lot of ancient and modern wisdom, moral courage as well as strong political will to keep the two together in delicate but necessary balance. More will be said on this later in this paper.

Jesus’ teaching on powers and authorities and the two kingdoms was the basic principle on which the apostle Paul tried to wrestle with the same issue. This was characterized by his well known statement in Romans 13. 1: “Let every person be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those that exist have been instituted by God.” But to infer from here, as some critical New Testament scholars often tend to do, that Paul was a political “conservative” is a blatant failure to understand the profound theology behind it. Paul’s teaching was based on the same theological conviction of his crucified Master. Just like his Master whom he tried to imitate, Paul never seemed to have questioned the legitimacy of the Roman authorities, even under the most adverse circumstances when he was very unjustly treated. Only once did he refer to his Roman citizenship to challenge the Roman magistrates’ unjust treatment for beating him and his travel companion Silas, before throwing them into prison.^⑨

But most paradoxically, Paul, the law-abiding citizen, turned out to be a most daring and thorough-going challenger of the Greco-Roman social ethos of his time, and inverting it in a most revolutionary way. Paul did it, not according to any socio-political theory or ideology of the present world order, but with his “theology of the cross” and personal *modus operandi*, in his most humble position as the *doulos* (“slave” or “servant”) of Christ. This message and testimony come out most powerfully and movingly in Paul’s Corinthian correspondence. Here is yet another great irony. Paul, the messenger of the gospel of *shalom*, and an “ambassador” for the message of *reconciliation* (2 Corinthians 5:18-20), was thought to be belonging to the people “who have been turning the world upside down” (Acts 17:6).

^⑨ Paul and Silas were in the Roman city of Philippi, where they were beaten publicly and imprisoned. The next day, the Roman magistrates sent police to release them, but Paul replied, “They have beaten us in public, uncondemned, men who are Roman citizens, and have thrown us into prison; and now are they going to discharge us in secret? Certainly not! Let them come and take us out themselves.” (Acts 16. 35-37)

The apostle Peter, sometimes quite wrongly regarded as a formidable “rival” of the apostle Paul, also followed a similar line of thinking in his teaching on Christian respect for worldly authorities and “civil obedience” (1 Peter 1:17; 2:12-17). ^⑩1 Peter 3:8-9 is clearly reminding of the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. ^⑪Like Paul and his Christian communities, Peter and his Christian readers of the *diaspora* in Asia Minor and other regions were fully conscious of their “dual identity”. In terms of their citizenship in the Kingdom of God, they were “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people” (2:9a). But in relation to the present world order, which was generally hostile to them, they could only regard themselves as “alien and exiles” (2:11). And their Christian identity was inseparable from their calling and mission: “that you [Christians] may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (2:9b). The whole marvelous thing about Peter’s positive teaching was that no Christian should use their disadvantaged and marginalized position in the hostile Roman society as a pretext for disengagement with that society or for passive Christian life and life style. The implications of this for Christians of all generations and in all places need no further elaboration.

The trial of Jesus before Pilate

Even a casual reading of the Gospel accounts would seem to suggest that at least for the Jews, including the Sanhedrin, the *identity* of Jesus, *i. e.*, whether he was truly what he himself had claimed or hailed as such by his enthusiastic followers, was essentially a *religious* issue. As such, it should have little to do with the Roman authorities. This seemed to be the initial opinion of Pilate, the Roman governor, when Jesus was first brought to his headquarters, the “*praetorium*” (John 18:28). Pilate therefore said to the Jews, “Take him yourselves and judge him by your own [religious] law” (John 18:31). However, Pilate’s initial opinion about and attitude toward Jesus appeared to change as the “trial” of Jesus continued. The Ro-

^⑩ “Be subject for the Lord’s sake to every human institution, whether it be to the emperor as supreme, or to governors as sent by him to punish those who do wrong and to praise those who do right. For it is God’s will that by doing right you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish men. Live as freemen, yet without using your freedom as a pretext for evil; but live as servants of God. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the emperor” (1 Peter 2:13-17). This positive and pro-active teaching of Peter became the more amazing and incredible when one bears in mind that the “emperor” at this particular time was the notorious tyrant Nero who persecuted the Christians most relentlessly from AD 64-66.

^⑪ “Finally, all of you, have unity of spirit, sympathy, love of the brethren, a tender heart and a humble mind. Do not return evil for evil or reviling for reviling; but on the contrary bless, for to this you have been called, that you may obtain a blessing.”

man governor was also quite understandably confused about the identity of Jesus and the nature of the Jewish accusation. In the presence of Pilate, Jesus was called an “evildoer” by the accusing Jews (18:30, RSV). Had it been “lawful” for them to put Jesus to death they would not have bothered to bring him to the Roman governor (18:31). At some point the governor must have been told either that Jesus had claimed or was hailed to be “the King of the Jews”. Such “title” certainly had most serious implications and consequences in the socio-political context of the Roman Empire. It was therefore only natural that Pilate should pursue the matter further. “Are you the King of the Jews?”, asked Pilate, when he first confronted Jesus (18:33). Any claim to kingship would of course tantamount to political sedition, and would certainly lead to capital punishment, just as the accusing Jews said to Pilate, “ ” Everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar” (19:12). *Religiously*, the Jews were more concerned with the other claim: “because he [Jesus] has made himself the Son of God” (19:7). However, the Roman governor Pilate was simply not interested in such extraordinary religious claim. In the end, it was a case of *religion* making use of *political* power. In the context of the Roman Empire, even *religious* issues could hardly be regarded as purely or merely *religious*, and it was difficult, if not impossible, for any religion to be completely “privatized”.^⑫ In this sense, the so-called “public theology”, a modern Western notion, was in fact as old as the Roman Empire!

