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The Church and China's Hopes

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I. WHAT HOPES?

HOPE SPRINGS ETERNAL IT SEEMS IN CHINA. THIS, DESPITE THE SEEMINGLY
Hendless parade in modern times of the failure of hopes. At least two reasons
are important for why this is so. One has its roots in China's deep cultural past;
the other has its roots in China's modern experience.

From ancient times there has been in China a continuing vision of a possible
better world. Confucius, who sought to educate leaders towards the better world,
certainly shared one form of this vision, but it goes back earlier still—at least as far
as the earliest written text, the *Shijing* ("The Book of Song"), an ancient book of po-
etry.¹ Among the poems are complaints of those who experience oppression by

¹For instance, this representative stanza from one of the poems: "Very leafy is that willow-tree;
But I would not care to repose under it. God on high [ironic reference to ruler] is very bright; Don't hurt
yourself on him! Were I to reprove him, Afterwards I should be torn to pieces by him." Quoted from Ar-
thur Waley, *The Book of Songs* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., 1937) 232 (no. 288).

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*To build civil society, China must develop its social capital—the social habits that
promote cooperation, especially among unrelated people. The love of neighbor that
springs from the Christian gospel can provide the basis for such social capital and
bring hope to Chinese society.*

the mighty and the powerful. Complaints are the back side of hope, for they indicate a dissatisfaction with the way things are and a seeking that they be better. They are the birth of an historical and moral consciousness.² In the case of ancient China such consciousness led positively to visions of a better world. Some of these visions were utopian, but others were the expected outcome of human accomplishment.³

China's contemporary hopes also have their roots in its modern experience of humiliation. The west began seriously to engage China with its superior military power during the first half of the nineteenth century, with the first major skirmish being that of the Opium War of 1841-42. A century of humiliation followed, in which a proud culture—after all, *zhongguo*, China's own word for China, means central kingdom—had to kowtow to foreign influence and power. The Unequal Treaties, by which the west wrested concessions from China in political, economic, legal, and religious spheres, were the mechanism. Humiliation was a kind of double palimpsest—upon the centuries-long humiliation of rule by the Qing (1648-1911, a Manchu, non-Chinese dynasty), which forced Chinese men to wear long queues as a sign of subservience, there was now an overlay of western impositions which allowed erection of signs like the notorious one in Shanghai at the entry to the park along the bund, "Dogs and Chinese not allowed."

Western imposition forged a certain realignment of loyalties, with significant efforts by Chinese to bring reform to the Qing empire itself, which, though foreign, had appropriated much of Chinese culture. Some scholars began to dream again of a coming grand unity (*Datong*).⁴ Others, more practically oriented, talked of China's necessary quest for wealth and power (*Fuqiang*).⁵ These visions came to a temporary halt with the failure of the Reform Movement of 1889 and the final dictatorial follies of the Empress Dowager, Cixi. The Qing dynasty collapsed in 1911. New hopes arose with the republican era. Shortly thereafter came the sudden surge of the May 4th Movement of 1919, with its calls for science and democracy and a vigorous colloquialization of Chinese culture. But these enthusiasms soon fell afoul of the warlord era in the 1920s. After a renewed republican spurt in the 1930s, chaos came afresh in the Japanese invasion of China. Concurrent with this

²Commenting on an ancient Japanese poem of complaint against injustice, Koyama notes that all "human greed is a misuse of freedom." Injustice derives from human freedom, not nature. Thus, to make complaint is to enter into a moral, and therefore, a historical world. "Historical thought is impossible apart from ethical implication....Human greed...can be named as a bridging element that takes us from the world of nature to that of history." See Kosuke Koyama, *Mount Fuji and Mount Sinai: A Critique of Idols* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1984) 107.

³For a survey of these visions throughout Chinese history, see Wolfgang Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness: Recurring Themes in Four Thousand Years of Chinese Cultural History* (New York: Seabury, 1976).

⁴Such as Kang Youwei (1838-1927), Tan Sitong (1865-1898), and others. For a quite accessible brief description of these two see Feng Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, vol. 2, *The Period of Classical Learning (From the Second Century B.C. to the Twentieth Century A.D.)*, trans. Derk Bodde (Princeton: Princeton University, 1953) 676-704.

⁵See, for instance, Benjamin I. Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University, 1964).

was the bitter civil war between Nationalists and Communists. In 1949, with Chairman Mao's declaration in Tiananmen square that "China had stood up," hope revived. It was soon to be drowned in a seemingly endless series of political movements, culminating in the disastrous Cultural Revolution itself (1966-1976). Yet again, with the downfall of the Gang of Four, the rise of Deng Xiaoping and the implementation of the Four Modernizations, hope once more revived. Then came the disaster of the Tiananmen tragedy, June 4, 1989, which ruthlessly squelched the bubbling hopes. Slowly, as the economy continues to expand and liberalize, guided by the firm hand of political repression, reshaped hopes return. Since the collapse of the Qing, China has been on one long roller-coaster ride. Hopes rise and fall and rise again. What hopes?

Clearly it is a hope for wealth and power. It is a hope for being accorded due respect in world affairs. It is hope for the renewed vigor of a Chinese cultural identity. It is not a hope for abstractions, of which democracy appears to be one. To be sure it is a hope for the concrete realities of food and clothes and jobs and wealth. But even more than that it is a hope for power to regain the national dignity and prestige that in China's eyes have been denied it for nearly two centuries.⁶

II. A THIRD CHINA?

A. *Two Chinas*

Hopes are something within, present only in the heart and in the head. Practical realities are something without, present only in the actual conditions of life. The hopes that are within and the realities that are without can often be as though worlds apart. What are the conditions of life amidst which the hopes that are within flourish? How do the two worlds relate to each other?

