



Chinese Wisdom and Christian Faith: On Harmony

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Three Parts

- I. Chinese culture and religions:
characteristics of
harmony, integrating 3
schools of thoughts
- II. History of Christianity in
China: 3 waves of
presence. What have
we learnt?
- III. Trinitarian relations:
East-West encounter,
3-party relationships

I. Chinese culture and religions

The characteristic of harmony
integrating 3 schools of thoughts



Confucianism

Daoism

Buddhism



Daoism: Harmony between human and nature

觸袖野云多自舞
避人出鳥不成啼

The Dao follows nature
道法自然





Confucianism: Harmony of human relations

天
人 仁

Heaven and humans are united as one
天人合一





Under the sky
we are
one family
天下一家



Chinese Buddhism

The "void"
(emptiness,
śūnyatā)

All sentient
beings are
equal
众生平等

II. History of Christianity in China

Three waves of presence

What have we learnt?



1st wave: Christianity introduced via the Silk Road from *Daqin* (referring to Rome) to Chang'an by the Eastern Syriac Church (635 d.C.)



Testimony
of the
Jingjiao
stele (the
luminous
religion) in
Xi'an

It shouldn't be called Nestorian but the Jingjiao Stele of Xi'an from the Eastern Siriac Church

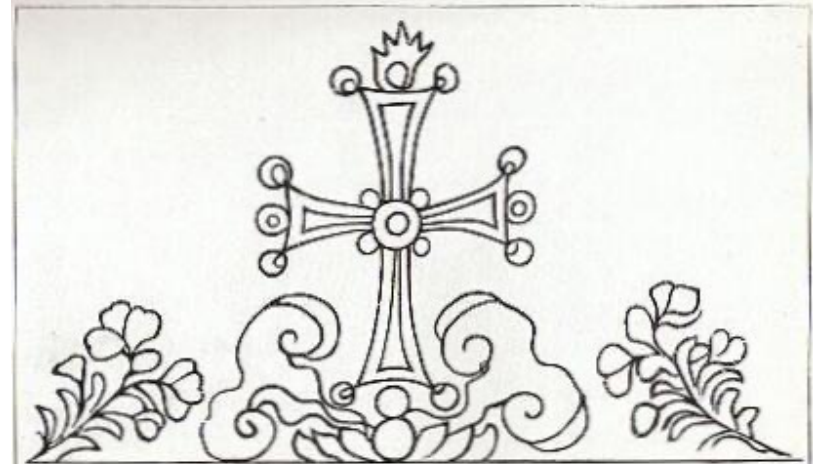
- Analyzing the contents, the inscription has no mention of Nestorianism, nor does it have heretical teachings.
- The famous Christian stele recorded the arrival of a missionary Alopen in 635 CE, from *Daqin*, Persia, to the Chinese capital of present-day Xi'an during the Tang Dynasty.
- The inscription explains: “The true and eternal way is wonderful but difficult to name. Its meritorious operations obvious, by trying our best to express, calling it *Jingjiao* (the luminous teaching).”



A relatively successful experience of inculturation and encounter between Christianity and China in history of the early times

Analyzing the design: a cross seated over lotus pedestals, and cloud patterns are leitmotif of typical Chinese cultural elements

The inscription starts by giving attribution to God with Taoist terms of permanence (常), truth (真), and silence (寂静), and describing God as "First without origin, whose lasts mysterious being forever ". The author of the inscription also used the terms Being (有), Non-being (无), and Spirit (气) to describe the mystical Triune God of creation called Elohim.



The inscription continues: “Judgment of the cross determine reaching out all four corners of the earth. The original wind is blown to produce two-fold vital energy (气). The somber void was changing, and heaven and earth opened out.” In this way, the relationship of God the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit is expressed as the Spirit of Void (灵虚) between Being (有) and Non-Being (无). These expressions somehow reflected Chinese category of thoughts Being and Non-Being generate one another (有无相生) coming from the *Daodejing*. It is not easy to describe the Trinity with Chinese category of thoughts, but the author of the inscription succeeded beautifully, a good example of how Eastern philosophy could enrich the understand of the mystery of the Trinity as interpreted by scholastic philosophy of the West.

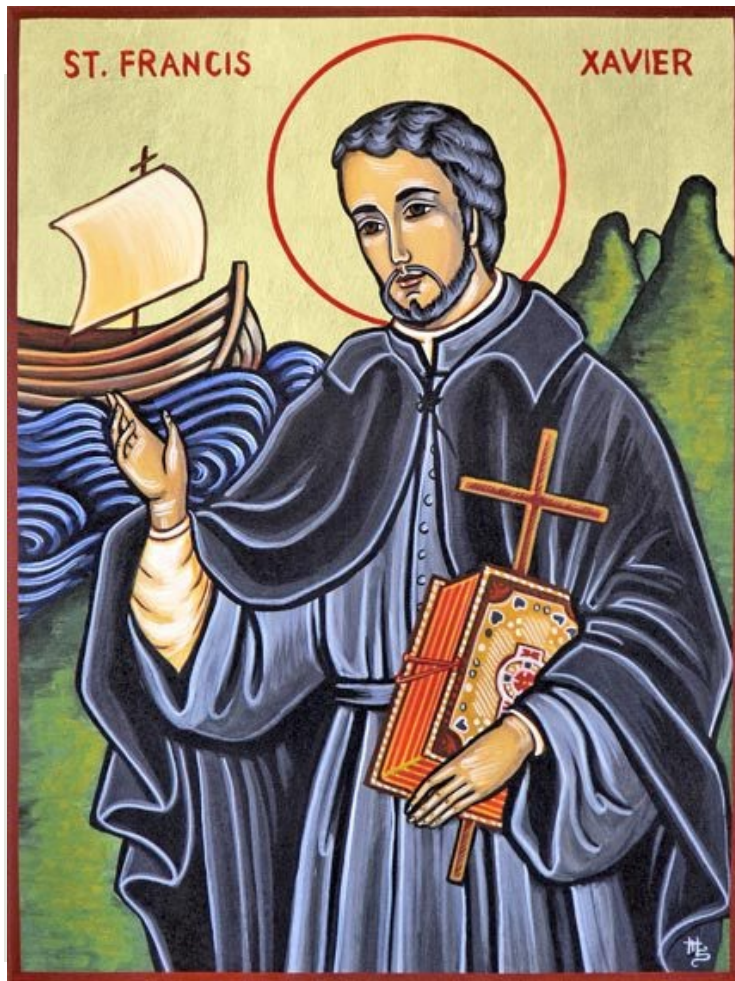


2nd wave: Giovanni Montecorvino arrived in Beijing met with Emperor Khan (1294)

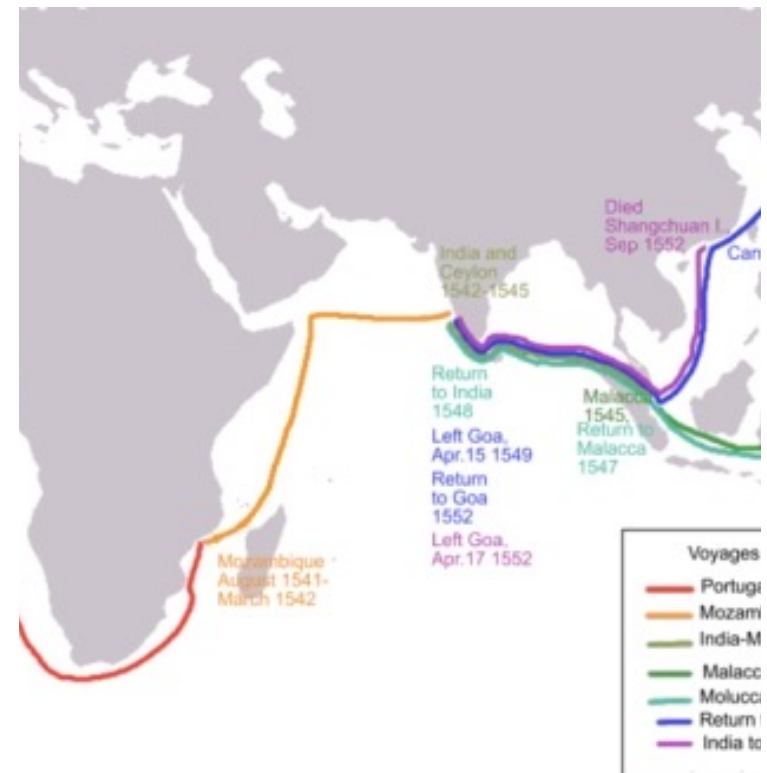


The Christian message preached was called "Yelikewen" in Mongolian, which means children of God. Whether it is *Jing jiao* introduced in the Tang Dynasty, *Yelikewen jiao* in the Yuan Dynasty, or *Tian zhu jiao* introduced in the late Ming Dynasty, their origins are one and the same of the universal Catholic Church.

3rd wave: Jesuit missions and other missionaries



Francis Xavier





The exemplary way of
Matteo Ricci: respectful
proclamation





Friendship

vs

Chinese Rites Controversy

a dispute over whether traditional Chinese ancestor veneration and Confucian rituals were compatible with Catholicism, significantly hampered evangelization efforts in China during the 17th and 18th centuries.



Protestant missions

Protestant missionaries, such as Robert Morrison, began arriving in China in the early 19th century. This wave intensified after the Opium War and the subsequent treaties that forced China to open its doors to foreign influence and missionary societies from the West.

III. The new era

Trinitarian
relations: East-
West encounter,
three-party
relationships





Dialectics of Harmony
in nature. Being and
non-being generate
one another
(有无相生)



Hegel's Dialectics
The analogy of bud,
blossoming and fruit



Dialectics of love in
the Trinity



A sense humility and intuitiveness

When one says “I see” in English, it means he “understands.” While in Greek culture the emphasis is on “seeing,” the Jewish Christian tradition on “listening” (to the words of God).

For Chinese, to understand, one says *ming* 明 (enlightened). A person must first have the light to order to see. One cannot “see” only by using his senses or “understand” by his reason. One has to be illuminated.



Laozi says: “To know the constant [Dao] is called *ming* (明 enlightenment).” (*Daodejing* 16, 55). The starting verses of *Daodejing*:

“The Dao that can be defined is not the constant Dao (道); the name that can be named is not the constant name”

Confucius when asked what he thought of life after death, he replies:

“We do not know the mysteries even of this life; how can we know about the future life?” (*Analects* 11)



Pope Leo XIV's coat of arms reflects the conversion experience of Augustine: *Vulnerasti cor meum verbo tuo*, meaning "You have pierced my heart with your word." It also includes the motto *In Illo uno unum*, meaning "In Him who is the One, we are one," which also reflects Augustinian themes of unity. He stresses the fundamental importance of communion and unity.



Jesse Russell, Ronald Cohn

Confessions (St. Augustine)

*Confession,
City of God, De Trinitate*



Augustine described his encounter with God:
“When I first knew thee,
thou didst lift me up.
And thou didst cry to
me from afar, ‘I am that
I am (*Ego sum qui sum*).’
And I heard this, as
things are heard in the
heart, and there was no
room for doubt.”

The first move to tell the
Being of God is not from
bottom up for this
attempt is always out of
reach, but from top
down.



The “little way” of St. Thérèse:

Recognizing her nothingness, she entrusted on the infinite mercy of God. Jesus was doing all in her. Instead of climbing relentlessly the stairs she found the “elevator” for which she was searching: “It is the arms of Jesus!



The dialectics of harmony

In Chinese culture

- Being and Non-Being
You and *Wu* generate one another (有无相生)
- Wu-wei (无为)
from *Daodejing*



Laozi's concept of *wu-wei*
"Dao abides in non-action, Yet nothing is left undone." (Daodejing 37)
It is a kind of paradoxical "action of non-action," characterized by living in harmony with the ultimate nature (*ziran*) in response to the world surrounding us.

"If he acts without action, order will prevail"
(Daodejing 3)

This is the way the sages govern social life without improper intervention.



the Daoist concept of *wu-wei*

Laozi refers to the cultivation of the highest state of being in non-doing, a paradoxical “action of non-action”, “going with the flow” characterized by living in harmony with the ultimate nature in response to the world around.

A practical example is when athletes exercise so hard, tending towards perfection. Only after endless practice that actions become natural to oneself, making a shot or a goal, simply done, effortless and clean, in harmony with everything around.

The dialectics of Love



God the Father, in total gift of self, generates the Son Jesus. Jesus totally abandoned himself to the Will of God the Father, dying on the cross, out of love, and thus truly manifested himself as the Christ. He does not end in annulment and death but in a new fullness of life, the Holy Spirit. He is risen from the death. It is a “dialectics of love” in the Holy Trinity.

