

# THE PROPHETIC ROLE OF RELIGION IN STRENGTHENING CULTURAL CONSTRUCTION

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## Abstract

China has made remarkable progress in areas such as the economy, trade, sports, science and technology. However, though rapid economic development has been impressive, examples of charitable services, sharing and sympathy are still rare. The gap between rich and poor in China continues to widen, while instances of corruption and fraud keep surfacing. At the same time, the uncertainty of belief systems and the blind pursuit of money and other material benefits only worsens social morality and dampens the development of religion and culture. Therefore Chinese society today must not only seek to strengthen the reconstruction of traditional culture, morality, conscience and law, but also enhance prophetic awareness. The term “culture” has again become very popular and is often used in Chinese society. This paper investigates how China has shifted its focus from economic development to cultural construction and how cultural legal, spiritual and moral constructions are as important as economic progress.

## บทคัดย่อ

ประเทศจีนได้ทำการพัฒนาอย่างเป็นที่น่าสังเกตในหลายด้าน ไม่ว่าจะเป็นด้านเศรษฐกิจ การค้า การกีฬา วิทยาศาสตร์ และเทคโนโลยี อย่างไรก็ตาม แม้ว่าจะสามารถพัฒนาด้านเศรษฐกิจรวดเร็วอย่างน่าประทับใจ แต่ยังมีห่างไกลในเรื่องการบริจจาคทาน การแบ่งปัน และการเห็นอกเห็นใจกัน ช่องว่างระหว่างคนรวยกับคนจนในจีนขยายกว้างขึ้นไม่หยุด ทั้งยังมีตัวอย่างการฉ้อราษฎร์บังหลวงและการหลอกลวงให้ประจักษ์อยู่เสมอ ในเวลาเดียวกันความไม่แน่นอนของระบบความเชื่อ

และการแสวงหาเงินทองและผลประโยชน์อย่างหน้ามืดตามัวทำให้สังคมจีนมีความเสื่อมถอยศีลธรรม และยังทำให้การพัฒนาด้านศาสนาและวัฒนธรรมเสื่อมถอย ดังนั้นสังคมยุคปัจจุบันจะต้องไม่มุ่งแต่จะเสริมสร้างความแข็งแกร่งด้านวัฒนธรรมประเพณีศีลธรรม มโนธรรมสำนึก และกฎหมายเท่านั้น แต่จะต้องหันมาส่งเสริมจิตสำนึกทางจิตวิญญาณด้วย ปัจจุบันนี้คำว่า “วัฒนธรรม” กลับมาเป็นที่นิยมอีกและนำมาใช้ในสังคมมากขึ้น บทความนี้ต้องการสืบสาวดูว่าทำไมเงินหันมาเน้นการสร้างสรรคทางวัฒนธรรมมากกว่าการพัฒนาคน เศรษฐกิจ และทำไมเงินจึงถือว่าการสร้างสรรคทางวัฒนธรรมจิตวิญญาณ และศีลธรรมซึ่งมีความสำคัญไม่ยิ่งหย่อนไปกว่าความก้าวหน้าทางคน เศรษฐกิจ

## Forward

Since the open-door policy was introduced in 1978, China has made steady progress in areas such as the economy, trade, sports, science and technology. Economic progress has been especially obvious. After joining the World Trade Organization in 2001, its economy has been growing quickly and steadily. Over the past 30 years, China has gone through a tremendous transformation, which has led to the policy of “let some become rich first” as envisioned by the late national leader Deng Xiaoping. But although this rapid economic development has made China quite visible on the world stage, the development of charitable services, sharing and sympathy have failed to keep pace. And certain negative instances have tainted the reputation of government-sponsored charitable foundations. The gap between rich and poor in China continues to widen, while instances of corruption and fraud keep surfacing. At the same time, the uncertainty of belief systems and the blind pursuit of money and other material benefits only worsens social morality and dampens the development of religion and culture.

The time has now come for China to engage in some deep soul-searching and reflection. What, after all, has happened to China over the years? Striving for economic development is necessary, but if it becomes

a one-sided development solely focused on the economy and GDP, if it neglects people's spiritual and emotional needs and denies the importance of purifying and uplifting belief systems and worldviews inherent in both religion and traditional Chinese culture, then social crises and problems are bound to arise.