All societies are complex, not least Chinese society. Nevertheless, for the purposes of our reflections here, there is good reason to identify two extremities in Chinese socio-political life that obtain today and that cut across everything else that transpires. In this regard, one might speak of two Chinas. Let us call them the official China and the people's China. This dichotomy has been one of the most troubling and frustrating of my experiences in China.

What do I mean by the official China? This is a China in which there is a clearly defined policy, with specific procedures to be followed in implementing

⁶Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983), offers some helpful reflections on nationhood and nationalism that provide perspective for our thoughts on China. On p. 100, he cites Buber: "Kinship is not the *sine qua non* for the *origin* of a people. A people need not necessarily be the fusion of kindred stems; it can be the fusion of unrelated stems as well. But the concept 'people' always implies unity of fate. It presupposes that in a great creative hour throngs of human beings were shaped into a new entity by a great molding fate they experienced in common" (Martin Buber, *Israel and the World* [New York: Schocken, 1973] 217). One may think of the American Revolution as one such event, the Civil War as another, the era of Martin Luther King as yet another for our own society. China, too, has such events, beginning from the ancient so-called "Spring and Autumn" period (ca. fourth century B.C.). Nationalism, which we touch on a bit later, is different. Wolterstorff defines it as "a nation's preoccupation with its own nationhood" (104). This preoccupation often arises from a sense of having been wronged, and is a kind of wallowing in self-pity.

this policy. Now in official China, procedures are more important than policy. Policy can change overnight, but fundamental procedures do not.⁷ For instance, at one time policy required that all Chinese be organized into communes, with no private property. Then one day the policy suddenly changed and farmers were told that they could take responsibility for individual plots. Almost overnight the whole commune system came tumbling down. The two policies, both determined by the same party (though different groups in the party determined the political lines), were contradictory. But there was no problem in that. What did matter was that the procedure in all of this was fundamentally the same: the directive came from above, and everyone was now to embrace this policy as the right one and to implement it in life. In official China communication is always vertical, from the top down, never horizontal.⁸

My wife and I have run into this reality numerous times in China. We might, for instance, be visiting a hospital in a particular city. My wife might request to be connected with the nursing school she heard of in town. One might think that a simple phone call from one institution to the other might help make the connection. But such in fact could not happen. The hospital official would inform my wife that they were not able to introduce her to the nursing school. Because, as we eventually came to understand, the hospital and the nursing school were different units (*danwei*)⁹ under separate chains of command. One could not jump across chains, but had to go up the one chain and down the other and then back via the same route. Such a request might take days to implement.¹⁰ Therefore, they were unable to oblige my wife. In official China all communication moves vertically, up and down, never horizontally, back and forth.

⁷Of course, things are more complicated than this essay can deal with. At the highest party levels "informal politics" is predominant, since there are no institutionalized ways to deal with conflict. Thus the political line that is in ascendancy determines policy and accounts for sudden shifts. But the command line structure for implementing policy remains in place. On this, Lieberthal writes: "The PRC's political system has experienced significant upheaval....Nevertheless, the decisions made in the regime's early years about the formal structure of the system have endured even as substantive issues, policies, and the allocation of power have changed greatly over time" (Kenneth Lieberthal, *Governing China: From Revolution Through Reform* [New York: W. W. Norton, 1995] 158). This dual formal (my official)/informal structure no doubt replicates itself at many levels, for instance, the *danwei* level (Lowell Dittmer and Xiaobo Lu, "Personal Politics in the Chinese Danwei Under Reform," *Asian Survey* 36/3 [1996] 264). On informal politics, see Joseph Fewsmith, "Institutions, Informal Politics, and Political Transition in China," *Asian Survey* 36/3 (1996) 230-245. The Lieberthal book, especially chapters 6 and 7, is extremely helpful to understand the formal structure and its actual workings in China.

⁸Of course, at the highest levels there is still the "informal" structure that Lieberthal speaks of. But beyond that, in its working out to the public it is entirely vertical. See preceding note.

⁹On *danwei*, see, for instance, Dittmer and Lu, "Personal Politics." *Danwei* are "enclosed, multi-functional, and self-sufficient" collective entities in which virtually all of urban/rural China was organized. They performed both state and societal functions. One's *danwei* in effect managed the whole of one's life. Dittmer and Lu call it "the secular functional equivalent of the extended family or clan," having "both 'paternal' (control) and 'maternal' (welfare) functions" (248).

¹⁰Efficiency is not one of the characteristics of an authoritarian bureaucracy. Lieberthal makes clear how authority is simultaneously vertical and fragmented. When it is necessary to make decisions for which there are no formal rules, the instinct for safety's sake is to bump it up. That process continues and, indeed, may end up in never-never land. See Lieberthal, *Governing China*, chapter 6, especially on "matrix muddle" and attendant problems.

What do I mean by the people's China? Over the years we have made many friends in China. They openly share much with us and we with them. Conversation is frank and open. We find that our friends constantly go out of their way not simply to accommodate us but to make us feel at home and make our stay as rich and worthwhile as possible. We found that if we wanted to get things done, it was best to have such friends. For here communication was horizontal, and when need arose they would do their best to cut across the vertical lines of communication and make them horizontal. There is, of course, a well known method for accomplishing this, and it goes by the name of "the backdoor" (*zou houmen*) or connections (*guanxi*).