As a Roman governor, it was almost impossible for Pilate to ever conceive the possibility of any other “power” besides Rome, or another “kingdom” in addition to the Empire. Hence, the arrogance of his question to Jesus: “Do you not know that I have power to release you, and power to crucify you?” (John 19:10). As such, Pilate must have been totally confounded, when he was told by Jesus, the “accused”, that he had “no power” over Jesus, unless it had been given him “from above” (19:11). Pilate apparently did not quite get Jesus’ message about “the two kingdoms” in their dialogue earlier (18:33-38), when Jesus told him that his “kingdom” was “not of this world”, and that his mission in this world was “to bear witness to the truth” (18:37) unfortunately, Pilate did not have the moral courage to face the “the truth”, and he only responded to the question of “truth” in a most cynical and scornful manner: “What is truth?” (*Ti estin aletheia*; 18:38). The Greek term *aletheia* can be both abstract and vague. But it could also refer to something very real and concrete. In the case of Je-

^⑫ Incidentally, China’s State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) is answerable to the State Council, which is the equivalent of the “Cabinet” in other countries.

sus, the “truth” of the matter was real and concrete, that is, Jesus, the accused, was completely innocent of any socio-political subversion, just as Pilate himself, the official judge and the highest representative of the Roman Empire in Palestine at that time, had declared it publicly three times: “I find no crime in him” (18:38; 19:4,6). As such, Pilate was duty-bound to release Jesus, the “accused”, as he did intend to do so (19:12). But there were other considerations, and the most important of which was his own political career and future. The force of the threat from the Jewish mob must be appreciated from this perspective: “If you release this man, you are not Caesar’s friend; everyone who makes himself a king sets himself against Caesar” (19:12). As a well seasoned politician, Pilate yielded to the pressure of the Jews, and had Jesus crucified (19:16). The Jews’ claim that Jesus had “set himself a king” was either due to a gross misunderstanding of Jesus’ teaching on the “Kingdom of God”, or his accusers’ deliberate attempt to politicize the kingship of Jesus. According to Luke’s accounts, the Jewish Sanhedrin also falsely accused Jesus before Pilate that Jesus had taught against giving tribute to Caesar (Luke 23:2).^⑬ Rightly understood, the kingship of Jesus should not be a socio-political threat to the earthly kingdom of Caesar, as Jesus himself had told Pilate earlier, “my kingship is not of this world; if my kingship were of this world, my servants would fight, that I might not be handed over to the Jews”. Had Jesus been interested in the kingship of this world, he would not have withdrawn to the mountain alone at the height of his great popularity, and when the Jewish crowd wanted to make him “king” (John 6:15).

In order to accomplish their murderous plot against Jesus, the chief priests had in fact compromised their most fundamental theological position when they answered Pilate, “We have no king but Caesar” (John 19:15). In fact, they knew fully well that *Yahweh alone* was their “King”, and not Caesar, ultimately speaking. At the trial of Jesus, there was also the unholy alliance between religion and politics, and each exploiting the situation fully to its respective ends. The former represented by the Jewish leadership and the latter by the Roman governor.^⑭ At the trial of Jesus, even two former enemies, Herod and Pilate, had become “friends” with each other (Luke 23:12).

For the maintenance of socio-political stability, whether it was the old Roman Empire’s

^⑬ “And they began to accuse him, saying, ‘We found this man perverting our nation, and forbidding us to give tribute to Caesar, and saying that he himself is Christ a king’”

^⑭ For the delicate and complicated relation between politics and religion, see Choong Chee Pang, 政教分离是个神话? *Zhengjiao fenli shi ge shenhua?* [Is the Separation of Politics and Religion a Myth?], (Hong Kong: CABS, 2008)

near pathological concern for the *Pax Romana* or modern China's big worry about 安定 *an-ding* (*Pax Sinica*), *expediency* is often a serious consideration. As in many ancient societies and communities, one member's act or behavior could often bring great trouble or disaster to the whole society and community. This was exactly the concern of the Jewish leadership in relation to the identity and "claims" of Jesus of Nazareth. During a meeting of the Jewish highest council, the Sanhedrin, a most crucial decision had to be made regarding the fate of Jesus. Recognizing the popularity of Jesus with the people, especially due to the "many signs" he had performed (John 11:47), the Jewish chief priests and Pharisees said, "If we let him go on thus, everyone will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation" (11:48). To this understandably most troubling problem, Caiaphas, the high priest of the time, suggested a way out: "You do not understand that it is *expedient* for you that one man should die for the people, and that the whole nation should not perish" (11:50). On the high priest's statement, the author of the Gospel of John commented: "He [the high priest] did not say this of his own accord, but being high priest that year he prophesied that Jesus should die for the nation. . . . So from that day on they took counsel how to put him to death" (11:51, 53). The matter of political expediency becomes vitally important whenever hard decision has to be made. Some may recall the very difficult decision that Chinese national leaders had to make on the eve of the "June 4" Tiananmen crack down. In order to justify the use of military force against the student movement, a national leader had reportedly said something like this: "If the killing of a thousand people could secure ten years of stability (安定 *an-ding*), it would be worth the while." This paper definitely has no intention to enter into such a politically sensitive and historically complex and highly controversial issue such as the "June 4 Incident", especially when no common "verdict" has been reached about the matter so far. Although worlds apart, the matter of "expediency" was equally important to both the ancient and the modern cases. It is reasonable to think that the matter of expediency will continue to be very relevant and important to China's quest for a "harmonious society". Something or someone, somehow and somewhere may have to be sacrificed in the name of "harmony" (和谐 *hexie*) and for the sake of "stability" (安定 *anding*). Common sense seems to suggest that opinions or persons, once perceived to be falling out of line of the state's guiding principle or "out-of-bounds", are most likely to be sacrificed or sidestepped. And the "fittest" will have to learn how to conform and compromise in order to "survive".