Although political reform is important for solving the above-mentioned social problems, these political issues are not the main point of this article. The promotion of traditional cultural reconstruction and an emphasis on spiritual and moral systems originating from religion are of equal importance. Chinese society today must not only strengthen reconstruction of traditional culture, morality, conscience and law, but also enhance prophetic awareness. This means that intellectuals and religious people as well as other social groups must courageously cry out against injustices and make their protests heard, so as to bring about a human society of justice, harmony and equilibrium. Certain parts of this article on the moral role of prophet and of religion were initially presented at an inter-religious seminar in North Europe.<sup>1</sup> In light of the current social problems in China and the theme of this present seminar, I repeat my contention that China today must pay due attention to the role of prophets and religion.

Since receiving the invitation to this conference this past June, we have been happy to see that the Chinese Communist Party made "cultural construction" one of the important study topics in its Congress in October and made it a new government project. For this reason, the term "culture" has become very popular and is often used in Chinese society. People have begun to pay attention to and rediscover the moral power, meaning and usefulness imbedded in traditional and religious culture. At the same time, they have also begun to reflect on why cultural construction lags behind and they look for a way out. In the process of reviewing how China has shifted its focus from economic development to cultural construction and as we highlight some social problems, it is not difficult to appreciate that cultural and legal constructions, as well as spiritual and moral constructions arising from religion, are as important as economic progress.

## **Part I: From Economic Development to Cultural Construction, and the Cost**

After the ultra-left period (1950s) and the decade-long calamity called the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), China's economy was almost paralyzed. When China's economic reform was launched to improve the country's seriously underdeveloped economy, Deng Xiaoping, who had just re-obtained political power, proposed the "let some people get rich first" policy and an "economic construction" approach. After years of sparing no effort to advance economic construction, China's economy gradually did seem to grow more affluent, but it had to pay a heavy price. The good news is that the Communist Party is not only paying attention to the economy, but it has also started to pay heed to cultural construction and has made the development of culture its target for this year.

In the fall of 1978, Deng Xiaoping visited Tianjin, which in 1976 experienced the double catastrophe of the Cultural Revolution and the severe Tangshan Earthquake. Deng witnessed the difficulties and poor living conditions of urban construction in Tianjin. After September 20, Deng put forward the policy of "let some people get rich first" for the first time. In December that year, his "get rich first" argument became a more accurately defined statement in the Third Plenary Session: "Allow some people to get rich, in order to help the rest become rich as well, so as to achieve common prosperity".<sup>2</sup> On Oct 23, 1985, while meeting with a delegation of entrepreneurs in the United States, Deng once again stressed: "Some areas and some people can get rich first, so as to help other regions and other people, and gradually achieve common prosperity".<sup>3</sup> Responding to the painful lessons learned from the extreme leftist ideology and conservative forces wanting to block the reform process and engagement in economic development and opting instead to foster the "political movement", Deng Xiaoping repeatedly stressed his ideas of economic reform. For example, he even regarded developing the economy as a political task, stressed that economic development should be the overriding concern, and demanded that all be subjected to economic construction.<sup>4</sup>

In taking economic construction as the central premise of China's economic development, China achieved sustainable development for many

years. Its total economic output in world rankings keeps rising. In 2005, China overtook Italy to become the world's sixth largest economy. It beat the UK in 2006, becoming the world's fourth largest economy. In 2007, China surpassed Germany to become the world's third largest economy, and it surpassed Japan in 2011 to become the world's second largest economic entity. "China Economic Weekly" described its economic growth in this way: "China's GDP soared from \$268.3 billion in 1978 to \$5.879 trillion in 2010. During the past 30 years, its economy increased more than 20 times, and its average growth rate was close to 10%. It demonstrated unprecedented speed in the history of China's economic development".<sup>5</sup>

However, the vast majority of Chinese people do not agree with such rankings, and do not think their country has surpassed Japan and other countries to become the world's second largest economy. Many people understand that China's per capita GDP is 10 times behind the per capita GDP of Japan. The per capita of China not only falls behind developing countries, but also suffers a great gap with developed countries. According to data from the "Global Times", the online survey of "China's GDP Overruns Japan: How Do You See It", more than 90% of respondents agreed that "China is not the world's second economic power" and more than 74% of Chinese people believe their nation will need at least 20 more years to achieve the real per capita GDP of the world's second highest level.<sup>6</sup> Obviously, it is pity that most ordinary Chinese people still cannot experience, nor enjoy the fruits of the world's "second largest economy".