I recall, for instance, when some dear friends helped prepare accommodations for us in one of China's major cities. My wife, Ida Marie, had been invited to give some lectures at a school of nursing. The only accommodations available for foreigners such as us at that time were hotel rooms. We told them that we were unable to pay hotel room costs for a two- to three-month stay and couldn't afford to eat in restaurants. We ended up in a small apartment in a regular housing project, living among the local Chinese. This violated all rules. But they had gone the backdoor way for us through connections—the full details were never divulged—to make this possible. Our rent was not in cash but in the purchasing of furnishings for the apartment. One day, the police came to check. I was out. Ida Marie used up all of her Chinese to appear hospitable and respond to their inquiries. They themselves were probably deeply puzzled as to what to do about this anomaly and uncertain about what chain of command was responsible for this. Being uncertain, they of course would do nothing about it. That would be too risky.

Now, which is the real China? The China of vertical communication, of officialdom, or the China of horizontal communication, of friendship? The answer, of course, is both. All people in China live with these two Chinas at once. So does the church.

The China of vertical communication is the world of Chinese politics, dominated by the Communist Party. Indeed, in recent years there has been a parade of unfortunate advocates of greater freedoms and democracy, who seek a less vertical and more horizontal Chinese politics, summarily tried and sentenced to prison. The China of horizontal communication is the world of the Chinese family and close friends. Between these two, the state and the family, there is a huge divide.

B. Civil Society

Is there a third China, one that is not rooted in either the command hierarchy of the party and state or the communal intimacy of family and friend? In recent years there has been a virtual hemorrhage of studies on topics such as "public sphere," "civil society," "public space," and "third realm" in relation to China. It is, in fact, a well-placed discussion. Clearly, no single view prevails on the subject, the views being almost as many as the authors. That encourages me to offer a few of my own reflections on these questions as they relate to the church and its place in Chinese society and culture.

There is at least one agreement in the studies: there is not now any well-

formed public space or civil society in China. But from that point the divergence is considerable. Some have a romantic view of civil society as something that is to be constituted in one fell swoop, a “revolutionary moment,” so to speak.¹¹ It is something that happens “at the barricades,” as exemplified in the currently popular opera, *Les Miserables*. Tiananmen, June 4, 1989, is of course the most recent Chinese exemplification of this. Since that failed, there is the hope for yet another such moment when a truly civil society is to be suddenly formed, and hopefully successful. This, I believe, though enormously appealing, is a forlorn hope, both on practical¹² and philosophical grounds.¹³

Others see the urban intellectual elite as an emergent form of this civil society. Given enough time, this will influence enough sectors of society to expand and ultimately enable civil society to become firmly established. The main problem I see here is that this elitist quest for establishment of a civil society does not easily filter down into the general public. Elitist views, however much to be affirmed and praised, are not a substitute for an existing moral basis in society. The big question is whether there is such an existing moral basis.

Yet others see things in a larger historical perspective and argue that traditional Chinese society already had its incipient forms of civil society. Although this has been interrupted by the chaos and authoritarianism of the twentieth century, one can find continuity between the institutions of an earlier society based neither on the state nor on the family network and current forms of organization that accompany the economic opening up of China and the weakening of central power over the regions and the market place. My main problem here is that any principled limitation of state power is not part of the thinking of these institutions or of the state, either traditionally or currently. Lacking a real public sphere, they are dominated either by the state or, if the state is too distant, by familial and other ties of reciprocity. In any case, they seem to be ad hoc and occasional, arising opportunistically where state power does not function in a thorough way.¹⁴ Without a

¹¹For this typology refer to Heath B. Chamberlain, “On the Search for Civil Society in China,” part of “Symposium: ‘Public Sphere’/‘Civil Society’ in China? Paradigmatic Issues in Chinese Studies, III,” *Modern China* 19/2 (1993) 200f.

¹²The practical grounds I have in mind include the fact of the current coercive power of the state which precludes both a free public space and the possibility of adequate grass-roots organization, the lack of cohesiveness among the different sectors of Chinese society, and the absence of a well-formed moral basis to replace the vacuum left by the collapse of ideology.

¹³The philosophical ground I have in mind is that such a “revolutionary moment” is inherently not civil society. It is something much more like what anthropologist Harold Turner describes as “*communitas*.” *Communitas* is that unstructured moment of communal oneness that happens, often ritually sanctioned in traditional religions, as a temporary counterpoint to the prevailing structure that governs ordinary life. An example of this might be Mardi Gras or the Million Man March or the orgy. It is a moment that enables a temporary rebirth before one returns to live within the structures. To be sure, in a revolution, another example of such “*communitas*,” one may experience a passage from an old type of order into a new order—but order they will both be, of some kind. Tiananmen was a rite of passage that neither led to a new order nor affirmed and recharged the old order. It was aborted. But as such it was not the creation of civil society. The chaos of viewpoints and practices testified to by many of the leading participants is witness to that.

¹⁴Frederic Wakeman, Jr., in my opinion, makes a strong case for the opportunistic nature of these institutions historically and the fact that, even so, they were tied to reliance upon state privilege accorded

principled basis such institutions have only a fortuitous, not guaranteed, existence. There is no necessary connection between existing fortuitously and existing by right.

What is civil society? Negatively, it is neither the state nor groupings dominated by the state. Thus in China everything from the party to the local unit (*danwei*) would not constitute civil society. Neither is it the natural communities of family, neighborhood, and friends. These are communities deeply embedded in specific particularities—blood, place, obligation. It is a community of people that has its own autonomy both with respect to the artificial community of the state and natural communities like the family. At the same time it is a community that fosters the common good, not simply the external will of the state or the particularistic interests of family, neighborhood, and friends. Yet again, it is a community that achieves its goals not by coercion but by free and equal participation in decision making. Such a community cannot arise from the quest for self-interest or from subservience to the state, but requires some kind of moral basis that transcends both state and natural community and that provides the soil and ongoing nutriment for growth.¹⁵ No democracy can function without some such morally grounded civil society.

