TOWARDS A CHINESE CHRISTOLOGY
Inculturation and Christology in the Chinese Context

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The Chinese celebrate Teachers’ Day on September 28, the birthday of Confucius. At the high school where I taught Chinese Language some years ago, the stage design for the occasion featured a huge painting of the Sermon on the Mount. Jesus and his disciples were dressed as ancient Chinese intellectuals; his physical features and those of his disciples were all Chinese. Behind Jesus, in the distance, was the figure of Confucius. The painting suggested that both were teachers and, although Confucius was “older,” Jesus was superior to him.

There is no doubt that an inculturated christology was at work in that painting. There is much to be said about the presentation of Jesus as a great teacher who surpasses China’s great teacher, Confucius. Too often, however, such juxtapositions remain on the level of provocative images and isolated ideas. Can Jesus be reduced to a great teacher, even the greatest teacher of all time? What about his divinity, his incarnation and his passion? Any christology has to address all these questions.

This paper will examine the way christology has been done in the Chinese context. After presenting the idea of inculturation in the post-Vatican II church and Jose de Mesa’s method of doing a
contextualized christology, I will offer two examples of christologies done in an Asian context. I will then proceed to examine the christology of the Jesuit missionaries in China in the seventeenth century. Finally, I will return to de Mesa's method and evaluate the various attempts at developing a Chinese christology. I will conclude by offering some thoughts on the necessary elements in the project of a Chinese christology.

**Inculturation in the Post-Vatican II Church**

The project of doing christology in the Chinese context, or any context for that matter, belongs to the process of inculturation. Over the last twenty years, the Church has come to emphasize inculturation as an integral part of evangelization. Although the term is relatively new, the process itself goes back to the beginnings of Christianity. Since inculturation has been the subject of many studies, I find it necessary to discuss it briefly before focusing on christology as a form of inculturation.

The incarnation is the theological basis for inculturation.¹ “The Word became flesh and dwelt among us” (Jn 1:14). The Logos, the Word, the Second Person of the Trinity, became a human being within the specific cultural context of Judaism. God did not become human in a vacuum but rather took on human flesh in the Israelite community. The language Jesus spoke, the kind of food he ate, his experience of growing up in Nazareth, all these form part of the environment in which he lived as the God-human. In his public ministry, he used many metaphors that also tell us how he experienced the world. One easily thinks of salt and light, wine and wineskins, sheep and shepherd, vine and branches. These are all images that he knew and later used to proclaim the Kingdom of God. He used images and language that his audience could understand. That was already inculturation.

Karl Rahner identifies the preaching of Jesus to his Jewish audience as the first of three major eras or epochs in Church history.²
Jesus preached to a Jewish audience and his disciples continued the process after his death and resurrection. Jewish Christianity was the result, a Christianity that retained many Jewish customs in regard to prayer, circumcision and diet.

The second epoch of Church history came with St. Paul and his mission to the Gentiles. Himself a Jew, he brought the message of Jesus to Gentiles and non-Jews who had a different language and culture. Paul adapted Christianity to a new audience. In the famous Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:1-21), around 49 C.E., circumcision and the Jewish dietary laws were no longer required of Gentile converts. Paul also engaged Greek and Roman philosophy in his preaching of the message of Jesus.

The landmark approach of Paul led to a full flowering of the Gospel message. It is important to remember that the New Testament was written in Greek, not in the Aramaic language that Jesus spoke. According to Rahner, the what Paul started evolved into a Western European form of Christianity, using Greco-Roman thought patterns, that has prevailed throughout two millennia of Church history. It is this Roman Christianity that the Church’s missionaries brought to various parts of the globe such that for much of Christian history, the eucharist was celebrated in the same way, using the same language (Latin), throughout the world.

All that changed after the Second Vatican Council. We are presently in the third epoch of Church history, one that recognizes and respects the diversity in the world’s cultures and religions. It is still a Roman church, but there is more flexibility in expressing the same faith and baptism in a variety of ways. It is now possible to be a world Church where different cultures and traditions have a place. The eucharist is now celebrated in local languages and missionary activity is now more sensitive to the culture, language and way of life of people. This third epoch of Church history is still ongoing. Pope Paul VI described the Church’s evangelical mission thus:

Evangelization loses much of its force and effectiveness if it does not take into consideration the actual people to whom it is ad-
dressed, if it does not use their language, their signs and symbols, if it does not answer the questions they ask, and if it does not have an impact on their concrete life. Legitimate attention to individual churches cannot fail to enrich the Church. Such attention is indispensable and urgent. It responds to the very deep aspirations of peoples and human communities to find their own identity ever more clearly.  