Data from the World Bank in 2009 indicated that China's per capita GDP ranked No. 124 among 213 countries and regions worldwide. Even if one reckons China's per capita GDP according to the actual sum of US\$3,800, it would rank as No. 105 in the world. One could take "medical care" as an example. According to the World Health Organization's ranking based on the member states' integrated assessment scheme, such as the fair distribution and fund collection of health care, China ranked 188 among the 191 member states – the 4<sup>th</sup> from the bottom.<sup>7</sup>

Though China's GDP and fiscal income are in the front ranks of the world, the income level and growth rate lag behind. For instance, as the prices of goods keep rising while the income of ordinary people re-

mains low. The daily necessities and fruits in supermarkets are indeed abundant, but their prices are almost the same with the developed countries. The reality we have to keep in mind is that the average per capita income in China is only 5,000 USD but 40,000 USD in developed countries. At the same time, the annual income of the lower-middle class in China is dozens of times and even hundreds of times lower than that of the rich class and of the average per capita income in developed countries. From 1978 to 2007, China's share of total wages in GDP declined from 15.65% to 11.15%, and the nation's workers compensation share of GDP declined from 62.34% to 42.60%. Also the Chinese government's administrative expenses accounted for 26% of total revenue, while it was only 3% in Japan, and many European countries did not exceed 4%.<sup>8</sup> The unbalanced development of China's economic growth has created a huge gap between rich and poor, as well as tremendous waste of resources and the escalation of environmental pollution. The unbelievable consequences are as visible as China's growth. All of these have led to some serious social conflicts and problems.

Economic growth has become the central measure of development. It has impacted all levels of Chinese society and accelerated the process of secularization. The blind pursuit of economic interests is gradually corrupting people's minds and leading China into a crisis. With the gap between rich and poor constantly expanding, relationships between people have become materialistic and insensitive, leading to instances which have shocked Chinese society. The tragedy of Yueyue (a 2-year-old girl) last fall was a typical case which demonstrated this lack of compassion and conscience.<sup>9</sup>

While material conditions are important, the pursuit of spiritual development and belief is also vital. If a society neglects or lacks these, the consequences are often horrific. Recently, in the pursuit of money, some people have added melamine to milk powder, selling waste oil discarded from restaurants, etc. From contaminating food (honey, pasta, meat, rice, dried sea cucumber, etc.) to the contamination of ordinary commodities (washing liquid, shampoo, shower gel, gasoline), and the production of fake drugs, fake diplomas and fake invoices, adulteration and fraud have penetrated all walks of life and become a common phenomenon.

In the past, giving red envelopes signalled blessings from elders to the young, but today has become associated with acts of bribery. It has lost its traditional value of loving affection and friendship. Besides such corruption cases among government officials there are also red envelop bribes of medical workers and teachers. Patients often need to give doctors red envelopes to get better medical treatment, and students need to give red envelopes to teachers. Recently, this corruption is also present in sports such as soccer.<sup>10</sup>

It is not merely secular society that has been polluted by economic growth. The same is happening in cultural, educational, charitable and even religious sectors. For example, temples and churches meant for worship have also been affected by the economy-centred development; most temples in China demand an entrance fee either through the temple administration itself or the cultural relics bureau. Some temples even sell the “first burning incense” and “first ringing bell” at a very high price.<sup>11</sup> Zhu Dake, professor of the Cultural Critique Institute at Tongji University and a well-known contemporary critic, once candidly asserted: “Many believers want to establish an adulterous relationship with gods” and “bring the bribery game in business sectors to religions through making promises and fulfilling them, thinking that by delivering a ‘red envelop’ filled with a lot of money the gods would be pleased and their sins forgiven.”<sup>12</sup> Of course, some enlightened Buddhist masters, such as monk Jinghui, the former abbot of Bolin Chansi Temple in Zhaoxian of Hebei Province, and his successor, the current abbot monk Minghai, insist that Bolin Chansi be open to visitors, welcoming all believers and people from all walks of life to worship and visit freely.

For many years, intellectual and religious circles in China have been constantly appealing for balanced development with due attention given to the traditional culture as well as religious and moral values, instead of just going after economic construction.

To solve a series of China’s social problems, not only do the legal system and management as well as transparent supervision mechanism need be strengthened, the spiritual needs, cultural construction and religion’s role must be given due attention. In other words, China needs to pay attention to constructing traditional culture and the moral system as much as the economy.

The sixth Plenum of the 17<sup>th</sup> Committee of the CCP on October 18, 2011, passed ‘Decisions on Several Key Issues Regarding Furthering the Cultural System Reform and Promoting the Great Prosperity and Development of the Socialist Culture’. For the first time, cultural and economic constructions, political and socialist, as well as ecological, constructions are being named as the new projects of the CCP.<sup>13</sup>

This is an historic decision that reflects progress. Though a single decision is not enough to solve so many social problems, the great attention given to cultural construction by the CCP can serve as compensation for what has been lost. At the same time, it is bringing new opportunities to construct a harmonious society initiated by the Chinese leaders, and it will bring blessings to ordinary people as well.