It follows, then, that one thing that civil society requires is a public space or public sphere. Habermas defines it in this way:

By “public sphere” we mean first of all a domain of our social life in which such a thing as public opinion can be formed. Access to the public sphere is open in principle to all citizens....Citizens act as a public when they deal with matters of general interest without being subject to coercion; thus with the guarantee that they may assemble and unite freely, and express and publicize their opinions freely.¹⁶

to them and thus represented nothing in principle different from what already existed. See Wakeman, “The Civil Society and Public Sphere Debate: Western Reflections on Chinese Political Culture,” *Modern China* 19/2 (1993) 108-138.

¹⁵For various definitions of “civil society” see the articles in *Modern China* 19/2 (1993). In my own formulation I begin from Chamberlain, “On the Search for Civil Society in China,” 207. However, Chamberlain seems to place too much stress on the factor of relative autonomy. I have thus picked up from Edward Shils the notion of common good: “The virtue of civil society is the readiness to moderate particular, individual or parochial interests and to give precedence to the common good” (see Shils, “The Virtue of Civil Society,” *Government and Opposition* 26/1 (1991) 16, cited in Chamberlain, 204); from Jürgen Habermas, quoted throughout in this issue of *Modern China*, the notions of free and rational discourse, as he talks about it under the rubric of “communicative rationality” or “the ideal speech situation” (see Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action*, 2 vols. [Boston: Beacon, 1984 and 1987], and *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* [Cambridge: MIT, 1989]; and from Richard Madsen the acknowledgement that such a community does not spring out of nowhere but presumes certain prior moral commitments (“The Public Sphere, Civil Society and Moral Community” in this issue of *Modern China* 19/2 [1993] 184, 188). As Emile Durkheim has put it, there had to be a “non-contractual basis for contract.” So also Tocqueville and others have stressed the importance of premodern, indeed, pre-enlightenment, religious and political traditions that have lent stability, solidarity, and moral substance to modern civil society.

¹⁶Jürgen Habermas, “The Public Sphere,” in Chandra Mukerji and Michael Schudson, eds., *Rethinking Popular Culture: Contemporary Perspectives in Cultural Studies* (Berkeley: University of California, 1991) 398; cited in Wakeman, “The Civil Society,” 111.

In this essay, I wish to draw special attention to the importance of “general interest” or “common good” for a civil society to function. Unless there is a sense of personal accountability, a moral basis, for the public space, for that area of life that does not immediately involve my own self-interest, there will be no real civil society. It does not “descend from the realm of a benevolent state” but arises from below, “from a voluntarily organized citizenry”¹⁷ who are not wedded to their own particularistic interests but possess an inward sense of accountability for the public space, the general interest, the common good.

This sense, or moral habit, of personal accountability for the public space I shall refer to as social capital.

III. A NEW SOCIAL CAPITAL?

What is social capital? By this, as I understand it, political economists mean certain social virtues that foster accountability, reliability, trustworthiness, and the like, as a presupposition for effective business relations. As Fukuyama points out, “Most economists have assumed that group formation does not depend on ethical habit but arises naturally, following the establishment of legal institutions like property rights and contract law.”¹⁸ They are wrong, of course. Fukuyama’s point, following the Weberian tradition, is that certain ethical habits that foster a “spontaneous sociability [are] critical to economic life because virtually all economic activity is carried out by groups rather than individuals.”¹⁹ The same is true for civil society. To function it requires an ethos of moral responsibility.

Capital is something that makes it possible to accomplish something. To start a business, for instance, you need capital. You need some start-up money. That money is one form of capital. You also need a space. So property is a form of capital. To start a business you also need intelligence. This is a form of mental capital. Many kinds of capital are needed to start a business. Social capital refers to certain social habits that make it possible for people to cooperate spontaneously, without coercion, and get things done.

One of the reasons that communism in Russia and Eastern Europe collapsed is that these nations were unable to create social capital. That is, communism tried to impose order upon society. The only capital authoritarian governments really have is political capital—the power to make rules and regulations and to enforce them. But, great political capital (that is, the power to control) weakens the social capital (that is, the spontaneous desire of people to cooperate). Imposed ideology proved to be no source of social capital. China faces the same problem, even if differently.

A. *Two Kinds*

There are different kinds of social capital. Traditionally Chinese culture has

¹⁷Madsen, “The Public Sphere,” 187.

¹⁸Francis Fukuyama, *Trust: The Social Virtues and the Creation of Prosperity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995) 48.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, 47.

been Confucian. Family and kinship relations are important. This is one form of social capital. Individuals are not mere individuals, but are part of a web of relations. Families and kin stick together. There is an unspoken, spontaneous sense of mutual obligation and trust. This is social capital.

If one looks at China today, so the political economists say, one will see two social sources for business enterprises in China. The first is the state, with its heavy dependence upon state-run enterprises. This is official China. This is the heritage of socialism. It is a well known fact that most of these are money-losing enterprises and need to be propped up by the state. But the state continues to have sufficient political capital, that is, power, to do so. And so China's economy continues to be dominated by such dinosaurs.