At the trial of Jesus by the Roman governor Pilate, not only was the crucial issue of

“truth” being cowardly evaded by Pilate, the equally important matter of justice was not done or seen to be done. Gross injustice was inflicted on Jesus, the victim, whom even the Roman governor-judge had thrice publicly declared to be innocent: “I find no crime in him” (John 18:38; 19:4,6). The matters of truth and justice were most relevant, not only to the Roman authorities’ uncompromising commitment to the maintenance of the *Pax Romana*, but also to modern China’s unyielding determination to keep its socio-political stability (安定 *anding*), or the *Pax Sinica*, at all costs. But there can be no lasting “harmony” without *truth* and *justice*. This is clearly the most consistent and firm position of the Biblical faith, in which *shalom* (peace) always assumes or demands the presence of truth and justice. A classic example would be Isaiah 9:6-7. ^⑮Paradise and lasting peace could only be “re-gained” on the basis of truth, justice (righteousness) and equality (Isaiah 11:1-9). ^⑯

Is Christianity a threat to the socio-political stability of modern China?

There are five major religions in China recognized by the Chinese authorities: Buddhism, Catholicism, Daoism, Islam and Protestantism. While the government tries to treat all of them equally, attitudes towards and perceptions about them are often not quite the same. Socio-politically Daoism does not seem to be a concern of the government since the founding of the Peo-

⑮ For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given;
and the government will be upon his shoulder,
and his name will be called
“Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.”
Of the increase of his government and
of peace
there will be no end,
upon the throne of David, and over his kingdom,
to establish it, and to uphold it
with justice and with righteousness
from this time forth and forevermore.
The zeal of the Lord of hosts will do this.

⑯ “. . . with righteousness he shall judge. . . .
Righteousness shall be the girdle of his waist. . . .
They shall not hurt or destroy. . . .
for the earth shall be full of the
knowledge of the Lord
as the waters cover the sea.” (11.4-9)

ple's Republic of China in 1949. Although the government's problem with Buddhism is only confined to Tibet, it is an issue that has to be handled with great care and sensitivity. The riot in Tibet in the summer of 2008, just prior to the official opening of the Beijing Olympics, had almost developed beyond control, and posed a great threat to the "largest show on earth", a world event which meant so much to China in many ways. The most recent earthquake in Yushu, in Qinghai Province, which affected the predominantly Tibetan Buddhist community, has been given a very special attention of top priority that is unprecedented in China's history of relief efforts. It was obviously a unique opportunity for the authorities to use the occasion to show its good will for reconciliation with the troublesome and estranged Tibetan community. It is also a very important and much needed diplomatic and apologetical exercise to show the international community that the Tibetans, instead of being discriminated against, are in fact given very special treatment and care, even better than the Hans.

As Buddhism is very influential in Taiwan, it is only understandable and necessary that the Chinese government should cultivate cordial relationships with Buddhism of the Island, especially with Fo Guang San's pro-mainland Abbot Xingyun (星云法师 Xingyun fashi). The diplomatic values of these ties are obvious for cross-straits relations. In early September, 2007 a very special Buddhist event was held in Taiwan's Fo Guang San (佛光山 Foguangshan), when a "Peace Bell" (和平钟 *hepingzhong*) from Suzhou's famous Han San Shi (寒山寺 Hanshansi) was presented to the Taiwan temple. It could just have been a normal religious event involving the Buddhists of both sides of the Taiwan Straits. But such was certainly not the case with this unique event, because the head of the Chinese delegation was the then director of SARA (State Administration for Religious Affairs). In order to avoid the obvious "sensitivity" of such an arrangement, the director did not use his official title, but was designated as "President of the Association for Chinese Religious Cultural Exchange" (中华宗教文化交流协会会长 *Zhonghua zongjiao wenhua jiaoliu xiehui huizhang*). The event simply shows how difficult it is for politics to be really separated from religion, as well as the sensitivity and complexity associated with the relations of the two.^{①7} At the same time it would be naive to think that Buddhists, Daoists and folk-religionists are necessarily socio-politically "pacifists" or simply *apolitical*. This is certainly not the case in modern Taiwan, where no political party could stand a chance getting elected to form the Government, and no one could become Taiwan's

^{①7} See Choong Chee Pang, *Is the Separation of Politics and Religion a Myth?*, 153-4

president without the support of the majority of these religious communities. As such, no “Christian” presidential candidate could afford not to pay homage to its places of worship and to cultivate good will and cordial relationships with leaders of these religious communities. If one were to be very particular about it, there would simply be endless “rites controversies” associated with the worship of the “Christian” politicians in the religious places of Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and folk religions in Taiwan. In this connection, it is perhaps meaningful and relevant to take note of the fact that for several years now consecutively top government officials of provincial levels have been taking leading parts in the annual rituals of sacrifice offered to the tomb of Huang Di (the “Yellow Emperor” 黄帝 Huangdi) in mainland China. In terms of population alone, the socio-political status of an average provincial party secretary or governor is just as important as the president or prime minister of at least a medium-sized country in other parts of the world.