## **Part II. Playing the Prophetic Role, Giving Play to the Religious Function, and Safeguarding Social Justice**

Institutionalized religion has doctrines and regulations, and the state has its Constitution, laws and policy. Both mutually define their responsibility and duty for each other. The state guarantees the right of its citizens to religious freedom through the Constitution, laws and policies, while religion, through its adherents, builds up the nation and contributes to society with its ideals of faith values and multiple identities.

Take the Catholic Church as an example. On the one hand, the Church thinks it necessary for the state and government to exist for the public welfare, “the political community and public authority... belong to an order established by God”.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the Church encourages citizens to exercise their rights and fulfil their duty by obeying the authority of the government, respecting the laws of the state,<sup>15</sup> and participating in the political life of the state in cooperation with the government, as well as “generously and faithfully loving their country”.<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, the Church attaches great importance to human dignity and equality, which is the foundation of social justice, believing that social justice is realized only when human dignity is respected.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the Church emphasizes that, only when inequality is eliminated among the members of the human family and between different nations, and everybody lives a digni-

fied life, does society have justice and humanity has progress and peace.<sup>18</sup> The Church's caring for society and paying due attention to social justice issues have formed the basis for its prophetic role.

It requires the joint efforts of the state and all circles of society, including religion, to realize such a goal. Contemporary religion contributes to society in two important ways: it enhances human dignity through charitable service, and it promotes social justice by exercising its prophetic role. With regard to the former, the Church tries to serve society and the masses by establishing charitable institutions. Before ascending into heaven, Christ admonished his disciples to love one another by attending to and serving each other (Jn 13: 14, 34), and he evidenced this love by giving up his own life, giving shape to the mode of the servant-type Church in ecclesiology. In fact, all religions similarly advocate service and devotion to society and the public as the mode of the servant-type Church.

Ever since China has reformed and opened up, the five religions in the country have made some contributions in serving society, but most have chosen social service, which is comparatively easier because it focuses on charitable sacrifice while basically avoiding a prophetic role and mission. This leads to an ambiguous identity, weak voice and limited consciousness of religion's prophetic role and edifying function – namely, the prophetic role of religion in safeguarding social justice.

## **II.1. The Prophetic Role of Religion**

Among world religions, Judaism, Catholicism, Eastern Orthodoxy and Protestantism all prophetic tradition, and all have a very clear mission in this regard.

The Old Testament prophets were spokesmen and predictors of the Lord Most High. Their prophecies not only conveyed the Lord's messages but also denounced social injustice. The prophet Nathan once denounced the famous King David for his serious crime of murder and adultery, and urged him to repent (2 Samuel 11-12). And the prophet Elijah condemned King Ahab for his evil deed of conspiring with his wife to falsely charge Naboth and seize his vineyard (1 Kings 21:1).

In New Testament times, Christ is not only Messiah, the Son of

the Lord Most High, but also Prophet, King and High Priest. “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me. He has anointed me, and sent me to bring good tidings to the poor, liberation to prisoners, sight to the blind, and freedom to the oppressed, and to announce a year of favour of the Lord” (Luke 4: 18). Without any reservation, Jesus condemned the social injustice of his time and stood with the marginalized to the point of giving up his life. The Second Vatican Council emphasizes that, through baptism, every Christian also participates in the priestly, prophetic and kingly functions of Christ.<sup>19</sup> Thus, every Christian takes part in his prophetic role and responsibilities.

In the history of Chinese Buddhism and Taoism, there were famous monks and priests who courageously stepped forward to ask the emperors to avoid making war and to safeguard peace, playing roles similar to that of the prophets, thereby saving countless common people. For example, “the eminent Buddhist monk in the West Regions Fo Tucheng (232-248) converted the ferocious and murderous Shi Hu and Shi Le, and prevented countless lives from being destroyed. The Shi’s respected Fo Tucheng as their teacher, and often consulted him on state affairs. Master Daoan, disciple of Fo Tucheng, once advised Fu Jian to stop war”.<sup>20</sup> Another example was the well-known Taoist Priest Master Qiu Chuji (丘处机 1148-1227), who, witnessing the miserable scenes brought about by the Mongol army’s indiscriminate killings, personally went to the West Regions in defiance of all dangers to see Genghis Khan (1162-1227), founder of the Mongol Empire, earnestly asking him to stop the atrocities, respect heaven and love the people, and encourage brotherly love and filial piety among the Mongols. Countless ordinary people were saved thanks to the prophetic role of Qiu Chuji, the Master of Eternal Spring, who thus won for himself the good reputation of “stopping killings with one word”.<sup>21</sup> Still another example was Liu Bingzhong ( 1216-1274), a former Buddhist monk. Faced with the Mongol rulers, who were interested in nothing but killing and conquering after moving their capital to Beijing, he sincerely advised Kublai Khan, or Emperor Shizong of the Yuan Dynasty, to adopt the policy of “minimum force and no killing”, which partly restrained the sanguinary massacres committed by the Mongol army in their conquests of Dali, Yunan and the Southern Song Dynasty.<sup>22</sup>