The other source for business enterprises in China is family and kinship. Most new businesses are based on family and kin. One reason that China has set a different course economically than Russia is that China had a form of social capital that Russia never possessed. China had wealthy and energetic Chinese people scattered throughout southeast Asia and the west. The vast majority of significant new enterprises in China today were begun by Chinese from Hong Kong, Taiwan, and elsewhere. The Hong Kong economy, for instance, in the last ten years has been utterly transformed. Virtually all the factories and industries moved into China, and the economy of Hong Kong, which once was based largely on industry, is now almost totally a service-based economy. China was favored with an enormous ethnic social capital. And so China has thrived in a way Russia never could.²⁰

There is another kind of social capital common to Chinese culture. This is not limited to kinship, but makes possible mutual obligations between unrelated, non-kin people. I will call it returning favors. You give something to me, and I return something to you at an appropriate time. Our friends made it possible for us to live in an apartment in a local housing complex. How could they do it? Through connections, through a favor returned. Perhaps one of those friends, who is a doctor, had had some important official as a patient and had gone out of his way to help him through a medical crisis. Doctors can gather a lot of social capital in this way. And now, when he had a need, he approached this important official, and the official returned the favor. At the same time, this important official got an empty apartment filled with furnishings. I suppose it worked something like that.

These two kinds of social capital are very important, but they have their limits. Family and kinship relations tend to be particularistic, closed to outsiders. Thus, nepotism becomes common.²¹ Or one takes advantage of non-kin relation-

²⁰Craig Moran, in his essay in this issue ("China's Transformation: Dynamics and Directions," *Word & World* 17/2 [1997] 158-159), suggests that the hoard of some 200 million displaced farm workers who provide cheap labor is the "real secret of China's unparalleled economic growth." My comments indicate the investment side of the equation; his, the source of cheap labor. The two together would seem to be the real secret.

²¹The point made by Jean-Luis Rocca, cited by Moran (157), that the "proportion of officials' sons in trading companies approaches 90 per cent in the special economic zones and 70 per cent in Shanghai" is quite apropos.

ships to benefit one's own family and kin. This opens the door to corruption. The same is true with relations based on the return of favors.²²

B. Responsibility in the Public Space

There is yet another kind of social capital that is very scarce in China. What sort of obligation does one have for another person if that person is not a relative, if there are no favors to return, or a person seems to be of no account? One senses little or none. It is for this reason that in Chinese society generally there is a lack of a sense of public responsibility, and the public space suffers. It is an historic Chinese problem.

Some thirty years ago in Taiwan, an American student²³ wrote a letter in Chinese to the editor of one of the major daily newspapers. The letter was entitled "*Renqinwei yu gongdixin*" ("Doing things based on human feeling and public spiritedness"). Human feeling can also mean "showing favor." The letter talked about some of the student's experiences in Taiwan at that time. (Today, it should be said, things are quite different.) He observed the lack of a public spirit in society and gave many examples. One was simply the matter of standing in line. Lines were not honored, and people would butt into line wherever they chose. Society did not regulate itself spontaneously; rather, public order had to be maintained by authority. Traffic, especially at that time—it has gotten much better since—was another example. If police were not around, hardly anyone paid attention to traffic signs. The article raised a storm of short-lived student movements calling for society to change and become public minded.

Other examples come to mind: I was being escorted through the beautiful Shilin (Stone Forest) Park near Kunming some years ago. I bought some candies, and ate these as I walked along. The wrappers I rolled up and stuffed into my pocket. I saw no waste disposal containers around. When the young woman guiding me noticed this, she said, "Just throw it down!" I told her that I preferred not to. As I walked and looked at the marvelous stone configurations, it was dismaying to see candy wrappers, cans, and other debris stuffed into the odd-shaped holes that gave to these stone monuments their strange attraction. This was a public space and no one was responsible for it.

In Hong Kong in recent years, we joined a group to visit a park by the sea. I have never had such an experience. The park looked like a garbage dump. Plastic bags and cans and all kinds of refuse were strewn everywhere. It was and still is the habit of groups of picnickers to barbecue things for a picnic. Whether it was wieners or pieces of chicken or whatever, they would put them on skewers—metal rods, two feet long, with wooden handles. When people had finished, since they

²²Much has been written about corruption in China in recent years. On a micro-scale see, for instance, Andrew B. Kipnis, "The Language of Gifts: Managing *Guanxi* in a North China Village," *Modern China* 22 / 3 (1996) 285-314. For the Rocca essay, which is a more systematic national study, see "Corruption and Its Shadow: An Anthropological View of Corruption in China," *The China Quarterly* 130 (June 1992) 402-416.

²³Don Baron, then a young missionary with the former American Lutheran Church, was doing graduate studies at the Taiwan National University.

had no further use for these skewers—which could be purchased cheaply—they simply threw them into the bushes. My wife and I could have gathered hundreds, perhaps thousands, of these skewers from the bushes in the park. It was inconceivably awful. And that is the way it still is. Fortunately, I have seen no other park in Hong Kong that begins to match this one. In fact, Hong Kong has a rather richly developed public sphere.

We hear a lot about Singapore, where it is against the law even to chew gum, much less drop a wrapper on the ground. Why such a draconian law? Because there is a lack of social capital, a lack of a spontaneous public spirit. Thus, cleanliness in the public space must be mandated by stern laws.

C. The Church as Source for Social Capital

Now what am I trying to get at? I believe that there is something fundamental within the Christian gospel that lays the basis for a vibrant social capital. A social capital in which each is responsible for one's neighbor, regardless of kinship relations, regardless of favor or enmity, regardless of worth. When the Chinese government today supervises (the Three-Self Church), restricts (unregistered Christian groups), and even imprisons Christians, they do not realize that the Christian community is, in fact, the best possible friend of China. This is a community, whatever its imperfections, that bases itself on faith in God, a God who loves all equally without favor or preference, a God who cares for the needy, the helpless, and the sick. Because of this faith, the Christian community is helping to build up within China, here and there, a new sense of community—a sense of community based on love, a sense of community that builds trust.

