

The Importance of Cross-Cultural Perspectives Based on the Spread of Christianity in China

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Abstract: The process of spreading Christianity in China is also the process of localizing Christianity in China. According to historical records, there was the first religious and cultural exchange between East and West in the Tang Dynasty. In the Yuan Dynasty, Mark Polo brought China into the European horizon, and Matteo Ricci spread Christianity by studying Confucian classics, which also promoted the development of Western sinology; After centuries of outbreak of contradictions within the Christian church, coupled with the blows of imperialist and capitalist power politics in modern times, Christianity in China has been viewed as a binary opposition, many of which are influenced by political factors. But today, the role of Chinese scholars in academia is increasingly non-negligible, and many examples demonstrate the importance of breaking down stable stereotypes and looking at different cultures from a more open-minded and dynamic cross-cultural perspective.

Keywords: China and the West, Christianity, Cross-cultural Perspectives

1. Introduction and Historical Context

When Christianity was introduced to the Tang Dynasty, it was called "Nestorianism", and the main missionary stages can be divided into four times: the Tang Dynasty, the Yuan Dynasty, the late Ming Dynasty and the early Qing Dynasty, and before and after the Opium War. The spread in China for more than 1,300 years reflects the long history and unique significance of the mutual contact, exchange, collision and integration of Christianity and Chinese culture.

2. Christianity, Multiculturalism and Marco Polo in the Yuan Dynasty

To talk about the most accomplished stage, we have to mention the Yuan Dynasty and Marco Polo. It can be said that the history of Italian sinology began with Marco Polo and his work *Milione* (The Travels of Marco Polo), and it is clear that the motivation for learning may have been driven by religious interests as well as commercial interests. At the time, the Yuan Dynasty was a dynasty that blended multiculturalism and religious tolerance. Mongolians believe in shamanism, because they have not formed strict doctrines and canons, and do not have a strong rejection of other religions. Secondly, during the long foreign conquests of the Mongol rulers, they encountered various religions, and as long as they did not oppose Genghis Khan's rule, they allowed believers to spread. Therefore,

all religions were allowed to freely preach within the territory of the Yuan Dynasty, and Christianity developed in the Yuan Dynasty.

Thus, during the reign of the Yuan Dynasty, Neo-Confucianism made certain achievements, and the rulers of the Yuan Dynasty set up colleges and hired talents to teach Neo-Confucianism, so that Neo-Confucianism ideas were widely spread in the north and became the official philosophy for maintaining feudal rule. For Buddhism, the most popular in Buddhism at that time was Lamaism, which was formed by the integration of Buddhism with local religions after Buddhism was introduced to Tibet, and the monarchs of the Yuan Dynasty were highly respected and personally ordained. In addition, Taoism also developed greatly in the Yuan Dynasty.

Based on this attitude, the rulers of the Yuan Dynasty implemented a very tolerant religious policy, stipulating that missionaries of various religions only need to pay commercial and local taxes, and do not have to serve as any errands; Their property (including monasteries, land, etc.) is strictly protected and no one may usurp it; The imperial court also supplied them with things, and all the religious missionaries had to do was pray for the Yuan emperor.

In Italy, however, in the context of the Renaissance and the Reformation, the humanist movement is rising, and the Mediterranean and surrounding areas have developed rapidly, creating suitable conditions for economic, religious and cultural exchanges with the East, and thus Marco Polo's travels had a creative background. The studies of "proto-sinology" in Italy were related to the religious activities of missionaries. Elisabetta Corsi, the chair Professor of sinology of Sapienza University of Rome, believes that these missionaries both shouldered the responsibility of spreading Christian doctrine and demonstrated their passion for scientific research.

However, the spread of doctrine depended on the study of the Chinese language, and missionaries from Italy soon realized this. They were well aware that in order for the Chinese elite, that is, the Chinese literati, to accept their doctrine, it was important to systematically and standardly study Chinese and the ability to communicate in writing Chinese. Therefore, they emphasize the importance of linguistic expertise, creating many dictionaries and translated works.

There have been many debates in Chinese and foreign academic circles about "Marco Polo's trip to China", and scholars have expressed their own opinions and have not reached a conclusion. Let's put aside the controversy and look at the contents of the book. In 1275, Marco Polo and his father and uncle carried the sacred mission entrusted by the Pope, and after a long journey of half years, they finally arrived at the mysterious ancient country of the East and met Kublai Khan in the summer place of the Mongol Khan - Yuanshangdu (today's the Site of Xanadu). After handing over the Pope's letters, he also offered gifts, which Kublai Khan liked very much, and when they first met, Marco Polo made a good impression on the greatest emperor in the world at that time, and was favored for it. During his stay in the Xanadu, the golden walls of the Great Khan's palace and the vastness of the steppe did not hinder the exploration of Marco Polo, and he looked forward to a broader and deeper journey.

Marco Polo knew China under the Yuan emperor Kublai Khan, a Mongol empire with little opportunity to come into contact with the majority Han and its culture. It can be said that Marco Polo's great contribution was to discover the world, increasing geographical knowledge to include East Asia. The real cultural encounter between East and West actually began three hundred years later, when another Italian, Matteo Ricci, traveled to China as a Christian missionary in the late 16th century. However, the spread of doctrine depended on the study of the Chinese language, and missionaries from Italy soon realized this.

3. Cultural Exchange and Challenges

Matteo Ricci (1552–1610) was an Italian Catholic missionary and also a scholar. Matteo Ricci was one of the earliest pioneers of Catholic missionary service in China and the first Western scholar to

read Chinese literature and study Chinese texts. He came to China as a missionary in the Ming Dynasty and coined at least nearly 100 Chinese vocabulary, covering mathematics, geography, astronomy, calendar, religion, law, biology and other fields, most of which are still commonly used today. Through his status as a "Western missionary", he spread Catholic doctrine in the form of Chinese writings, and made friends with Chinese officials and celebrities, and disseminated Western scientific and technological knowledge such as astronomy, mathematics, geography, etc., and his writings not only made important contributions to the exchanges between China and the West, but also had an important impact on the understanding of western civilization in Japan and the countries on the Korean Peninsula. He was well aware that in order for the Chinese elite, that is, the Chinese literati, to accept their doctrine, it was important to systematically and standardly study Chinese and the ability to communicate in writing Chinese. Therefore, they emphasize the importance of linguistic expertise, creating many dictionaries and translated works.

However, Christianity spread to a certain extent in China, but did not have as far-reaching an impact as Buddhism. In Chinese tradition, imperial power has traditionally been above theocracy, and the status of religion has always been subject to political control. Although Confucianism has always been revered by rulers as an official philosophy, it is not a religious thought rather than a belief, and its role is also to consolidate the authority of the rulers. The distinction between orthodox religion and heresy [1] in traditional China is also based on its political significance.

One reason for the unsuccessful Christian mission in China is that China's tolerant religious policy is based on the premise of maintaining its own political rule, rather than allowing religious beliefs to escape the political control of its rulers. In order for Christianity to take root and develop in China, it must first manage its relationship well with the Chinese government. Second, it is necessary to integrate it with the traditional culture of the Chinese nation, maintain basic beliefs, and absorb elements of Chinese culture in terms of theological thought, ethical values, and ritual customs.

French scholar Jacques Gernet argues that in China the question of assessing the authenticity of a religion from an absolute perspective has never arisen. For the general public, it is enough that a religion is recognized for its traditions, its teachings can "improve the morality of the public, and its contribution to society is positive. For rulers, their attitudes and policies on religion depend on different political situations, in addition to the above evaluation criteria. Religious movements are severely punished if they are deemed a threat to public safety; Those "heresy" and "cults" that are out of official control will not be accepted. Christianity has been hit for hundreds of years since it first introduced to China from the Tang Dynasty, and by the Yuan Dynasty it was able to prevail again in China because Christian missionaries had established good relations with the Yuan rulers in all aspects.