As he felt abandoned by his Father, he took upon himself the totality of negative human experiences, Jesus brings all humanity back to the union with God. For Chiara Lubich, the abyss of the suffering of the forsaken Jesus reveals the climax of his love. To live for unity, there is a secret, that is to love and to embrace Jesus forsaken on the cross, in every obstacle and difficulty one encounters.



The dialectics of Love

Jesus forsaken is living a “dialectic of love” in the Holy Trinity for he is because he is not.

Lubich once explained: “Three form the Trinity, yet they are one because love is and is not at the same time. Even when love is not, it is, because it is love. In fact, if I renounce a particular possession of mine and give it away (I deprive myself of it – it is not) out of love, I have love – therefore it is.”



Inculturation = interculturality

Benedict XVI: Inter-culturality
Meeting of cultures

John Paul II: Dialogue and
reciprocal human and
spiritual enrichment

Francis: Culture of Encounter
Encounter of civilizations





Pope Leo XIV, at the very start of his pontificate, speaks of unity and love, emphasizes on building bridges



June 10th is the International Day of Dialogue among Civilizations, adopted by the United Nations on the proposal of China. The day aims to promote mutual understanding, global solidarity, and respect for the diversity of civilizations.

I have briefly described the history of the introduction of Christianity into China. In different eras of the Tang, Yuan, and Ming dynasties, missionaries used different names to introduce Christianity to China.

Apart from the deviation in the modern colonial period, the introduction of Christianity to China should be seen not as a unidirectional process of Inculturation or Sinicization, but a two-way process of interculturality. In this regard, recent popes have expressed it all too well in this new era.

It is significant that 10 years after China launched the initiative of building a community with a shared future for mankind and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Chinese President Xi Jinping introduced the Global Civilization Initiative (GCI) for the first-time in 2023 at a high-level meeting in dialogue with world political parties. The GCI enriches the contents of the BRI and contributes Chinese Chinese wisdom and approach to promote exchanges and mutual learning of culture and the progress of human civilization.



Revelation

God communicates to humans, reached its full manifestation in Jesus Christ, the Word of God made flesh

West

The mediating culture is a means to arrive at the source, is not absolute.

East

We also need to have a direct contact somehow with the source, Jesus

Divine Revelation is the point of reference for all cultures, whether Greek and Latin of the West in which Christianity has inculturated, or other cultures of the East such as Chinese and Indian where the Christian faith is in the process of inculturing.

The Holy See

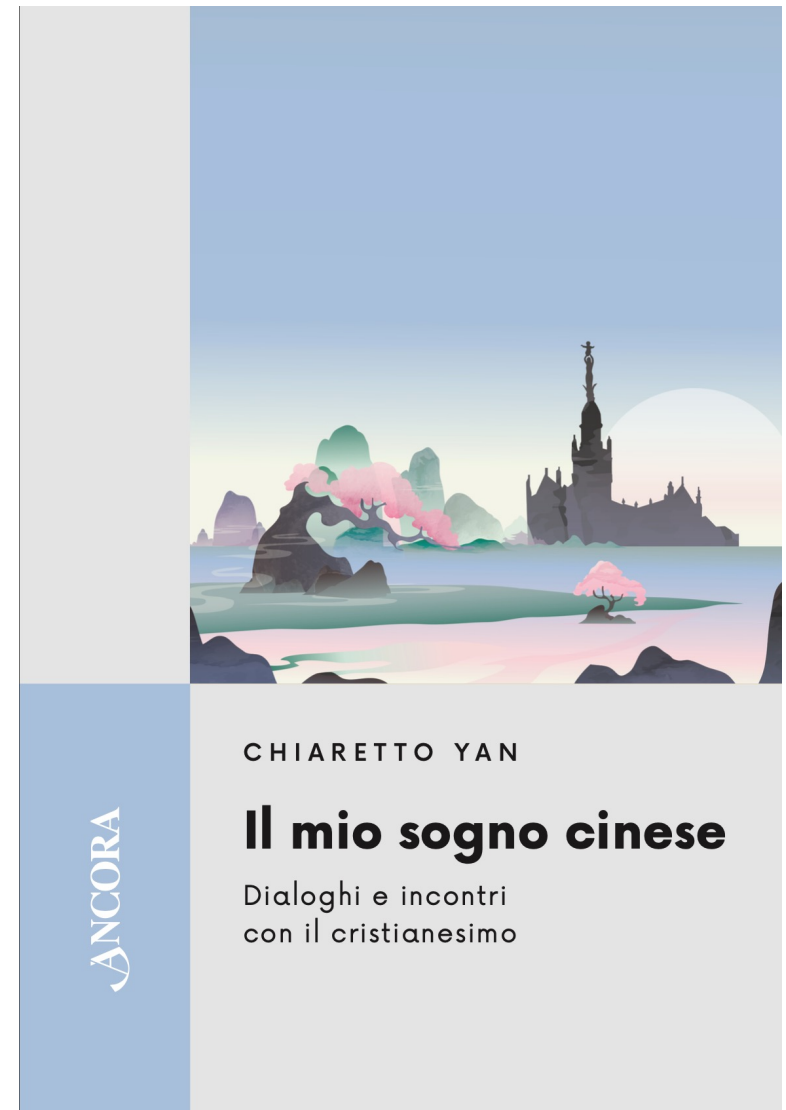
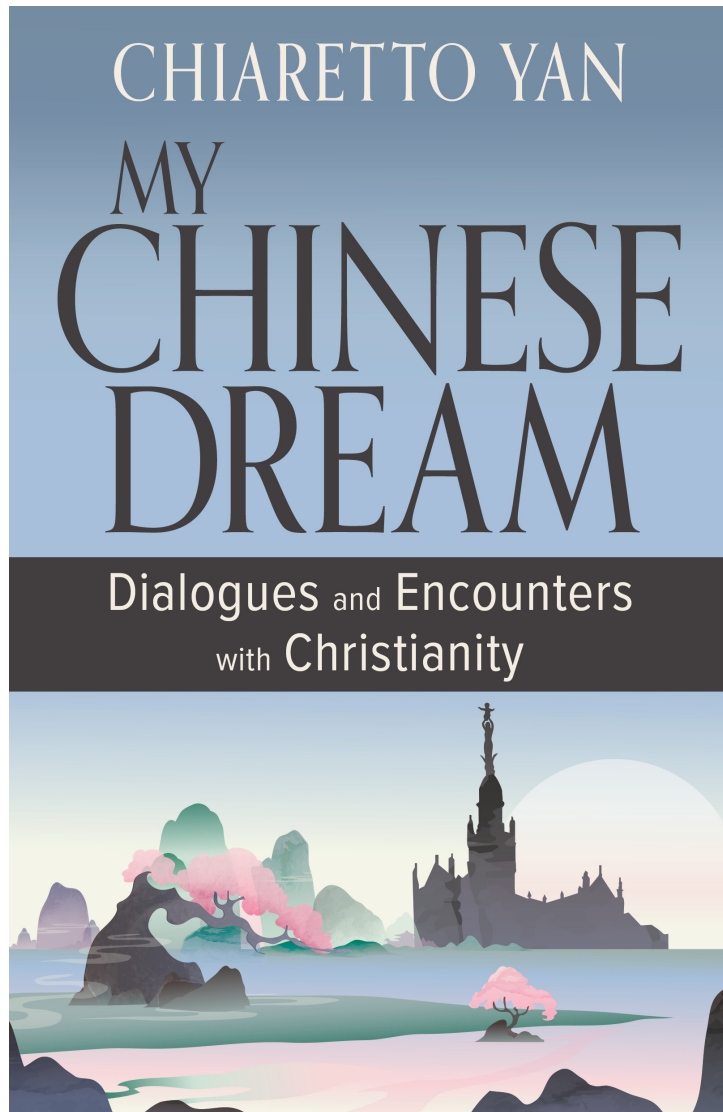
A diagram consisting of three dark blue rounded rectangular boxes arranged in a triangle. The top box is labeled 'The Holy See'. The bottom-left box is labeled 'U.S.A.'. The bottom-right box is labeled 'China'. The background is white with light gray geometric shapes.

U.S.A.

China

神权政治
宗教权威和世俗权威
重叠

With dialogues and
encounters, we may dream of a
world of fraternity and peace



My new book, dedicated to Pope Francis and his legacy, coming soon.



Thank you for listening