The framework of Rahner is not absolute, as we will see in our exploration of doing christology in the Chinese context. The missionary experiments of Matteo Ricci in China and Roberto de Nobili in India show us that Roman Christianity did not prevail at all times and in all places. The point being made here is simply that the Christian faith, beginning with no less than the incarnation of Jesus Christ, always had to be inculturated or adapted to its audience. The Gospel message is essentially the same but throughout history it has taken on different forms.

It is now possible for us to define inculturation. In 1978, Ary Roest Crollius defined it as the “process by which the Church becomes part of the culture of a people.” This definition was in use for many years, but today there are as many definitions as there are theologians. Pio Estepa, a Filipino missionary in Africa, speaking at the First National Mission Congress of the Philippine Church, defined inculturation as:

The retelling of the Jesus story to a people or to a new generation in a way that it evokes emerging cultural intertexts from the collective mind and heart and offers them a meaningful life project for the emerging social context.

Estepa makes use of the notion of cultural intertexts which will be important in our project of a Chinese christology. A text that we hear recalls in our minds another text that comes from our own culture. The figure of speech that we call a pun would be the perfect example. Another example would be the way colors are understood across cultures. Many East Asians think of death and mourning when they see white, but North Americans would have no such association. We can consider the gospel message a cultural text which, when
shared in another culture, evokes other cultural intertexts from that culture. We will see this at work when we consider how Jesus has been presented to the Chinese people.

The simplest definition of inculturation that I have come across is also the one I like best. Inculturation is the gospel taking root in another culture. Jesus is the Gospel and he took root in Jewish culture. St. Paul implanted the Gospel in Greco-Roman culture. Throughout Christian history, whenever the Gospel encountered another culture, a process was begun. Oftentimes, the process got stuck in the Roman, Western European form of Christianity that prevailed in many places, but today that process is being developed so that the Gospel can find expression within each culture and language.

With the advances in theological reflection, many methodologies in inculturation have been developed. This paper does not intend to develop a specific christology, but the method Jose de Mesa’s espouses provides three very helpful elements in the present exploration. First, de Mesa says that soteriology precedes and leads to christology. The first step is, therefore, to look for a cultural notion of “salvation” that expresses the experience of human well-being in a particular cultural context. Thematic cultural exegesis is then applied to these notions in order to make the implicit meanings explicit.

The second phase is that of projection. Since Christians ascribe “salvation” to Jesus, the cultural notion of salvation is applied to Jesus. The salvific significance of Jesus is expressed in a way that is intelligible to the culture. Names and titles that are native to the culture are applied to Jesus and these names have the capacity to transform people’s attitudes towards life.

Finally, the third phase consists in “regauging.” The projections made on Jesus are assessed against the words and deeds of Jesus in the New Testament. The names, titles, and images that have been projected onto Jesus are valid only if they are compatible with the Jesus of the gospels. Having done the regauging, a pictorial presentation can be created that combines and synthesizes the projection and regauging that have been applied to Jesus.
In our study of Asian christologies, and specifically christology in the Chinese context, we will see de Mesa’s ideas of soteriology, projection, and regauging at work.

**Asian Faces of Jesus**

**Experiments in Formulating an Asian Christology**

**Minjung Christology of Korea**

*Minjung* is a Korean word meaning “the people,” especially “the oppressed people.” The *minjung* tradition had an indigenous provenance and referred to the struggle to liberate Korea from oppression, especially by the Japanese. The word *minjung* connotes liberation or salvation and, when Christianity arrived in Korea, the *minjung* tradition was appropriated to refer to Christ. Aloysius Pieris observes that Korea is probably the first country in Asia to sow the seed of a theology of liberation.¹⁰

The Korean church received the Bible as the sacred history of the *minjung*. God was presented as being in solidarity with the *minjung*, announcing to them a message of liberation. The *minjung* tradition has been projected on the Judeo-Christian God and on Jesus. Today, this task is being carried out by Korean theologians like Byung Mu Ahn who are developing a christology based on Jesus’ identification with the *minjung*. It is to be hoped that the necessary regauging of *minjung* in the light of the Jesus of Christian revelation is taking place.