In modern times, the contradictions between the Vatican and the Chinese government also reflect the stalemate in cultural exchanges under the high posture of the West. In the early 50s, Pope Pius XII decreed that Chinese Catholics be forbidden to cooperate with the Communist Party and promote the "principle of three nots" Doctrine through the then "Catholic Academic Council". The serious consequence of the Vatican's unreasonable move is the division of the Catholic Church in China and is not conducive to the development of Catholicism itself.

This also shows that any kind of religion was born and developed in a certain historical period and a certain cultural background, and therefore all of them are branded with the era and national culture in which they live. When it spreads to peoples and countries with different cultural backgrounds, it is necessary to pay attention to understanding the historical and cultural background of the nation on the premise of maintaining basic beliefs, find out the common points in depth, and absorb the elements that can be accommodated, otherwise it is bound to encounter strong resistance.

The setback in the spread of Christianity in China lies in the lack of sufficient understanding of Chinese culture and the philosophical traditions behind it, the failure to reconcile the two different

cultures, from the perspective of an "outsider", and the promotion of "dualism" cultural views, which have profoundly influenced to this day. Haun Saussy, professor of department of East Asian languages and civilizations of the University of Chicago, argues that this dichotomy, which developed at the beginning of the mission of European sinology [2], still influences modern Western perceptions of China.

Some western scholars like Jacques Gernet, believe that Chinese do not know any spiritual reality that is different from material [3]. Actually, Europeans' opinion that Chinese don't have abstract notions is baseless, and Chinese do have abstract notions, just like language, and religion is not the priority of Chinese system. In the eyes of Westerners, the God of the West is the embodiment of absolute truth, but in philosophical Chinese tradition, Chinese gods(sages) are the embodiment of material forces and are more in line with human nature. Western missionaries generally advocate a "dualist" cultural perspective, and what they spread in China is "completely Westernized Christianity", which completely copies the Western cultural model from content to form, which is incompatible with Chinese culture. They divided the world into Christian and pagan countries, and believed that the European and American countries belonged to the former and had the best culture, and the cultures of countries outside the West are inferior pagan cultures, and China is among them. They ignore Chinese 5,000-year-old history and traditional culture and adopt a contemptuous attitude toward China's religion.

However, in the mid-60s and early 70s of the last centuries, there was a great ideological turmoil and divergence in the American academia, and John King Fairbank's model of "impact–response approach," which had long dominated the study of Chinese studies in the United States, was criticized, and he believes that China's modern history is a process of China's slow progress from tradition to modernization, and this process of modernization is the process of China's response to Western shocks. He argues that "In every sphere of social activity the old order was challenged, attacked, undermined, or overwhelmed by a complex series of processes—political, economic, social, ideological, cultural—which were set in motion within China as a result of this penetration of an alien and more powerful society."

According to the scholars who raised Western impact–Chinese response approach, China is not unchanged, but within the confines of some obvious cultural form of rules and regulations. Just as traditional Chinese Confucianism has long occupied an ideological firm, the influence on the acceptance of Christianity in China is a manifestation of obvious inertia [4].

The "impact-response approach" is a research model that understands the East from the Western view of values, ignores the dynamic development of Chinese society, and fails to base it on a correct and profound understanding of traditional Chinese culture, and views the failure of China's modernization with the arrogant posture of colonial democratic academic traditions and invaders. However, the famous sinologist Paul Cohen critiqued this model and fought back forcefully. According to Paul Cohen, one of the problems with the "impact-response approach" is that when dealing with Western shocks, it tends to ignore the West's own difficulties and contradictions. He first said in China and Christianity, the western scholars have too often focused on the process of Western impact and Chinese response, to the neglect of the reverse process of Chinese impact and Western response [5]. The missionary who came to China found himself confronted with frustrations and hostilities which he could hardly have envisaged before coming and which transformed him, subtly but unmistakably, into a foreign missionary. And finally, the upshot was that the impact–response framework, although a decided improvement over earlier approaches that ignored Chinese thought and action entirely, encouraged a picture of nineteenth-century China that was incomplete and suffered unnecessarily from imbalance and distortion, Cohn said [6].

However, for neither insiders nor outsiders studying Chinese culture, what is the most important is to integrate different views. Cohn argues that for years, however, the insights applied were linked,

explicitly or implicitly, to modernization theory, with its heavy burden of Western-centric assumptions; this resulted, as we have seen, in an understanding of China that was seriously flawed. Li Yongbin, Ph.D. in History, associate professor at the School of History of Capital Normal University, China, also believes that the understanding of "the other" in the binary opposition will always be affected by various subjective and objective factors, and in order to truly know and understand "the other" clearly and objectively, should first clearly and objectively understand the "self". Because the purpose of knowing the "other" is ultimately to better understand the self.

4. Localization and Cultural Integration

Therefore, the localization of religious beliefs requires a more cross-cultural perspective that integrates both the views of "insiders" and "outsiders". Zhang Longxi, a leading scholar in East-West cross-cultural studies, on the basis of Fairbank's "Western impact–Chinese response" and Cohen's "China-centered" approach," he proposed to achieve a more comprehensive understanding and try to synthesize different views and images in order to get closer to the "things themselves" [7].

In fact, Chinese Christian believers have been making more open, innovative and integrated attempts to integrate Chinese characteristics on the basis of the original meaning of Christianity, as Professor Zhang suggested that it is necessary to open up to different perspectives and other views, to look from various angles, to judge all with a set of intellectual criteria that transcends group allegiances and local identities. After Christianity in China was attacked by imperialism and colonialism from the West, China's patriotic intellectuals launched "the movement of indigenization". They believe that Chinese has a long cultural tradition and values and that the expression and dissemination of the gospel message must be integrated with the traditional culture of the country and should have characteristics different from those of the West. In view of the problems existing in Chinese society at that time, it included the content of ethics, morality, and patriotism. In short, it is to advocate the Sinicization of Christianity, to "re-align" the "basic elements" of Christianity with the historical experience of one's own nation, to make it "Christianity with Chinese cultural characteristics," and to oppose the utilitarianizing of missionary activities by Western missionaries, who they believe come from another cultural background and are not competent to interpret and apply the gospel in Chinese traditional background.

For a long period of history in ancient times, China was a country with a high degree of clarity have not suffered much foreign cultural shock in cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. In short, for ourselves, if Christianity to gain a foothold in China, we can only base ourselves on reality, judge situation, conform to the historical trend, adjust foreign relations, end confrontation as soon as possible, and actively create good external conditions.

Fundamentally speaking, the reason why we understand differently is because our pre-given culture background and language is different, and the same is true in terms of theological theory. People's experience of God is subject to different cultural backgrounds in different historical periods, is different from each other and can be changed, and each nation has its own experience and commentary on God, and has different degrees of truth.

From the history of Christianity in China, Matteo Ricci's achievements tell us the importance of cross-cultural perspective. As an "outsider", if you like a certain culture or need to spread your culture to people from different cultural backgrounds based on certain motives, you need to learn that language deeply and try to become an "insider" to understand their culture and traditions, and be open-minded, and change the position.

5. Conclusion

In terms of cultural acceptance, both the East and the West should get rid of the sense of cultural superiority and accept differences with a more inclusive attitude, as Luo Yingguang argues that in the long process of formation and development, different national cultures in the world have formed their own characteristics and advantages, but there are also inherent limitations and deficiencies [8]. This is also the reason why ethnic groups have been able to exist and communicate for a long time, as well as for their mutual absorption and development.

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