In modern China, not only did peace-loving clergy and laity oppose wars and advocate peace, but some even risked their lives to rescue wounded anti-Japanese soldiers. In 1937, a group of clergy and laity from Anguo County, Hebei Province, bravely joined the anti-Japanese ambulance corps, “especially Sister Lu, who, in active response to the call to take part in medical aid, went to many places in Henan, Shanxi, Shaanxi, and Sichuan during the eight years of the war, trudging in the mountains as Taihang and Zhongtiao to retrieve the dying soldiers and rescue the wounded ones on the frontlines of the raging battlefields”.<sup>23</sup> Father Zhang Qingtong, pastor of Erzhangcun Village, Fangshan District, Beijing, tried to protect women taking refuge in the church, but he was cruelly shot dead on September 14, 1937, by Japanese soldiers, who then hung his body on a cross.<sup>24</sup> On October 9 that same year, also for trying to protect women taking refuge in a church, Most Rev. Franciscus Hubertus Schraven, Dutch-born bishop of the former Zhengding Diocese, and eight other foreign priests and brothers were murdered by Japanese soldiers, who thereafter burned their bodies.<sup>25</sup> During the Nanking Massacre in 1937, a group of peace-loving, anti-war and justice-upholding foreign clergy and lay missionaries courageously remained in Nanking. They not only risked their lives and did their utmost to help Chinese refugees, but also bravely recorded in detail the various atrocities which the Japanese invaders committed daily in Nanking City, thus later providing to the International Tribunal irrefutable evidence of the sanguinary massacre the Japanese invaders had committed in Nanking.<sup>26</sup>

Religious figures have not only stopped violence but also created it as well. This is why religious communities should reject self-destructive religious fanaticism, fundamentalism and chauvinism, especially egocentricity, insanity and irrational compulsion in human nature.<sup>27</sup> All religious wars and the mutual oppression and persecution of religions by means of political power in human history, as well as the various forms of religious terrorism today, have been perpetrating horrible violence and terror in the name of the Supreme God, and harming the perpetrators themselves as well as others, and causing no end of trouble for future generations. This not only blasphemes God, but more than everything else, it is the tragedy of religion itself.

There no longer will be court teacher, emperor’s confidante, or

mafia, nor does modern religion encourage its clergy to enter politics,<sup>28</sup> but religious circles can still contribute to society and bear witness to their respective beliefs by serving the masses, safeguarding peace and upholding justice with the multiple identities of their adherents as clergy, citizens, scholars, experts, advisors, or peace mediators. This article is meant to awaken the consciousness of the prophetic role, and advise the religious communities in China to play their prophetic roles and bring into play their unique function in the uplifting of social morality and conscience, the safeguarding of social justice and the relief of the needy.

Every religion has its prophetic identity and action. This kind of prophetic defence of justice and sincere remonstrance, instead of producing effects inferior to those of charitable works, often accomplishes far more.

## **II.2. Effective Instruments in Defence of Social Justice: Law, Religion, and Moral Conscience**

The law is the instrument to safeguard the order of the state and social justice, but without the help of moral conscience, the law alone cannot thoroughly resolve the problems in current societal tendencies. The law can only restrain, through punishment and deterrence, external criminal acts that have been discovered, but it cannot restrain the heart, the mind and inner acts of the human being. Therefore, despite numerous laws, rules and regulations, various serious problems of social injustice and heartless incidents will inevitably take place if society has no conscience.