This is what the parable of the good Samaritan is about. It concludes with the question: "Which of these three, do you think, was a neighbor to the man...?" The lawyer replied, "The one who showed him mercy." Whereupon Jesus said, "Go and do likewise." Commenting on this, Chiang Menglin, not a Christian, in a Chinese newspaper column some years ago said: "This simple and seemingly ordinary discourse holds within it a compelling motive force that has been constantly propelling humankind for nearly two thousand years....If we can also do likewise, we then understand Jesus' teaching and need not read on further."²⁴

It is in this gospel that I find the church's contribution to China's future, giving China a new hope, a new social capital, a new basis for community. Let me mention only two things in my own experience that point in this direction.

Some years ago a close friend was visiting from China. I had just come home from school. As I sat down at the dining room table and we talked, she began with these words: "I would like to be baptized." I asked her why, whereupon she told a fascinating story. She had grown up near Shanghai in the years before the communist victory, before 1949. She was about my age. She said her childhood was very unhappy. She was the oldest daughter in her family, and her aunt did not have any

²⁴See Ts'ai Jen-hou, Chou Lian-hwa, Liang Yen-ch'eng, *Hwei-t'ong yü chuan-hwa: chi-tu-chiao yü hsian-tai te tui-hwa* (Taipei: Yü-chou kuang ch'ü-pan she, 1985) 178f.

children. As was often the custom then, parents might give one of their children to a relative who had none. So her parents gave her to the aunt to be her child.

She always wondered why her parents gave her away. What had she done wrong? Also, this aunt, with no children of her own, did not know how to show love. So, the young girl was extremely unhappy. One day she happened to hear music from a church and she squeezed in. The old ladies tried to push her out but she pressed in, attracted by the music. Up in front she saw a man hanging on a cross, and she heard the story about this man. She learned that he had been killed by his enemies, even though he had done no wrong. Still, he loved them to the end. She began to think, "If he could love those who treated him like that even though he had done no wrong, what are my small problems to me?" This memory, she said, provided her motivation throughout her whole nursing career.

The next fall, while traveling in China, I met her. She had just returned from a trip to another province, visiting a nursing school there. Before leaving, the hospital and nursing school asked her to lecture. The hall was filled. As she lectured, she stressed the importance of love in the profession of nursing. As she was talking, she said, the whole auditorium broke down weeping. She said, "All I was doing was talking about love, and everyone began to weep!"

As I evaluate that experience in the light of what we have said, I think I understand something of what was going on. Marxist doctrine has never known what to do about love. It teaches class struggle. And the Communist Party today, having given up class struggle, teaches obedience to authority. Class struggle destroys social capital, for people become suspicious of one another, and trust is lost. Even today many remain instinctively suspicious of others, obstructing the rise of social capital. We have observed it countless times. This loss of social capital was one of the most devastating consequences of the Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976.²⁵ The demand to obey authority, current today,²⁶ also destroys social capital. These were people, nurses, whose life work is to aid and care for others, but who could find no motivation for this work in class struggle or in obedience to authority. Something new was heard when they heard of love. With love, motivation arises from within; no longer is there the insider and the outsider, but only the neighbor.

Some time ago I was visiting in China. In one place, I met doctor Zhong—short, rotund, and very dynamic. She was retired. Some years ago she had begun

²⁵For the most devastating exposé of this that I have read see Chang Jung, *Wild Swans* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991). It documents in autobiographical fashion three generations from the republican era to the present of a family deeply devoted to the Chinese Communist Party and shows their progressive, and often uncomprehending, disillusionment.

²⁶As I write this, a newspaper article notes that Beijing has temporarily stopped registering new unofficial social organizations, or "mass organizations" as they are called. According to a party source, "The authorities fear mass organizations may be a source of socio-political instability." This includes such things as pressure groups, polling and social research organizations, environmental groups, and the like. Perhaps this will hold only until the Ninth National People's Congress in March of 1998 when control issues and leadership directions have been worked out. These represent precisely the public space and civil society talked about in this paper. See "'Worried' Beijing puts bar on new unofficial groups," *South China Morning Post* (Hong Kong), 21 January 1997, 1.

work at a social ministry carried out by a local organization. It was a kindergarten for children infected with Hepatitis B. Because of this infection they were not allowed in other kindergartens or nursery schools. It was feared they could easily infect the other children.

In this city, kindergartens are really prep schools for first grade. Thus, children infected with Hepatitis B, when it came time to enroll in first grade, were sent off to the poorest schools, for they were unprepared. This social ministry, religiously connected, was designed for the aid of these children. Dr. Zhong was a deeply compassionate Christian. Her faith simply bubbled over in the love she showed to these children. Tremendous social capital was being built up. The children trusted her; the parents had confidence in her. Her work was their hope.

They began with some 200 children. Some time later, the government began inoculating infants to protect them from this infection. The inoculation program was very successful. Eventually the kindergarten was down to 50 infected children. One day it was simply announced that the ministry was to be discontinued. The reason given was finances. She was heart-broken—what were these children to do? The trust and confidence the families had in her and this ministry, what would happen to that?

I asked Dr. Zhong what she would do. Could she start something in her home? Yes, she said, she was thinking of that. She could perhaps help eight or nine Hepatitis B infected children. But, she said, "I can't teach them. Others will have to do that. It wouldn't take much, but such persons would have to have a little remuneration." So there she is, wondering what to do.