The Chinese government should not have many major problems with Chinese Muslims, if not for the Xinjiang independence movement (*jiang du*). Socio-politically, Christianity, whether it is Catholicism or Protestantism, has not been a “trouble-maker” for the last sixty years, certainly not in terms of any organized rebellion or violence. The trouble with Chinese Catholicism has largely been confined to the Vatican factor, and issues closely related to it.¹⁸ But Chinese Protestantism, which has a much larger membership than the Catholics, seems to be quite free from those troubles between Beijing and the Vatican. And why does it seem to be a worry for the Chinese authorities still? In this connection, a common question is often raised, particularly by the outsiders: Why is the “Three-Self Patriotic Movement” still needed, sixty years after the founding of the People’s Republic of China? What is its *raison d’être*? Is Christian patriotism still being called into question? Due to the complicated “Vatican factor”, historically, politically and ecclesiastically, the question of “loyalty” and “identity” of the Chinese Catholics is perhaps quite understandable. But this is clearly not the problem for Chinese Protestants. No amount of apologetics offered by the Chinese authorities or the Christian leaders on the continuing *raison d’être* of the “Three-Self” organization, especially of the Chinese Protestant Church, seems to have satisfied its critics, both at home and abroad. The following

¹⁸ Sixty years after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, Vatican still maintains its diplomatic ties with Taiwan, much to the annoyance and displeasure of Beijing. The concentration of Chinese Catholic bishops without the official sanction of the Vatican also raises the most complicated and sensitive issue of jurisdiction and sovereignty. The former archbishop of Hong Kong, Chan Yat Guan’s estranged relations with and critical attitude towards Beijing were certainly no help to the Beijing-Vatican relations.

points are simply some attempts to try to account for the difficult position that Chinese Christianity, both the Catholic and Protestant, finds itself in modern China, and they are certainly not meant to give any real answer to the complicated question.

A. Protestantism's historical link to the *Imperialistic* West. The Protestant mission to China was spearheaded by Robert Morrison of the London Missionary Society in 1807, a time which began to witness the decline of the Qing Dynasty. Morrison's arrival was soon followed by intermittent invasions of China by Western powers, beginning from the notorious "Opium Wars" (1839-42) which were fought between Britain and China. China's repeated defeats in the following decades brought great shame to the whole of the "Middle Kingdom", and Christianity came to be closely associated or identified with Western imperialism. The end of the last Chinese dynasty and the founding of the Republic of China in 1911 and its aftermath did not help to eradicate China's deep-seated ill feelings against Christianity, "the religion of the imperialists". The founding of the *People's* Republic of China in 1949 brought great national pride and renewed confidence to the once deeply humiliated Chinese. At the same time, this most drastic socio-political change also further enhanced the nation's long and persistent prejudice against Christianity. The Marxist-Leninist-based state orthodoxy now provided the Chinese mind with additional ideological ammunition against "the religion of the imperialists".

The socio-politically most unsettling period of the 1930s and 1940s witnessed the emergence of some promising Chinese theological thinkers. T. C. Chao of the mission-sponsored Yenching University was perhaps the most respectable leading figure of the time. But events following the Communist Party's capture of power in 1949 made it virtually impossible for independent and creative theological work to emerge substantially. For nearly thirty years, from the early 1950s to the late 1970s, Christian studies in the Chinese academia were virtually non-existent, except in some strictly controlled state-run institutions. It was the open door policy, inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, that gave the Chinese church as well as Christian studies a new lease of life. But the old prejudice against and suspicion of Protestantism continue to exert their influence on China's policy. The year 2007 was the bicentenary of Morrison's arrival in China. Under normal circumstances this would have been a meaningful occasion for the Chinese Church as well as the academics, especially Church historians, whether Christian or not, to reflect on it in the context of history, at least in an objective and scholarly manner. But that was not to be, so that an international conference had

to be held in Hong Kong eventually, and very few mainland scholars felt comfortable to attend. In comparison, the history of Catholic missions seems to have been much better treated by the present Chinese government, although the “rites controversy” and the eventual expulsion of foreign Catholic missions from China also took place under very difficult religio-socio-political circumstances.^⑩ Fortunately for the Catholic missions, they came when China was still strong and self-confident generally, and when China was almost completely free from any serious “imperialistic” invasion from Western powers in the late Ming and early Qing periods. Equally important, if not more so, was the impressive Western learning and advanced technology (advanced by the standard of the time) brought by Matteo Ricci and his fellow Catholic priests. Unlike the Protestant missionaries who came nearly two centuries after them, their profile for direct “evangelism” and “conversion” was consciously much lower, and their attitude towards the Chinese culture was far more accommodating, and was thus quite acceptable to the Chinese authorities as well as to its mass population. What happened during the long period of the “rites controversy” was quite another story. For a long period of time imperial patronage was extended to the Catholics, a very great privilege not given to the Protestants. As such, the Chinese memories of the Catholic missions, especially during the late Ming and early Qing period, was far less bitter and painful, in marked contrast to the Protestant missions. While even an academic conference to “commemorate” the bi-centenary of the arrival of Morrison was a *taboo* in mainland China, activities surrounding the 400th anniversary of the death of Matteo Ricci in 2010 had been welcomed and supported even by the Chinese authorities. Again, the “timing” was also very significant. 2010 was the year of the Shanghai World Expo, an event which gave China every opportunity to demonstrate its openness to the world community, just as it tried to do in and through the 2008 Beijing Olympics. The focus of the commemorative events was naturally and understandably on the contributions of Ricci and his associates to the cultural exchanges between China and West, and things religious are kept in very low profile. Consequently, a special theme exhibition on Ricci was held at the prestigious Shanghai Museum from April 3 to May 23, 2010. The Ricci-Xu [Guangqi] Dialogue Institute was formally inaugurated on May 11, 2010 at the School of Philosophy of Fudan University, Shanghai, with an international forum on “Dialogue Among Civilizations and Global

^⑩ In very broad terms the “rites controversy” actually lasted for 219 years, from 1720 to 1939. See Choong Chee Pang, *Is the Separation of Politics and Religion a Myth?* 142-150.

Challenges”.^{②①} A very serious event, called “Grand Ricci”, was also held at the Shanghai Museum for the launching of a Ricci DVD on May 11, 2010. The Counsel Generals of France and Italy to China and some top Ricci scholars were among the dignitaries at the special event.

B. The “Christian” West’s pre-occupation with human rights and religious freedom and its constant pressure on the Chinese government has led to China’s counter measures, particularly its strong re-action against any move or pronouncement that could be perceived as outside interference in Chinese *domestic* matters. In this case, foreign interference, such as the meeting with Tibet’s self-imposed exiled leader, Dalai Lama, often becomes counter-productive, causing the Chinese authorities to be even more suspicious of any foreign link of a China-based religion.

C. The continuous growth of the Christian population in China, including some Communist Party members’ acceptance of the Christian faith, has also been a serious concern. The often exaggerated or imaginative figures of the Chinese Christian population certainly do not help to ease the authorities’ worry about the socio-political implications of the phenomenal growth.

D. Christian conviction based on the prophetic message and the theology of the incarnation as well as the Christian role as the servant of all actually leave serious Christians little choice, except to concern themselves with things of the world and get involved in it with a deep sense of calling and responsibility. How to fulfil this Christian calling in actual life and witness in the ever changing socio-political dynamics of the time is an enormous task. As a leading scholar of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences frankly put it in an international symposium on Christianity and society held in Beijing some years ago, the China government, at least for the time being, would only welcome the *servant* role of the Chinese church, but not its *prophetic* role. The TSPM/CCC (Three Self Patriotic Movement/China Christian Council) has therefore wisely chosen to play the role of the former, and not the latter, said the scholar, although he knew fully well that the Biblical faith expects the church to take up *both* roles. The socio-political implications of TSPM/CCC’s difficult choice need no further elaboration. The vital ques-

^{②①} The keynote address was delivered by Michel Camdessus, former director general of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the present writer had the honour to be his discussant. The highlight of the welcoming address given by the former President of Fudan University, Professor Wang Shenghong, is on Ricci’s great contribution to the cultural exchanges between China and the West, especially the introduction of Western learning to China in the late Ming and early Qing period.

tion confronting Chinese Christians is clear; how to remain faithful to their Biblical faith and make contribution to the building of a “harmonious society”, with due recognition that they live in a society which is still atheistic ideologically. As “peace-makers” (Matthew 5:9) as well as being “the salt of the earth” and “the light of the world” (5:14), the Christians will need a lot of wisdom as well as moral courage to accommodate and to avoid confrontation as far as possible, without having to compromise the core of their faith.

Christian Nestorianism from Syria arrived at Chang’ an (长安, now Xi’ an, 西安), the capital of T’ ang China in AD 635, when the dynasty was strong and self-confident, and had acquired a very cosmopolitan outlook, due largely to international communications, trades, diplomatic ties and cultural exchanges via the “silk road” (丝绸之路 *sichou zhi lu*). Imperial hospitality and patronage were readily and generously extended to the Syrian Nestorians, messengers of the new religion. ^② Similarly, it was also a relatively strong and self-confident China in the late Ming and early Qing period which welcomed the Catholics, especially the Jesuits, led by Matteo Ricci, to the country. An ascending China is already being recognized as major world power. As such, one would reasonably expect modern China to be able to display the elegant demeanour or graceful bearing (風度 *fengdu*) of a great nation, just as it did in much of the Han, T’ ang and the Ming-Qing periods, and should have no difficulty accommodating Chinese Christianity quite comfortably in its quest for a “harmonious society”.

China’ s quest for a harmonious society

The reform and open policy inaugurated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 has undoubtedly generated enormous wealth for China, and brought a great deal of benefits to many of its subjects. But modernization, whether in China or elsewhere, is often a two-edged sword. The modernization which has so far benefited China has also created host of new problems not seen in the long history of the country. Due largely to its very closed political system and the lack of the rule of law both in terms of its structure as well as its implementation, corruption, bribes and many irregularities have been very widespread, resulted, among many socio-political ills, the widening gap between the rich and the poor. As the national leaders as well as the Chinese

^② See, for instance, *The Nestorian Tablet*, erected in AD781, and presently placed in the “Calligraphy Forest” (碑林 *Beilin*) in Xian. See also, Choong Chee Pang, “Studying Christianity and doing theology *extra ecclesiam* in China”, in *Christian Theology in Asia*, edited by Sebastian C. H. Kim, (Cambridge: CUP, 2008)

populace know it fully well, behind all these socio-political ills are the issues of honesty, integrity, trust, justice, equality and truth. As the Chinese leaders themselves are keenly aware, unless the serious situation is effectively addressed, social harmony and national unity could not be guaranteed. The quest for a “harmonious society” is itself a clear confession and admission of the existence of the problem.

The idea of “harmonious society” (“和谐社会 *hexie shehui*”) was seriously tabled and formally adopted at the 4th Session of the 16th Meeting of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party (中国共产党第十六届中央委员会第四次全体会议 *Zhongguo gongchandang di 16 jie zhongyang weiyuanhui di 4 ci quanti huiyi*) on September 19, 2004. The full title of the idea was “构建社会主义和谐社会 *goujian shehui zhuyi hexie shehui*” (“The Construction of a Socialist Harmonious Society”). “和谐社会 *hexie shehui*” (“harmonious society”) is just its short form.

As an ideology totally committed to “class struggle”, it would be inconceivable that Communist China before Deng’s reform would be concerned for the “harmony” of its society. It would be equally incredible that China, since the May Fourth Movement (五四运动 *Wusi yundong*) in 1919, and especially during the time of the “Great Cultural Revolution” (文化大革命 *Wenhua da geming*, 1966-76), would try to find any valuable cultural resources in the outdated, even “feudalistic” and “reactionary” Confucianism to solve any of China’s modern problems. It is Deng’s reform and open policy which has turned many fundamental things upside down. Deng’s policy is pragmatic, as he himself has put it ingeniously and somewhat humorously, “Who cares whether the cat is black or white as long as it catches mice.” When applied to the present context in relation to China’s quest for a “harmonious society”, Deng’s pragmatic approach could perhaps be put like this by those who have returned to the “ancient wisdom” of Confucius for inspiration: “Who cares whether Confucianism is ancient or modern, conservative or progressive, as long as it solves problems”.