The media exposure of the Three Deer (Sanlu) contaminated milk powder incident in Shijiazhuang, forced state leaders to pay greater attention the problems of corruption. On September 22, 2008, Premier Wen Jiabao pointed out, “What we should do now is prevent such things from happening again. This incident revealed inadequate supervision and management on the part of the local government, and also lack of occupational morality and social morality on the part of some enterprises, in the words of the ordinary people, that they have no conscience. We cannot only affix the responsibility on the officials for the incident, but also resolutely rectify and handle such enterprises, and let none of them off!”<sup>29</sup>

Here, besides severely criticizing law enforcement agencies for their inadequate supervision and management and declaring that criminals will be severely punished by legal means, Premier Wen also raised a serious social problem that is plaguing contemporary China: *no conscience*. Be it enterprises or individuals, when greed has the upper hand in the competition to make money, they go so far as to make money through fraud, trafficking, cheating and poisoning in total disregard of the health and life of others. This is typical total moral degeneration due to excessive avarice and greed. Their conscience has been degraded beyond cure. Whether it is society as a whole, or individuals, what effect does the law have on them, and what meaning does it have for them, once they have reached such a level of decadence?

In recent years, the Chinese government has constantly emphasized the importance of constructing both spiritual and material civilizations equally, yet it has deferred the idea of “governing the country with law”, which is crucial and necessary for the harmonious and healthy development of China. However, not only has rapid economic development not solved moral problems, some severely immoral incidents have been rising. This is because these regulations and policies have no spiritual backup – no religious or cultural nourishment.

Actually, the law is not all-powerful, and it is far from sufficient for society to have only the law and administration. Since the reform and opening-up, China over the years has drawn up many laws, regulations and rules. “There are rules and regulations covering almost all areas of life, none of which are not strict and severe: in the political area, besides the state Constitution and the party Constitution, we have various norms and methods; in the economic area, besides various imperatives and stipulations, we have numerous bylaws and directive rules; and in the social area, apart from statutes and stipulations, we have many regulations and pledges. But what is the result? Corruption has not been eliminated, and the same is true for fraud, cheating, trafficking, breaching laws and violating disciplines...”<sup>30</sup> For example, immediately after the incident of the Three Deer contaminated milk powder, the law on food safety was drawn up and smoothly approved. There now is a perfect law on food safety, but it is useless if producers of foodstuffs continue to be heartless, supervisory departments of foodstuffs and supervisors remain indifferent to their

duties, and the law fails to expose these criminal acts. Therefore, society needs a legal system, and society with a legal system calls out for conscience, and conscience needs religion.

What, then, is conscience? Where does it come from? As an expression of good-heartedness, conscience is not only a kind of traditional virtue and public morality, but also a reflection of the natural law and justice. Conscience originates first and foremost in the innate goodness of human nature. Secondly, it is the inner activity of the human person to discern truth from falsehood, good from evil, and justice from injustice. Religion is the pivot of conscience, which needs constant nourishment and formation by the former. Every religion can strengthen the moral and conscientious responsibility one bears for self, family and society. Finally, the feelings of peace or unease, shame or fear deep in the human heart that follow an action are reflected in the conscience as in a mirror, unmistakably signifying how truly ethical the action is.

As one saying goes, “the deity is right above your head” and another, “a quiet conscience sleeps in thunder”. Everybody fears because the object of fear is the omnipresent and all just Supreme Deity. Conscience cannot penetrate deep into the heart and restrain a person unless the person is conscious of the existence of God and his omniscience. Only when conscience is troubled in the face of various unjust temptations can one pull back, wake up and repent. This is the experience of being moved by conscience. Obviously, conscience is the just voice of the Supreme Deity. It can urge one to be on guard and restrain one’s behaviour even if this behaviour falls beyond the reach of the law’s restraining power. Beliefs in transmigration, retribution and the nether world in polytheism as well as monotheism’s beliefs in the last judgment, heaven and hell can both contribute to social justice by awing and restraining a person in the heart.

Of course, to safeguard social justice, besides religion and the restraining power of morality and conscience, the law is also needed because no religion can restrain those who defy the natural law and conscience. Religion cannot exert external punishment but only inner restraint and punishment, yet the just and sound law of the state can effectively punish all external unlawful behaviour. Therefore, both law and moral conscience are needed to safeguard social justice. Only when the building

of the legal system and the rebuilding of morality and conscience are equally emphasized can a civilized, just and harmonious society come into being.

Therefore, to ensure a healthy development, China needs to build up the edifice of the legal system together with that of morality and conscience. In today's China, which strengthens the up-building of a society that respects the dignity of law, society calls for a conscience supported by religion. Religion can assist society, which in turn should allow the former to play its role of conscience in defence of social justice and give full play to its functions. To supplement the inability of law to get to the root of evil behaviour, equal attention must be paid to both.