A basic survey of available material points to a very promising indigenous theology in Korea. This is an example of an Asian liberative tradition being absorbed into the Church’s tradition. Byung Mu Ahn says that Asians in general and Koreans in particular have been “enslaved by the Christology of the *Kerygma.*”¹¹ What he means is that the image of Jesus as a savior and redeemer was formed in Europe and has been imposed on the rest of the world. Ahn sees a positive sign in the quest for the historical Jesus because it is an opportunity to go back to the way Jesus actually lived. This is a quest that is free from the dogma of the institutional Church. In Ahn’s
study of the synoptic gospels, he points out how often the term *ochlos* is used to refer to the crowds that constantly gather around Jesus. Another term could also be used—*laos* meaning God's people—but it is *ochlos* that is used most frequently. Ahn uses this detail and proceeds to demonstrate how Jesus is always with the *minjung*—the sick, the tax collectors, sinners, and prostitutes. Jesus shares their reality and mediates with God for them. Jesus is *minjung*.

**Hindu Christology**

Indian Hindus have been working out Hindu images of Jesus since the nineteenth century. R.S. Sugirtharajah notes that the Hindus are the only non-Christian faith tradition to have "worked out such elaborate and varied images of Jesus." The varied philosophical traditions within Hinduism, and their corresponding philosophers, have produced diverse images of Jesus, among which are the following:

- Jesus as Supreme Guide to human happiness (Rajah Ram Mohun Roy);
- Jesus as true Yogi and Divine Humanity (Keshub Chunder Sen);
- Jesus as the Son of Man, seeking the last, the least, and the lost (Rabindranath Tagore); and
- Jesus as the Supreme Satyagrahi—lover and fighter for truth (Mahatma Gandhi).

These Hindu thinkers incorporated Jesus into their Hindu thought-worlds, seeing him as a confirmation of the truth in their sacred texts. Curiously, these Hindu responses to Jesus inspired Indian Christians to imagine Jesus using their own cultural and philosophical resources. The Hindu philosophical language was projected on Jesus, and more images of Jesus surfaced:

- Jesus as Prajapati—Lord of creatures (K.M. Banerjee);
- Jesus as Avatar—Incarnation (A.J. Appasamy, V. Chakkarai); and
- Jesus as Eternal Om—Logos (S. Jesudasan).

Sugirtharajah, after naming all these Hindu images of Jesus, further notes that, today, there are Hindus who are not enthusiastic about such images of Jesus. He is referring to the *dalits* or lower-caste Indians who are oppressed and marginalized based on their place in Sanskritistic tradition and philosophy. *Dalit* means broken
or destroyed, and the members of this class have developed their own *dalit* theology since the 1970s. For centuries, these people have been discriminated against and considered outcasts, untouchables. For them, their brokenness is their core identity and so it is the basis of their Christian living. Jesus Christ is for them a broken Christ. It cannot be any other way. This is how they have projected their brokenness and need for liberation on Christ.

Today there is a clash between the Hinduizing Christians and the *Dalit* Christians. It is said that while 90% of Indian Christians are *dalits*, 90% of church leadership is in the hands of upper-caste Christians! The broken Christ of the *dalits* has no place even in the Church. It seems that the Indian church needs to be fragmented by the diverse images of Christ that have emerged within Hindu tradition before an authentic, Hindu Christ can surface.

The task of christologizing in the Hindu context is quite complex but also very promising. Ovey N. Mohammed has meticulously outlined the similarities in the notions of salvation offered by Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita and Jesus Christ in the New Testament. Among the similarities are the gratuitousness of the salvation offered by God, God incarnating Godself, the instrumentality of grace and the necessity of repentance and forgiveness. Mohammed makes the bold claim that given these similarities, Christians can continue “to affirm that God has really spoken in Jesus, but [the theocentric view of salvation] does not compel them to say that God has not spoken through Krishna.” The locus of Hindu-Christian dialogue would not be the relationship of Krishna or Jesus to God, but to what extent they promote liberation or salvation. In other words, Mohammed proposes the liberation theology of religions as the approach to Hindu-Christian dialogue. The focus of such a task is obviously not christological in nature, but there is more than enough raw material to work out the regauging of the Hindu conceptions of Jesus.