I recently spent an evening at a banquet for volunteers of the Caring for Children Fund, a Hong Kong organization started three years ago to provide aid for children in poverty-stricken areas of China. While not a Christian organization, a large percentage of the volunteers are Christians. Others are secular, entertainers, business people, Buddhists. I sat beside the Director for China Projects of the Salvation Army. They, too, have an extensive social ministry in China, with their Christian identity made clear and public. A young woman in the church we attend had just joined as a worker with the Hong Kong chapter of Food for the Hungry. They, too, are developing an extensive social ministry in China joined with a clear Christian witness. This is only a beginning list. But this work is not only done by international or Hong Kong based groups. In China one would have to speak of the critically important and extensive ministry of Amity, inspired by the China Christian Council and a channel for many overseas churches to participate in a wide array of social ministries with a Christian touch. Beyond this national focus one would have to go to local areas, to local Christian communities, and to individual Christians to see the growing extent of this compulsion to serve the neighbor that arises from the gospel.

It is in the Dr. Zhongs that I see the church giving hope for China. To be sure, as everywhere, the church in China is far from perfect. The Three-Self Church is hardly truly self-governing in its subservience to the government. The independent churches too often show a schismatic and unkindly spirit. Yet, these communities in their

imperfection are bearers of the gospel. As the gospel takes root in the lives of people the social capital of a nation is slowly but surely built up.²⁷

IV. A CLASH OF CIVILIZATIONS?

But is all this pondering about social capital simply another species of western missionary imperialism? Are there really universals that can find expression in this way? Aren't cultures different? What makes us think the gospel has long-term relevance in Chinese society? Why, moreover, should China need or want the kind of social capital of which I speak? Why not simply accept that China has its own tradition, will decide its own future, and leave it at that, hanging on as best we can to the values and institutions we have formed for ourselves in the west?

One of the most stimulating books I have read recently would seem to make just such an argument. Samuel Huntington, in his *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, seeks to fill up the conceptual vacuum in global affairs that has descended upon us after the collapse of communism as a functioning ideology. With that collapse went also the self-assured cold-war values that had shaped our worldview for two generations. We can all see forces in our world today that push toward increased global integration—the information age, economic interdependence, ecological pressures. We can even more easily see forces that push toward fragmentation—reassertion of ethnic or religious identities, or the fractious politics of identity in our own nation. But how can we make larger sense out of all of this? For Huntington, as a political scientist, the question is what formula, imperfect though all formulas be, will distinguish important issues from lesser ones and provide guidance for our own national policies during the foreseeable future?

My concerns, of course, are not primarily political, but theological. But Huntington's argument is eminently relevant to the concerns of this essay. His proposal is that, with the collapse of Communism and the end of a cold-war mentality, what we see displayed before us are the major fault lines between societies that have formed over the centuries. These fault lines are between civilizations—those networks of values and institutions that shape usually large aggregates of people. He discerns seven or so of these; among them are western civilization, Islam, the Orthodox world centered in Russia and Slavophile Europe, and the Sinic (Chinese) world. Conflicts in the future, whether intra-civilizational (as we see in Rwanda) or inter-civilizational (as we see in Bosnia) will primarily have to do with communal identities. If there is another great war, it will likely be between civilizations, not nations.

In part, Huntington writes his book as a warning—with the hope that nations, most especially our own, can act in such a way as to reduce the possibility of a great war ever happening. It is a sobering book. Most sobering for me is the likelihood he sees of such violence erupting in the first part of the next century between China and the west. The United States is now the world's single superpower. But China, more than any other nation or civilization, shows signs of

²⁷Craig Moran's concluding sentence makes this same point ("China's Transformation," 160).

challenging that supremacy and, at the minimum, seeking to dominate Asian affairs—which, after all, include most of the world's people.

Huntington's scenario of such a war takes place in 2010. An intracultural war between China and Vietnam over disputed islands in the South China Sea becomes a much worse intercultural war because of American support of Vietnam.²⁸ As I read this, I could not help thinking of a book that has recently swept China, written by some young upstarts who in their youth idolized America but in their maturity turned against the idolizing of a foreign civilization to become ardent nationalists. *China Can Say No!* is the stirring title. And they too envision a war between China and the United States.

The authors are deeply committed to the value and integrity of Chinese civilization. They see China's culture and values threatened by a singularly powerful and arrogant United States. "The Azure Heavens (the west) must die, the Yellow Sky (China) must arise!" they declare.²⁹ In a section entitled "Don't forget 'be prepared for war,'" comment is made on the two memorial walls in Washington D.C.—the Vietnam memorial and the Korean war memorial. In the event that America provides obstacles to uniting Taiwan with the mainland, they write, "We respectfully recommend: that Washington build an even larger, an even wider memorial wall for fallen soldiers, and prepare to inscribe an even larger number of names of America's youth. We sincerely believe that so great a wall will become the graveyard of the American spirit."³⁰ Are we peering into the future? Will nationalism³¹ become the moral basis for a distinctly new Chinese social capital? Neither of the preceding scenarios is an impossibility. But neither is either one inevitable; perhaps neither is likely. Yet, one of Huntington's admonitions to the west is disturbing: "to maintain Western technological and military superiority over other civilizations."³² Living by such a dictum, could conflict become a self-fulfilling prophecy?

Is the clash of civilizations our destiny? Perhaps. Hopefully not. Vastly different scenarios have been painted, from chaos to gradual change.³³ Certainly there

²⁸Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996) 313-316.

²⁹Qiao Bian, Zhang Zangzang, and Song Qiang, *China Can Say No!* (Chinese original; Hong Kong: Mingbao chuban she, 1996) 20. The background to this is the TV series, "The River Elegy" (*He Shang*), which in its turn was the rage of China in the months before the fateful Democracy Movement resulting in Tiananmen. In this series, western civilization was portrayed by the symbol of the blue or azure heavens and was seen as a maritime civilization, dynamic and open. China was portrayed as the Yellow River, filled with silt, always flooding and wreaking havoc upon itself. The yellow silt was a symbol of ancient agrarian tradition binding China into static helplessness. *China Can Say No!* (*Zhongguo keyi shuo bu!*) is in part a reaction against this idolizing of the west.

³⁰*Ibid.*, 35-36.

³¹See note 6.

³²Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 312.

³³For instance, James Miles, in *The Legacy of Tiananmen: China in Disarray* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 1991), sees the opposite extreme as a possibility, the gradual disintegration of China as a politically cohesive entity. Both views of spontaneous combustion—war or chaos—may be overly dramatic.

are forces for moderation in China, as in our country. Included here is the recognition of xenophobia as a danger to China's open door policy.³⁴

It is Huntington's thesis that there are no significant moral universals amongst civilizations. Certainly democracy is not a universal. It would, therefore, be well for us to give up ambitions to see such universals realized. At best, there is a "thin" or minimalist morality that is about all we have to go on.³⁵ Singapore, for instance, in a white paper, defined the following as essential shared values of Singaporeans (and China would assent): nation before [ethnic] community and society above self; family as the basic unit of society; regard and community support for the individual; consensus instead of contention; and racial and religious harmony. These in large part might sound good also to us. But political values are excluded from this list. Thus, placing nation before community and self means, politically, that the state has every right to tap any person's phone anytime it pleases—and, in fact, it does so. So we find that there may be a surface or thin similarity, but a "thicker" difference.³⁶

Are there no genuine universals that can provide a moral basis for social capital other than thin and skimpy ones? When the Christian faith becomes part of another culture, does it become so changed that no thick commonality remains with that faith in other cultures? Certainly that can and has happened. I do not believe it is necessary. Is "imperialism...the necessary logical consequence of universalism," as Huntington maintains?³⁷ I don't believe it.³⁸ There are different kinds of universalism. We as Christians talk of a universal grounded in the cross, not in triumph. It is this concrete universal of the gospel that I believe has relevance in all cultures and inspires the social capital exemplified by the good Samaritan. Indeed, I believe that the gospel has in the past and will continue to contribute to a "thick" moral commonality by helping to create the necessary indigenous social capital upon which the welfare of the neighbor, the freedom of assembly, and the

³⁴Two recent illustrations of this: In the January 31, 1997, *South China Morning Post*, p. 11, is a short article, "Xenophobia on the rise, leaders told," by Willy Wo-lap Lam. It reports a letter sent by some members of the National People's Congress (NPC) and Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) to senior party cadres affirming patriotism but discouraging anti-foreign sentiments. "If signs of xenophobia were to develop," they write, "our open-door policy might be threatened." The article also notes that the book *China Can Say No!* and its sequels "have either been banned or denied publicity by the official press." Again the February 1, 1997, review section of the same paper (p. 1), continues a lengthy interview with Qian Ning, the son of Qian Qichen, the Chinese foreign minister. Ning has been studying and teaching in the U.S. for some six years. He has just returned to China to publish a book on the likely destiny of the 250,000 students from China who have studied in the U.S. since 1979, two-thirds of whom have stayed. It reflects a much more sage perspective.

³⁵Huntington, *Clash of Civilizations*, 318.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 318f.

³⁷*Ibid.*, 310.

³⁸Huntington's primary reference, of course, is to western civilizational values. He cites, for instance, the "American Creed," which includes "liberty, democracy, individualism, equality before the law, constitutionalism, private property" (*ibid.*, 305). To universalize these unilaterally by political means, of course, entails imperialism. Moreover, some of these, not least the extreme individualism cultivated in our society, are very mixed blessings.

limitation of power, whether western or Sinic, become constituent factors in the public space in ever new contexts.

V. HOW TO HOPE

If China has hopes, how might we hope?

First, let us join our hands in prayer with Christians of all kinds in China. There should be prayers of confession, thanks, and mutual intercession. And we intercede not only for Christians but for whole peoples—theirs and ours. In prayer is hope.

Second, let us strive to be concretely related to each other, contributing in as many venturesome ways as possible to support and strengthen each other and to further the hearing of the gospel. What do we do with the Dr. Zhongs in our world? Leave them abandoned? In joining hands is hope.

Third, let us look to ourselves. No country has as rich a body of volunteer organizations seeking the welfare of the neighbor as our own. This reality, developed over the centuries, has perhaps its deepest roots in the gospel we preach. But today we are in danger of squandering our social capital. The social capital of which I speak cannot be based on a secular doctrine of individual human rights. It cannot be based upon consumption as the highest good. It cannot be based upon a purely private, *laissez faire* concept of morality.³⁹ It needs a deeper basis. Other societies, not least China, look at our inner-city chaos, with its drugs and murder, the collapse of our families, the celebration of our freedoms through self-indulgence and unbridled consumerism, our apparent right to do anything we want without corresponding responsibilities—and are aghast. These are signs that our social capital is being eroded by radical doctrines of individualism. The moral basis is at risk. Individual freedom is no more the gospel than communal welfare is. Yet both can have a rootage in the gospel of the crucified and risen Jesus Christ. Rooted in that will be a community life based on love for the neighbor, especially for the least amongst us. In repentance is hope. ⊕

³⁹Qian Ning rightly lays his finger on some of our problems. Commenting on his own experience, he observes: "You can live completely freely, find your own house, cook your own food, apply for your own financial aid, choose your own classes, find your own job and decide your own future....But as one 48-year-old visiting scholar who arrived in American in 1988 observed: 'America is free. Nobody bothers you but nobody cares about you.'" Again: "From daily goods to professions, from lifestyles to politicians, the right of personal choice is the most basic meaning of democracy." See the second article cited in note 34 (p. 1). If this is the bottom line of western democracy, is it sufficient to sustain community over the long haul?