### **II.3. Strengthening Awareness of Identity and Walking Together with Society**

Given the nature of religious identity, every religion should play a prophetic role, and religious individuals must have the courage to pursue social justice, so as to assist those in power in working for the development of the country and welfare of society. Nevertheless, it is usually easier to play the role of a servant than to act according to one's responsibility as a prophet. Of course, it is easy for religion to lose its prophetic role and, as a result, the value of such a role as well, once its identity is brought into question, held in contempt and rejected, so that it can no longer give attention to social justice and contribute to its safeguarding. Actually the prophetic role of religion neither resorts to force, nor agitates for political confrontation, but seeks in a timely way to inform the governmental departments concerned and all circles of society of the real situation, denounce unlawful and unjust behaviour, encourage society to be mindful of such issues, and urge the departments concerned to take them seriously, by peaceful means and through the multiple identities of the laity and clergy of different religions and their opportunity to be invited to take part in government and political affairs.

In recent years, modern media and the internet seem to have played the supervisory role in speaking up boldly in defence of justice by means of their irreplaceable advantageous position of being the channel of public opinion, in matters such as food safety, workplace accidents, and pro-

protecting the rights of the social masses and the marginalized. In most cases, it is usually the media of the national level, of the higher level, or of the local level that respectively exposes the injustices of departments, enterprises and individuals of the local level, and elsewhere in society. Nonetheless, most cases exposed and severely criticized by the media have drawn the attention of society and the officials, so that the law could give play to its functions, problems could be resolved, and justice could prevail. This is the real sign of social progress. It is a pity that, in the face of the crisis of moral deterioration and phenomena of social injustice, the five religions in China have never uttered any voice, nor issued any appeal over the years. The fear of touching upon sensitive political and ethnic issues is no excuse not to assist the state in preventing and correcting injustice. Religious circles ought to give play to their unique social function connected to social inspiration and edification. Of course, while the law is needed to crack down on crimes and various illegal activities, it needs to be supervised by public opinion. As the famous English philosopher Bertrand Russell said, the law is almost powerless without the support of public opinion. However, like the law, public opinion can only supervise external behaviour and cannot solve the problems in the human heart. Public opinion in coordination with the law can indeed expose, check and punish crimes, and reveal the inner and external scars of the human being, but like the law, it is still insufficient to heal the wounds and eradicate the deep-rooted social ills. Religion can not only heal the wounds of the heart and change unhealthy social tendencies, but also can function to inspire and edify society.

Today, as the plurality religions and their social function are becoming understood and recognized, the religions in China must journey together with society and its masses by paying attention to their role as servants, playing the critical role of prophets, protecting the weak, denouncing injustice, awakening conscience, and purifying the human heart, thereby positively contributing to the construction of a civilized, just, stable, and harmonious society.

## Conclusion

In the past thirty some years, a series of social problems have surfaced in the process of rapid economic development in China. This should prompt the whole society to do deep soul-searching and reflection so as to make suitable adjustment and change. It also demands that the government and its citizens pay attention to and strengthen the spiritual, cultural and moral construction. As the guardian and defender of human spiritual life, religious faith will need to play a greater role and exert more influence in China. How to make better use of the religious value systems to support society is a timely challenge for China. In this regard, the religious communities themselves have to take up these prophetic responsibilities, but the government and other social groups have also to pay attention and make good use of this spiritual element and its energy.

We are happy to see that, at present, the notion of “religion is culture, and religion is the soul of culture” has been widely accepted by the Chinese society at large.

In the past 40 years, the religious influence on political affairs has changed from weakness to greater power around the world. Religion used to be passive, but has become confident and full of energy. It used to be local but now is universal, and it used to be subjected to power and authorities, but now is prophetic and making its protesting voices heard by politicians.<sup>31</sup>

Although religion still belongs to the government according to the current state-religion practice in China, and without rights to demand any governing power for the political regime,<sup>32</sup> the religious people and intellectuals in China are still able and should play the prophetic role in the areas of social justice, morality, and cultural construction, so as to make its prophetic voices for justice heard in building up a harmonious and just society.

## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>See, my paper “The Function of Religion and the Development of its Role in the Chinese Society”, *Religion and Society: the Challenge of Multiple Identities* -

--A Workshop for Further Understanding between Europe and China and for Our Common Challenges, the Sigtuna Foundation, Stockholm, October 3-6, 2008.

<sup>2</sup>艾君編《改革開放三十年流行語錄》Ai-Jun, Ed. “The popular quotations of the past three decade-long Reform”, 2008-12-3, <http://news.sina.com.cn/pl/2008-12-03/154016776075.shtml>.