*Others*

Aside from the Korean and Hindu contexts, christology has also been done in the Buddhist context. Theologians like Aloysius Pieris
and Michael Rodrigo have developed ways of understanding Jesus in the Buddhist environments of countries like Sri Lanka. Liberation is also the path where Buddha and Christ meet.

In the Philippines, the only country in Asia where Christianity became the majority religion, Filipinos have appropriated Jesus Christ for their own needs. Some have referred to the theology of the Philippines as one of struggle.\textsuperscript{18}

Having surveyed some of the more prominent experiments in formulating an Asian christology, we now turn to the Chinese context, the main focus of this paper.

**Christology in the Chinese Context**

**Past Experiments**

Contrary to popular belief, Matteo Ricci and his fellow Jesuits were not the first Christian missionaries to attempt the evangelization of China. Nestorian Christians arrived in China as early as 635 C.E. The Franciscan John of Montecorvino arrived in 1294 during the Yuan dynasty (1280-1368) and was quite successful in his missionary work, but when the Ming dynasty was established in 1368, all the foreign elements allowed by the Yuan were expelled from China. Both Nestorianism and Catholicism disappeared. The popular belief about the Jesuits being the first Christians to arrive in China, therefore, is not without basis, for when they arrived there in 1582, there were no Christians. The Jesuits had to start from nothing. The Jesuit mission to China is well-documented, unlike the Nestorian and Franciscan missions. We shall be limiting our exploration of christology in the Chinese context to the Jesuit missionary experience after briefly indicating the christology that the Nestorians developed.

*The “Buddhist Christ” of the Nestorians*

The Nestorian missionary Alopen reformulated Christian soteriology within the Buddhist worldview. A “Buddhist Christology” was modeled on the story of Avalokitesvara, a male bodhisattva
who took on female form and became known to the Chinese as Guan Yin, the goddess of mercy. A bodhisattva is a person who postpones his or her own attainment of nirvana in order to help others. The incarnation was explained along this line, and here we see an example of cultural intertexts at work. Jesus is like a bodhisattva in his mission to save others. David Scott has written on the Christian references to Buddhism in pre-medieval times.

**Matteo Ricci's "Lord of Heaven"**

One of the reasons for the Chinese Rites Controversy is the accusation that Ricci and his companions were ashamed of Jesus Christ and were consciously putting him aside. The Jesuits, according to their critics, did not display the crucifix and did not explain the Passion to their converts. In fact, the Jesuits did not give "wide public display to the Crucifixion," but this was due to missionary strategy rather than renunciation of Christ.

Ricci and his companions did not display the crucifix because they were afraid of exposing Christian doctrine to ridicule. They were afraid that the crucifix would be equated with a Daoist charm. Besides, Chinese law forbade nudity in art. The Jesuit strategy was to delay explanation of Christ's passion and death until such time that the catechumens were ready for the teaching. Through his method of trial-and-error, Ricci discovered that a premature explanation would not favor conversions.

In *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, a catechism that Ricci published, Jesus Christ was presented only in the eighth and last chapter, and the passion and death were omitted. This drew much criticism but Ricci explained that his catechism did not treat all the mysteries of the Christian faith. It was a preparatory document that focused on principles that could be proven and understood through natural reason. The reality of Jesus Christ would be explained to catechumens and Christians through the *Doctrina Christiana* pamphlets that Ricci also published.

In short, Ricci sought to present Christ gradually to the Chinese. He first presented Christ as a teacher and performer of miracles. The
miracles indicated his divinity. Ricci compared Christ to China’s great teacher, Confucius (again, a cultural intertext), but insisted that Christ was greater than any king or teacher. Hoping that the Chinese would see and understand Christ not as a foreigner but as someone already “mysteriously present in the noble Chinese civilization,” Ricci’s method had Christ as the conclusion rather than the starting point.

In the religious teaching of the *Doctrina Christiana*, Diego de Pantoja, one of Ricci’s closest collaborators, gives a long and complete account of the passion of Jesus and the doctrine of the resurrection. He also wrote *The Recitation of the Passion of the Savior* which Chinese Catholics recited during Holy Week until the middle of the twentieth century. De Pantoja insisted on the salvific value of the passion. He also displayed an understanding of the Chinese mentality when he mentioned the virtue of filial piety as applying to Jesus. Gianni Criveller says that De Pantoja does not seem aware of any objections to his presentation of the passion. The objections would come later.

**Giulio Aleni**

Giulio Aleni belongs to the generation of missionaries that came after Matteo Ricci, who labored in China from 1582 to 1610. Like Ricci, he began his pastoral approach with natural revelation, writing and preaching at length on the nature of God. He had an extensive knowledge of Chinese culture and language, writing prolifically on morality, heaven and hell, penance and the examination of conscience. Among the missionaries of his time, he was the most christocentric.

Aleni promoted a eucharistic spirituality that focused on the eucharist as the “actualization of the mystery of Christ’s Redemption.” He published *The Life of Jesus in Words and Images* and *The Life of Our Lord Jesus Christ* in Chinese, the first Chinese translations of the life of Jesus. The use of the Chinese language to tell the story of Jesus was a milestone, as was Aleni’s use of Ignatian methods of meditation to encourage people to reflect on the life of Jesus. In *Learned Conversations of Fuzhou*, Aleni addresses himself to two non-Christians who objected to the incarnation. How could the omnipo-
tent God accept the humiliation of becoming a man? Aleni used love as the motivation for the incarnation. God is love and could not leave humankind desolate and abandoned.

The two non-Christians were not convinced and did not convert. They remained Aleni’s friends, and the incarnation would prove to be one of the greatest stumbling blocks to the evangelization of the Chinese. In 1635, Aleni wrote *Introduction to the Incarnation of the Lord of Heaven*, the first Chinese text completely devoted to christology. Aleni presented the mystery of Christ in a doctrinally straightforward way, using a trinitarian and biblical perspective. He linked the incarnation to the mystery of redemption, saying that the incarnation is not simply the self-revelation of God’s power and glory but the working out of God’s salvific plan for humanity. The human person is being redeemed from sin by the passion, death and resurrection of Jesus.

Asked why God had to suffer, Aleni answered with a stroke of missionary genius. Instead of repeating the doctrine, he alluded to an ancient Chinese legend. Cheng Tang, the first emperor of the Shang dynasty (1766-1753 B.C.E.), was known for his wisdom and virtue. During his reign, the country suffered a terrible famine due to a prolonged drought. The people became convinced that Heaven or God was angry and could only be appeased by a human sacrifice. Cheng Tang offered himself as the human sacrifice. After fasting and cutting his hair, he sat by a mulberry grove, confessed his sins and offered himself as the victim to God.

To pray and intercede for the people was part of the emperor’s duties as the Son of Heaven. The Chinese believed in the semi-divinity of the emperor such that only the emperor could make the annual sacrifice to Heaven. Aleni used this idea to state that Cheng Tang prefigured Jesus Christ, who offered himself to the Lord of Heaven in order to save humankind. We see here the christological satisfaction and ransom theories at work and also the Christian idea of embracing suffering to express virtue and love.

Like Ricci, Aleni also compared Jesus to the wisdom figures in
Chinese culture—Confucius, Mencius and Laozi. But unlike Ricci, who focused on Confucius’ belief in a Lord of Heaven, Aleni shifted his focus to the mystery of the incarnation and redemption in Jesus, all the while affirming Jesus’ superiority over the Chinese philosophers.

There were many other christological questions that were directed at Aleni: Why did the incarnation take place so late in history, especially in reference to Chinese history? Why was Jesus not born in China? Why did God leave China out of his salvific plan? When God became human, did heaven become empty or are there two gods? How is Jesus different from Confucius and Mencius? Aleni responded to all these questions using rational discourse rather than theology. For example, to differentiate Jesus from Confucius and the other Chinese sages, Aleni argued that Jesus’ birth was foretold by prophets and the prophecies were all recorded in the Western Scriptures.

Asked to explain the passion of Jesus, Aleni talked instead of the supernatural graces brought about by the passion. True to the spirit of his time, Aleni and his fellow Jesuits hardly mentioned the resurrection in the plan of redemption. They tended to present Jesus suffering and dying on the cross rather than rising to new life.

In all his writings and pronouncements, Aleni always maintained a dialogical attitude. He engaged Chinese culture and was quite ready to accept the validity of those cultural elements that he saw as compatible with the Christian faith. Through it all, he politely claimed the superiority of Christian revelation.

Criveller concludes that Aleni did not “formulate a true Chinese christology.” While he became “Chinese with the Chinese,” he was still European in a fundamental way. Only Chinese Christians can really develop a Chinese christology. Aleni’s contribution is in providing Chinese Christians with the tools necessary to develop a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. He passed on his devotion to the eucharist and to the passion and helped people to center their lives on the person of Jesus. By doing this, Aleni was laying the “conditions of possibility” for the Chinese to do their own theological reflection.
Towards a Chinese Christology

Historical events prevented the development of a Chinese theology. The Chinese Rites Controversy, the European occupation of many parts of China in the nineteenth century and the rise of communism in the twentieth century, all created political problems for the Chinese church. Only in the years after Vatican II did Chinese theology blossom again and, this time, the theologizing was done outside mainland China. There are Chinese theologians now in what is known as Greater China—Taiwan and Hong Kong. These Chinese theologians are the people who are equipped to develop a Chinese christology. They have received the faith from missionaries and are now in a position to do their own theologizing. Criveller has pointed to the necessity of Chinese Christians developing their own christology. Nicolas Standaert has made the same point in his systematic presentation of the process of inculturation.  

In developing a christology in the Chinese context, it is useful to return to de Mesa’s ideas of soteriology, projection and regauging. The first step, to define soteriology within Chinese culture, has been very difficult. Kwok Pui-Lan, like many scholars, has pointed out that Christianity insists on the need of all human beings for salvation because of an innate depravity, but in classical Chinese culture there is no equivalent notion of religious depravity or sin. The Chinese understand “shame” and “guilt,” but there is not even a Chinese word for “sin.” Missionaries have used the word “crime” (zui) to refer to “sin” and many Chinese find this unacceptable. “I have not committed any crime!”

Further, the Chinese have difficulty understanding how Jesus died for all. Both the satisfaction and ransom theories are patterned on thought patterns that are alien to the Chinese. Kwok attributes the ransom theory to the Roman penal system and the satisfaction theory to the sacrificial rituals of the Jews. A Chinese intellectual says, concerning the ransom theory:

They say that the Master of Heaven paid in person for the crimes of the ten thousand generations. That is totally incomprehensible.
Since the Master of Heaven is majesty without equal and infinite compassion, why did he not simply issue an amnesty to men for their crimes, and what need had he to redeem their crimes with his own person?... And if he was capable of redeeming the crimes of men with his own person, why was he not capable of arranging that men should commit no more crimes?\textsuperscript{32}

The incarnation is another stumbling block for the Chinese. When Ricci and his companions used the Confucian classics to talk about God as the Master of Heaven, the Chinese eagerly accepted their teaching and rejoiced that the foreigners shared their belief in providence. When Jesus was presented as a great teacher like Confucius, the Chinese could accept him as a wisdom figure like the Chinese sages. When later missionaries compared God to the Dao that has no beginning and no ending, the Chinese found the comparison acceptable. But when presented with the idea that the Master of Heaven consented to become a human being and be nailed to a cross, the Chinese remained silent.

Jacques Gernet’s monumental work \textit{China and the Christian Impact}\textsuperscript{33} is devoted to indicating the fundamental differences between Western and Chinese conceptions of the world and of human beings. On the incarnation, Gernet wonders whether the dogma can ever be separated from Judaeo-Greek concepts.\textsuperscript{22} Many other scholars have made the same point. We recall that in the ancient Chinese legend Aleni used to explain the passion of Christ, it was not the Master of Heaven but the emperor who sacrificed himself for the sake of the people. There is no God-human in the story.

Hans Küng, speaking of a “Chinese theology for the postmodern age,” says that such a theology must have a “clear reorientation to the original, biblical faith and not to some confessional, Western-ecclesiastical doctrine such as has caused so much division in Chinese Christianity over the centuries.”\textsuperscript{34} Jesus Christ needs a Chinese garb that is more than external.

When a Chinese soteriology has been worked out, the projection onto Jesus as the savior needs to be original. While certain notions can be borrowed from the Semitic-prophetic and Indian-mystic reli-
gious traditions, the two categories that Küng uses to classify the world religions, Küng maintains that the Chinese religions constitute a separate category. Soteriology in the Chinese context cannot simply borrow christological answers formulated in another culture. As Kwok says, it will be “worthwhile understanding more sympathetically the non-Christian (Chinese) perceptions of Christ.”

Any projections made onto Jesus will then be regauged according to the Jesus of the gospels. One such attempt at a Chinese christology belongs to the Taiwanese theologian Hu Tsan-yün. For him, Jesus is the human being who has become one with God. This echoes the Confucian idea that heaven and the human being are essentially the same. Since his work is not available to this writer, we simply point to him as an example of a Chinese christology that seeks to make the incarnation comprehensible in Chinese terms.

Conclusion

We have examined the idea of inculturation in the post-Vatican II church and tried to apply it to christology using the framework of Jose de Mesa. We explored the Asian christology that has emerged in Korea and India before embarking on a lengthier exploration of christology in the Chinese context. We saw that the Chinese people could easily accept natural revelation but found the total Christian understanding of Jesus incomprehensible. Comparison with certain Chinese sages and ideas were helpful but ultimately the soteriology involved in the incarnation and subsequent passion of Jesus proved to be a challenge to the Chinese mind. Chinese Christians were presented with a christology “from above” that inspired piety and devotion, but the project of a Chinese christology is still ongoing.

If there is something to be learned from the minjung christology of Korea and the Hindu christology of India, it is that christology must be rooted in the experience of the people. Aside from what we have said earlier about christology being done by local agents of inculturation and being rooted in the original, biblical faith, it is also
necessary for christology to be done in the context of present-day Chinese culture. Küng doubts whether the Chinese classics still have much influence in mainland China and the increasingly globalized territories of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. Chinese culture today, while sharing a common origin, has been reshaped by historical developments of the late twentieth century. The culture of China under fifty years of communism is very different from Chinese culture as found in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Singapore. The overseas Chinese communities throughout the world also have their own peculiarities. The situation of the Christian church in all these territories is also variable and that is why our search is not for a Chinese christology, but for Chinese christologies.

If we wish to outline a christology for mainland China, where the population stands at 1.2 billion, I suspect that the other theological questions notwithstanding, it is still the image of the suffering Jesus that will speak to the Chinese. In a sense, it is still the suffering Jesus of Aleni that would still be relevant in China, albeit for different reasons. China today is still suffering from the consequences of the Cultural Revolution where a whole generation of young people lost their education and their rootedness in the past. China today is a China of the one-child policy, of female infanticide, massive corruption in government, rural poverty as against urban-coastal prosperity and state control over religion. These are the experiences of the Chinese masses and it is from such experiences that a soteriology must be worked out. The mainland Chinese, especially the non-Christians who flock to Catholic churches during Easter and Christmas, need a Jesus who will give them back the life in the spirit that their ancestors cherished. They need a Jesus who will give them hope and liberation, and the result will be a christology for the Chinese masses.
Notes


3Ibid., 86.


10Ibid., 40.


12Sugirtharajah, 3.

13Ibid., 3-4.

14Ibid., 4.

15Pieris, 38.


17Ibid., 22.

20 Gianni Criveller, “Christ in Late Ming China (1),” *Tripod* 102 (Nov-Dec 1997) 6-29.


22 Criveller, 17.

23 Ibid., 20.

24 Ibid.

25 *Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana (BAV)*, Barb. Or. III, 134 (1).

26 *BAV*, R.G. Or. III 219 (5).

27 *BAV*, Borgia Cinese 324 (20b).

28 *BAV*, Borgia Cinese 324 (5)b.

29 Ibid., 37.

30 Standaert.


33 Ibid., 223.


35 Ibid., xii.

36 Kwok, 31.

37 Küng and Ching, 265.

38 Ibid., 252.