The idea of “harmony” (和 *he*) has been a core ethic-socio-political value in the long Chinese cultural tradition, especially Confucianism, which served as China’s state ideology for more than two thousand years. It will be sufficient to refer to just a couple of key verses on the ethic-socio-political value and virtue in the Confucian classic, *The Analects* (论语 *Lunyu*), to see why the ancient idea of harmony has been so often quoted to support and justify the present leadership’s quest for a harmonious society.

In *The Analects* I;12 “harmony” (和 *he*) is regarded as the cardinal ethico-socio-political

value and virtue, especially when it is applied to *li* (礼)²²

《论语》学而第一:12

有子曰:礼之用,和为贵。先王之道,斯为美,小大由之。

This verse could be paraphrased in modern Chinese like this: “有子认为,礼法(禮儀規則)的应用以和顺²³为可贵,从前圣明君王治国的方法,这条做得很好,无论大事小事都按这一条去做。”

In the long history of China, this Confucian text has often been used as a “golden rule” to evaluate and judge the performance of a ruler in his or her governance. “先王之道 *xianwang zhi dao*” literally means “the way of [ancient, former] kings”. If the text simply ends here, the “golden rule” would be of great use and of great advantage to the ruler only. It could also be exploited or abused by the ruler, even tyrant. Fortunately, there is a second part of the same verse to counter-check and counter-balance it:

有所不行,知和而和,不以礼节之,亦不可行也。

A paraphrase of this statement in modern Chinese reads: “有子认为,礼法的应用以和顺为可贵,但和顺必须以礼法为基础,如果只知和顺可贵而一味地和顺,不用礼法去节制约束它,也就行不通了”。²⁴

While harmony is undoubtedly important and precious in the governance of the ruler, and would be beneficial to the social harmony and political stability of a nation, one should not seek harmony simply for its own sake. True and lasting harmony must be regulated and constrained by ethic-socio-political propriety (礼 *li*) [法规 *fagui*, 原则 *yuanze*, 规范 *guifan*, 准则

²² In the Confucian context, 礼 may be translated broadly as “social propriety”. This paper is concerned less with 礼 as rites and rituals (禮儀規則 *liyi guize*), but more with its socio-political aspects, including the skill and art of governance. It can therefore include “virtue” (德 *de*), general and common principle (道理 *daoli*, 原則 *yuanze*). It can also mean “norms” (規範 *guifan*, 準則 *zhunze*, 法規 *fagui*) in socio-political behaviour. It is often thought that even after implementing Deng Xiaoping’s “reform and open” policy for thirty years, China still does not have a comprehensive and holistic set of the rule of law (整體法治規範 *zhengti fazhi fagui*) and the effective and just implementation of it. Zhu Xi (朱熹) had a very sound understanding of the Confucian 礼 *li* (social propriety), thinking that it was concerned with both 天理 *tianli* (the principle of heaven) and 人事 *renshi* (human affairs).

²³ The harmony in music or orchestra is often used as an analogy in Confucian classics to convey the idea of “harmony” (和) whether in ethical, social or political terms.

²⁴ 《十三经直解》*Shisanjing zhijie*【The Direct Interpretation of the Thirteen Classics】,第4卷,(南昌 Nanchang:江西人民出版社 Jiangxi renmin chubanshe【Jiangxi People’s Publishing House】,1996),5。

zhunze]. This is where and why the “rule of law” must come in, in modern China’s quest for a “harmonious society”. The whole verse of *The Analects* I:12, with its two integral parts, must be seriously and sincerely^⑤ taken, understood and honored together.

The other most relevant Confucian saying on “harmony” (和 *he*) is found in *The Analects* 13:23 (《论语》子路第十三:23): “君子和而不同 *junzi he er butong*”.

This statement can be quite freely translated: “Gentlemen could enjoy harmony together while holding differences in opinions (views, positions, life and life style, *modus operandi* etc.)”. Just like *The Analects* I:12, the first part of the statement “君子和 *junzi he*” (the harmony between gentlemen), must be counter-checked or counter-balanced by the next phrase “而不同 *er butong*” (while holding differences in opinions etc.) When applied to the ruler or those in power and authority, the whole verse could be most challenging and testing, that is, how to enjoy harmony and yet accept differences at the same time, especially differences in political views and positions, which could be very threatening to one’s secured ruling position. It really takes a true gentleman-politician to do that, and this is very rare, whether in modern Chinese history or in old imperial China. As far as the international community is concerned, China’s track record on this is far from being satisfactory. However, it must be noted that the Confucian text is *not* referring to “small men” (小人 *xiaoren*), but “gentlemen” (君子 *junzi*), because it is not too realistic to expect 小人 *xiaoren* (“small men”) to have the capacity, elegant demeanour or graceful bearing (风度 *fengdu*) to accept differences with others. But this is certainly expected of the “gentlemen” (君子 *junzi*) defined by Confucius’ “ancient wisdom”.

What worries the Chinese, especially the perceptive intellectuals, is that the quest for “social harmony”, which is legitimate and necessary in itself in the present socio-political context of China, could well be used as a pretext to constrain, even silence different and dissenting voices. This had been the weakness and problem in Confucianism, which served as the state orthodoxy and ideology for two thousand years in imperial times, even spilling over to the period of the Republic of China, led by the Guomindang. One of the best known Neo-Confu-

^⑤ Sincerity or honesty, 诚 *cheng*, is also a cardinal virtue in Confucianism, not only in personal self-cultivation, but also in interpersonal relationships and social behaviour as well as in governance. 诚 *cheng* is often used closely together with another Confucian cardinal virtue, 信 *xin* (trust, faith, confidence), hence 诚信 *chengxin* (sincerity or honesty and trust). Perhaps, it is not an over-statement to say that the lack of 诚信 *chengxin* in many spheres of life, is the greatest of all crises in China today. Rampant and widespread corruptions, bribes and misappropriation of public funds are clear testimonies to it.

cian scholars, former Harvard professor Tu Weimin²⁶, served for several years as a leading advisor to the Singapore government in its promotion of Confucian ethics in the 1980s. While most enthusiastic and supportive of Singapore's very committed project, Tu had also warned against the *politization* of Confucian ethics. Tu read his Chinese history very well, and was keenly aware of the politization or the exploitation of Confucian ethics by people in high positions for their own political gains in the long history of China.²⁷

One of the worst scenarios that could happen to a nation was when the perceptive intellectuals, who were truly concerned for the welfare of the nation, were silenced or chose to do so for obvious reasons. There is in fact a piece of "ancient wisdom" in the prophetic words of Amos which refers to a sad and disturbing scenario like this:

"They [the rulers] hate the one who reproves in the gates,
and they abhor the one who speaks the truth. . . .
Therefore the prudent will keep silent in such a time;
for it is an evil time." (Amos 5. 10, 13)

In a politically closed system in which people are so used to taking orders and directives obediently and are trying to be "politically correct" for one's own benefit and survival, there is understandably the constant pressure and temptation to be *prudent* and try to do everything just for the sake of "和 *he*" (harmony). Even conscientious intellectuals may become "prudent" and "keep silent" in "evil time", just as Amos, the prophet, had sadly witnessed in his own days.

The following notes have some very revealing things to say about "harmony" (和 *he*) with reference to governance. On the word "和 *he*", the authoritative Chinese dictionary 辞源 *Ciyuan* has a very interesting comment:

和谐: 协调。左传襄十一年: "八年之中, 九合诸侯, 如乐之和, 无所不谐。" 晋书挚虞传: "施之金石, 则音韵和谐。" 后汉书四九仲长统传倡言法诫: "夫任一人则政专, 任数人则相倚, 政专则和谐, 相倚则违戾。" 此指行动连贯一致。(辞源)

²⁶ Tu is sometimes being dubbed as a Neo-Confucian "missionary" for his zeal in promoting Confucian ethics and values as well as in Confucian apologetics.

²⁷ Tu Weimin, *Learning, Politics and the Way*, (Albany: State University of New York, 1993). First published by the Institute of East Asian Philosophy (IEAP), Singapore.

“政专 *zhengzhuan*” could mean one’s single-minded devotion to governance or public duties. This seems to be the original meaning of the positive statement “夫任一人则政专 *Fu ren yiren ze zhengzhuan*” in 后汉书 *Houhanshu*. And the interpretation of 辞源 *Ciyuan* is accordingly positive: “此指行动连贯一致 *Ci zhi xingdong lianguan yizhi*”。In both cases, the basic assumption is that the devotion of one single person to governance (政专 *zhengzhuan*) would [necessary] lead to [socio-political] harmony (和谐 *hexie*), hence “政专则和谐 *zhengzhuan ze hexie*”. There is certainly some truth in this assumption empirically. Thus, in comparison, dictatorship is sometimes far more effective and efficient than democracy, because the process of the latter is often very time-consuming. It could even end up with little accomplishment, or simply fruitless. But, as it often happened in history, the so-called single-minded devotion to governance (“政专 *zhengzhuan*”) could also lead to “专政 *zhuanzheng*” (dictatorship) as well as its perpetuation.

The *Houhanshu* 后汉书 *Houhanshu* apparently prefers the governance of one single person to oligarchy or group leadership: “任数人则相倚, 政专则和谐, 相倚则违戾 *ren shuren ze xiangyi, zhengzhuan ze hexie, xiangyi ze weili*”, because the latter will lead to difficulties and problems (“违戾 *weili*”), instead of harmony (“和谐 *hexie*”). The *Houhanshu* 后汉书 *Houhanshu* also has something interesting to say about “违戾 *weili*”:

“违戾, 乖戾也。《后汉书·范开列传》:“太史公违戾五经, 谬孔子言。《三国志·魏志·高贵乡公纪》:“隗嚣违戾, 光武覆。”《新语》:“怀虑违戾相错。”^②

It is hoped that the Confucian texts taken from *The Analects* are sufficient to show that there are indeed rich ethic-socio-political resources in the “ancient wisdom” of China for the modern Chinese leaders to refer to. But the use of it requires a great deal of honesty, integrity as well as strong moral courage and political will. This means one cannot simply seek harmony alone, for there are other equally important issues and factors to be considered seriously. The Confucian text also solemnly reminds those who are just too eager to achieve social harmony that true “gentlemen” can enjoy harmony and respect differences at the same time. There can be no meaningful and lasting harmony without check and balance.

^② 中国文化研究所 *Zhongguo wenhua yanjiusuo* [Institute of Chinese Culture Research] 编《中文大辞典》*Zhongwen da cidian* [The Big Chinese Dictionary], 第33册, 162。《现代汉语词典》*Xiandai hanyu cidian* [Modern Chinese Dictionary], 第5版, (北京 Beijing: 商务印书馆 *Shangwu yinshuguan* [The Commercial Press], 2005): “乖戾: (性情、言语、行为) 别扭, 不合情理”。

The “ancient wisdom” of Confucianism would also want modern propagandists of 国学 *guoxue*²⁹ especially Confucianism, to be level-headed, so that they will not lose their right sense of discernment and judgment, because it is often far too easy for this to happen when the promoters of a particular project know that it has the strong support of the authorities. On this particularly crucial point, a great deal could perhaps be learnt from another equally ancient “wisdom”, namely the message of the Hebrew prophets. They were not only “gentlemen” (君子 *junzi*) in the Confucian sense, but also “watchmen” and “conscience” of their time. In many cases, “和 *he*” could just be a deceptively attractive name for mere conformity and slavish obedience.

In the last twenty years or so the Chinese government has often reacted justifiably against the indiscriminate imposition of certain Western values, concepts and systems on China. However, what appears to be justifiable and legitimate could sometimes be used as an excuse or pretext to achieve certain pre-determined goals. The now famous rhetoric, “socialism with Chinese characteristics” may be cited as a good example. In some cases, what were supposed to be particularly “Chinese” turned out to be quite *universal*. It is hoped that the Chinese government will be open and transparent in its quest for a “harmonious society”.

Conclusion

This paper is essentially a “tale”³⁰ of “two empires”, namely, the old Roman Empire and a rising modern China, and the latter often regarded as a new and threatening “Empire”. As has already been noted in the “Introduction”, the placing of the two “empires” together does not necessarily mean a comparative study between them in any technical sense. What actually brings them together is their respective commitments to the quest for and maintenance of “peace” (*pax*), hence *Pax Romana* and *Pax Sinica* (the latter coined by this paper). While some common features might be shared between the two, certain means are used respectively

²⁹ “国学 *guoxue*”, literally “national learning”, generally refers to the learning of ancient Chinese classics, especially Confucian classics, although it also covers Daoist and Buddhist classics as well as other literary treasures of China. There has been an almost unprecedented revival of “国学 *guoxue*” in China with strong government support in recent years, leading its critics and sceptics to suspect that it might have been politically or ideologically motivated. For a most recent discussion and critique on the subject, see Paulos Huang’s coming publication, *The Sino-Christian Academic Biblical Literature Studies in the Light of the Great Guoxue*. 见黄保罗 Huang Baoluo 著, 即将出版的《大国学视野中的汉语学术圣经学》*Daguo xue shiye zhong de hanyu xueshu shengjing wenxue* [The Sino-Christian Academic Biblical Studies in the Light of Great *guoxue*] , and Choong Chee Pang’s *Foreword* for the book.

³⁰ The word “tale” is used very loosely here.

by them to deal with the complex and complicated issue of peace (*Pax*) markedly differently. For instance, the maintenance of peace and stability in the Roman Empire was largely and consistently characterized by the use of brutal military forces, but such measures have been taken by Communist China only sporadically in dealing with rebellions and disturbances for the restoration of socio-political order and stability. The approach of the paper is obviously not sociological or socio-analytical, but largely biblical-theological, especially in the understanding of the “two kingdoms” and the nature of powers and authorities. It is also the Christian understanding of these issues that provides the meaningful link between the two “Empires”, although their respective historic-socio-political contexts are vastly different. Much less is said about the Roman Empire itself, except with reference to the trial of Jesus and the life and teaching of Paul. The paper also assumes that the reasons and factors behind China’s current quest for a “harmonious society” are already a matter of common knowledge. As such, very little is said about them in the paper. A great deal more space has been given to the “church and state”, or “politics and religion” issue, because this delicate issue has been troubling the Christian community both at home and abroad, and has not been satisfactorily dealt with by the authorities concerned.

Was Jesus really a threat to the *Pax Romana*? Certainly not in *socio-political* terms, let alone military, when the life and teaching of “Jesus of Nazareth” are rightly understood, including his views on the nature of the “kingdom of God (or Heavens)”. But the teaching of Jesus, such as the “Sermon on the Mount”, and Paul’s “theology of the cross”, together with the apostle’s personal *modus operandi*, could pose a formidable challenge and threat to the *socio-ethical* ethos, not only of the Greco-Roman world, but ethos throughout the ages. It is not only threatening, but essentially subversive and revolutionary, and here lies the great *paradox* of Christ and the Christian religion, a *paradox* that is often misunderstood, *i. e.*, that the “Prince of Peace” himself as well as his followers, the “peace-makers” could be so threatening, even “subversive” and “revolutionary”.

Modern China’s quest for a “harmonious society” is not only understandable, but socio-politically justifiable. And when the right approach and proper means are taken, the project and “vision” could be most laudable, and worthy of full Christian support. However, there can be no real and lasting peace and stability without equality and justice, truth, integrity and trust (诚信 *chengxin*). As such, check and balance will always be necessary. True harmony (和 *he*) must have the capacity and grace to accommodate and respect differences (不同 *butong*).

There are indeed very rich resources at the disposal of those who are seriously and sincerely committed to the building of a “harmonious society”; wisdom in China’s own cultural resources as well as ethical and spiritual resources in the Biblical tradition. But the effective use of all these resources requires not only an equal measure of *wisdom*, but also strong *political will* and *moral courage*.

中文题目:

罗马与中国的和平:两个帝国的故事

钟志邦

英国伦敦大学高级研究员,新加坡总统之宗教顾问,牛津亚洲宗教文化研究中心高级研究员,英国爱伯丁大学哲学博士,新加坡三一神学院前院长,北京大学、复旦大学、香港中文大学客座教授
电子信箱:choongcp@singnet.com.sg

提要: 对于古罗马来说,必须不惜一切代价地维护和谐以至于达到罗马大帝国的社会政治稳定。当代中国对和谐有着相似的追求。尽管可以探讨关于维护和谐之手段的各种问题,但两个帝国对和谐的关注显然是合理的。鉴于两个帝国处境差异,本文无意于从技术层面对二者进行比较。把这两个帝国连接在一起的是基督教关于“两个国度”的概念以及历代所有的权力与权柄之本质。在认识到当代中国对社会政治和谐与稳定的追求的同时,本文作者强烈主张,若不顾手段公平与正义与否,只以结果论一切,是不可取的。对于努力追求和谐的执行者来说,中国与圣经中的智慧值得借鉴,但如何使用这些智慧,则需要现代智慧、政治意志力和道德勇气。

关键词: *Pax*、安定、和谐社会、基督教、儒家