<sup>3</sup>參考《鄧小平文選》第2, 3, 1994, 人民出版社, , 301, 2008 12 14 . See “Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping”, Volume 2, 3, 1994, People’s Publishing House. “1978 China Central Work Conference twist of fate”, “Beijing News”, p. 301, December 14, 2008. <http://www.thebeijingnews.com/news/reform30/2008/12-15/011@090542.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> : 《關於經濟工作的幾點意見》(1979年10月4日)《鄧小平文選》第2卷第194頁. (1980年1月16日),《鄧小平文選》第2卷第250頁. Deng Xiaoping: “a few comments on economic work”, (October 4, 1979), “Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping”, volume 2, p. 194. Deng Xiaoping: “The current situation and tasks” (January 16, 1980), “Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping”, volume 2, p. 250.

<sup>5</sup>汪孝宗,《GDP居世界第二被指意義不大,多領域落後》,《中國經濟週刊》,Wang Xiaozong, “GDP ranks second in the world accused of meaningful, multi-field backward”, “China Economic Weekly”, 2011-03-01, 2011-03-01. See: <http://finance.huanqiu.com/roll/2011-03/1529791.html>.

<sup>6</sup>中國GDP超日·你怎麼看·全球網: China’s GDP Overruns Japan: How Do you Think: The global network: <http://survey.huanqiu.com/result.php?s=SFFzdXJ2ZXlfMzM0MQ@`5^1@@`5^1@>. **■經濟形勢和會議**《中國命運的轉折》

<sup>7</sup>See: Wang Xiaozong, “GDP ranks second in the world accused of meaningful, multi-field backward”.

<sup>8</sup>See: Wang Xiaozong, “GDP ranks second in the world accused of meaningful, multi-field backward”.

<sup>9</sup>On the eve of October 13, 2011 evening, on a street in Foshan city, Guangdong Province, 2-year-old girl Little Yueyue was hit and rolled over by two vehicles. Within 7 minutes after the incident, 18 individual went through Yueyue’s body, not even one shot to the rescue. Finally a garbage-collecting woman came to her rescue. During the following days, the video and photos of this tragedy shocked the whole Chinese society, and it has become the center of public news-media and the focus of attention. It caused a nationwide discussion.

<sup>10</sup>See: <http://www.globaltimes.cn>, Special coverage: Former Soccer officials on the trial in China?

<sup>11</sup>“**first burning incense**” usually refers to the first incensing on the morning of the First Day of the Lunar New Year (or the first day of each month). People consider it as the greatest virtue in gaining the greatest blessings. For this reason, its price is also very high. Along with the **first burning incense** is the ringing of the first bell three times for the health of body and other blessings.

<sup>12</sup>朱大可《小悅悅和文化夜鷹丸》, 2011-11-02博客: <http://zhudake.blog.sohu.com/189764911.html>.

Zhu Youke’ article in his blog: <http://zhudake.blog.sohu.com/189764911.html>.

<sup>13</sup>中國共產黨第十七屆中央委員會第六次全體會議公報》，北京，人民出版社，2011年10月版。 *The Communiqué of the Sixth Plenum of the 17th Central Committee of the CCP*, Beijing, Renmin Publishing House, <http://baike.baidu.com/view/6730690.html>.

<sup>14</sup>*Gaudium et Spes* 74.

<sup>15</sup>Rom 12: 1-2; *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 1897-1999, 1904.

<sup>16</sup>*Gaudium et Spes* 75.

<sup>17</sup>*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, No. 1928.

<sup>18</sup>*Gaudium et Spes* 29.

<sup>19</sup>*Lumen Gentium* 31.

<sup>20</sup>：《佛教叢書》，見《教用：佛教與政治》篇，佛光文化出版社，“Buddhism and Politics”，in Master Xingyun ed. *Buddhism Series*, Foguang Cultural Press, Buddhism Series Network.

<sup>21</sup>，參考明宗網。 Cf. Mingzong Network, “Master Qiu Chuji stopped killings with one word...”. 余秋陽《長春觀》，《武漢文史資料》>> 1994年 >> 第04期，第140頁。

<sup>22</sup>，葫蘆島市檔案資訊網，2006-9-6。；《元初名相—劉秉忠（邢臺縣人）》，，2007-9-17. “Visit to the Ancient Town of Qianwei”, 09-06-2007, [www.dahld.gov.cn](http://www.dahld.gov.cn). Originally “Liu Bingzhong (from Xingtai County), a Famous Prime Minister at the Beginning of the Yuan Dynasty” in *Huludao Daily*. