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CHANGING CHINA: ENGAGING IN A DIALOGUE WITH MADAME DE AND MISTER SAI

改变中国：与德先生和赛先生的对话

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Changing China may seem at first sight a most absurd enterprise, given how its cultural patterns seem so deeply entrenched in the strongly hierarchical traditions characteristic of the “Middle Kingdom”. Nevertheless, this view ignores the fact that China and especially its wisdom and ethical traditions are in a constant process of change, as they often are revised to achieve social progress. As Zhou Shoujin documents, one of the most important of these events was the May Fourth New Culture Movement which started in 1919. This movement had a profound impact in China related to its belief that science and democracy, nicknamed “Mister Sai” (science) and “Madame De” (democracy), will eventually transform China’s cultural traditions. In the Republican era the question was whether the moral imperatives of the Confucian “*Junzi*”, the morally refined person, would simply be replaced by some Western approach to science and democracy or if there could be a synthesis between the ancient wisdom traditions, accommodating a democratic and scientific worldview. China’s traditional ethos based on the hierarchical structure of legitimate moral authority was thus enriched by an awakening of awareness of the pluralism of civilizations and a sincere desire for genuine dialogue among civilizations.

Perhaps the visit to China of Rabin-dranath Tagore who was the first non-European to win the Nobel price of Literature in 1913 may be seen as a landmark in a development which combines Asian wisdom traditions with a strong drive for reform based on rigorous academic research and education. Another major milestone along these lines, as indicated by Zhou Shoujin, is the reform and opening-up policy in the 1980’s which inspired China’s progress from a planned economy towards a market economy.

In this process exemplary leaders played a crucial role by sticking to a roadmap for change despite much resistance. This becomes particularly evident when leaders respond well to crises. In the context of the Covid pandemic Cristina Lu portrays four international leaders who were determined to sacrifice temporarily their nation’s economy by shutting down their borders to the world, for the sake of their population’s safety. Although it is always tricky to find effective leadership--in Lu’s sample, the heads of government of small sized countries--it seems crucial to discern what would be key features of “humane leadership” defined as an empathetic and wise attitude resonating with Confucian traditions about the virtues of the *Junzi*.

As the *Junzi* seemed automatically linked to men with their privileged position ruling their families and societies, it may be useful to consider, as Dacy Wu and Dennis McCann argue, that women may not only be as capable of exercising *Junzi* leadership as men are, but judging from the virtues enshrined in the *Junzi* ideal, women may even be more naturally gifted for “humane leadership” than men. Despite the rhetoric promoting gender equality over decades, women are still noticeably underrepresented in leadership roles in business, in politics and other public service sectors. Confidence and motivation are indeed crucial for seizing the opportunity when it is presented, and not backing off for fear of not being qualified enough or worrying about their credentials. The authors strongly ask women to encourage their daughters to achieve their dreams and dare to be leaders. In fact, the strong focus on value education in China, for both young men and young women, gives hope that this kind of change could be achieved in a not too remote future.

Facing the crises of conflict and wars

Engraved in the memory of China as in many other countries and cultures is the horrible experience of war and the threat of complete devastation. How to conceive any positive change given the bitterness of hatred over generations and the all-too-frequently entrenched obsession with revenge. As the spectre of war has more closely cast a dark shadow over the imagination of all of

the Movement has been the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), and the ICRC has worked to facilitate the response from China. This has included extensive promotion of international humanitarian law (IHL) through the China Red Cross Society, and within the Chinese armed forces. The Chinese National IHL Committee, an inter-ministerial body, was established in 2007 to better coordinate and promote the domestic implementation of international humanitarian law.

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us, thanks to the outbreak of armed hostilities in the Ukraine more than a year ago, we may more readily see the intrinsic value of those who against all odds commit themselves to restoring peace. Roderick O’Brien’s essay describes the connection between the Red Cross in the People’s Republic of China and international humanitarian law. The initial proposals by Henri Dunant, the founder of the Red Cross, had two elements: the formation in times of peace of volunteer groups who could assist war wounded, and an international agreement which would protect the wounded and the volunteers from attack. O’Brien shows that the second element, the international agreement, provides a basis for modern international humanitarian law. Participation in these treaties began in the Qing dynasty, in 1904 and 1906, and was continued with the Republic of China’s signing of the 1929 Conventions, and further renewed by the People’s Republic of China, which formally assented to the 1949 Conventions and Additional Protocols. Since that time, a major promoter of

In the demanding process of bringing peace to a broken world, the role of religion is often underestimated. In his analysis of the philosopher Zhu Xi (1130-1200 CE), Edmond Eh describes the spiritual path from a purgative to an illuminative stage, meant to regulate household duties, while ordering well the state and culminating in bringing peace to the world. The major task of the illuminative stage is to restore the state of original goodness in others. The illumination to be expected of the proficient is to guide others along the path of cultivating virtues. The purpose of learning at this stage is to use one’s knowledge of the good for the sake of others. Those who are proficient learn to apply their moral knowledge by caring for others in the family, the country, and the world. The first task is to acquire knowledge of the nature of utmost goodness while the second task is to go about the achievement of utmost goodness.

Anton Jamnik develops basic principles shared by various religions and beliefs which represent a kind of “global ethos” of honest and just behaviour in all areas of life, including business. The foundation of these principles reflects a deep commitment to respecting human dignity: Persons should always be the end, never the means only. This axiom strongly links Western and Confucian wisdom traditions as well as the Golden Rule, namely “Do unto others as you would have them do unto you, and do not do unto others as you would not have them do unto you”. The orientation to the common good can thus be shared by both secular and religious perspectives by respecting human dignity. The joy of being, embracing true beauty in life, can be achieved in our relationships with other people (thus, the pursuit of the common good), and not in our solitude or pragmatic individualism.

Transforming the message of Jesus in the face of China

The itinerary of Matteo Ricci (1552-1610 CE), a path toward gradually mastering the Chinese language and acquiring new skills, opened a new door to China. As Thierry Meynard, with his thought-provoking reference to the “Chinese Christ” argues, Ricci came to understand the meaning of the rituals of the ancestors that were frequently practised among the Chinese. In front of the tablets of their parents and ancestors, the Chinese were in fact not worshipping idols with supernatural powers, but they were expressing their connectedness with those who had transmitted to them the gifts of life, culture, and moral principles. However later, after Ricci’s death, this issue – known as the Chinese Rites Controversy – would become the focus of a conflict which would run for centuries. But in the view of Mey-

nard, Ricci was able to engage in a fruitful experience with his Chinese friends, through which he encountered the “Chinese Christ” especially in the teachings of Confucius and through the moral and cultural ideals of China. Ricci was not only a great scholar of China and its language; he had a deep empathy for the people and for their culture, which resulted in his own self-transformation. By discovering the “Chinese Christ” Ricci enriched his own experience of Christ and was able to communicate it to others. Meynard recalls the inspiring image of Ricci who wrote that his was not yet a time for reaping in China, nor even for sowing, but rather a time for clearing the woods. On another occasion, he wrote that the success of the Jesuits’ apostolate should not be judged only by counting the number of Christians, but by the strength of the foundation they were establishing for a long-lasting enterprise.

Along the lines of letting Christian faith take root in China, Anna Mahjar-Barducci explores linguistic nuances in the Chinese language under a Christian lens that reflects key concepts of the Gospel and the Social Doctrine of the Church. While her reading may be unconventional, when viewed through a narrow focus on linguistic analysis, it may actually provide a new way of addressing the crucial question whether or not human nature is “good” (善) or “evil” (恶) as it was widely debated in Chinese intellectual history. According to the Chinese philosopher Mozi “human nature is inherently good”. But in his theory of human nature Mencius does not mean that “human nature is inherently good” (人性本善), but that “human nature is to the good” (人性向善). A contrary view is put forward by the philosopher Xunzi who argues that evil is part of “nature,” a situation that is not incorrigible. Xunzi says that “man will conquer the sky” by overcoming his instincts. The drama of this struggle

is well delineated in the analysis of Pope Benedict XVI who somewhat along the lines of Mozi and Mencius maintained that each person is called to do the good, and intimately wants to do it. However, at the same time, in a manner reminiscent of Xunzi, we must admit that each person is driven by the impulse to do the opposite, to follow the path of egoism and violence, doing what he or she wants knowing that he or she is acting against God and his/her neighbour. This contradiction is experienced every day. From this contradiction, the Christian lens offered by Mahar-Barducci in faith knows that a redemption must arise.

community in Asia. In light of Lam's important case study drawing lessons from a particularly painful period during Covid, we need to focus on what should be the hallmarks for making the relationship between Africa and China mutually beneficial, not only in business transactions but also in adequately fighting against numerous diseases.

An intriguing example of an opportunity arising within our prolonged struggle with Covid involves a tourist promotion campaign in the old district of Macau. Eric Mou leads us to the street called "*Rua dos Ervanários*" (關前正街) which is

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Social innovation in action in Southern China

In 2020, at the height of the Covid crisis, China did face accusations, made by the African Union and the United States, of racism and xenophobia over the alleged mistreatment of African and African American citizens in Guangzhou. Kaian Lam recalls complaints such as not being able to enter restaurants, or to leave a quarantine hotel even with negative Covid test results, as well as other potentially discriminatory actions based on a person's darker skin colour. We may never adequately assess to what extent Covid reconfigured the cultural dialogue between China and Africa. Statistically, only a few thousand Africans were residing in Guangzhou during the year 2020, falling sharply from the 2005-2012 peak when Guangzhou hosted the largest African expatriate

the oldest China customs border area in Macau. It is now a district with lots of old buildings, stores, and small restaurants. Such areas kept attracting many tourists; however, with the Covid crisis the number of visitors dropped drastically. The shops were facing their greatest challenge in a decade, and some shop owners took the painful decision to close. Based on its experience of previous community work, a local association combined the photo games concept on mobile phones with lucky draw prizes to attract more investment and tourists to this area. The awards include discount coupons from the shops within the district and gifts sponsored by the mega resorts in Macau. The organizers extended the program twice until October 2022, as more shops would like to join the program, and even the owners of closed shops now want to lease their shops for business again.

The purpose of this experiment was to create a platform for development involving the community, Macau's government, and people, with innovative proposals that would help them to survive the economic contraction prompted by the Covid pandemic. With the welcome return of tourists to Macau, such platforms may create opportunities which promise to diversify the overall landscape of Macau and diminish an overreliance of the local economy on the casinos.

The road ahead

In considering various factors which may help to change China, our reflections have tended to focus on the itinerary of the Ignatian Year that ran from May 2021 through July 2022. Jesuits and their supporters explored some key elements of life stories which completely transformed the lives of two friends, namely Ignatius Loyola (1491-1556 CE) and Francis-Xavier (1506-1552 CE). Their bold responses to the wide-open spirit of the European Renaissance enabled not only themselves but also many other people to cross the threshold to a "New World" along the same lines. Whatever their origins, they and their disciples today follow the path of Francis Xavier who crossed Asia from India, Indonesia, Japan, and the Moluccas ending his journey on a barren rock in Shangchuan Island below Canton in Southern China. The MRIJ's dialogue with China thus takes its own inspiration from the bold vision of Xavier, continuing the dialogue as a point of departure for dialogues with the many cultures of Asia despite their risks and spiritual dangers. Amid a situation nowadays which seems to make dialogue with China nearly impossible, the various insights of this issue's authors clearly indicate the urgent need to continue and to go deeper in a mutually enriching encounter.



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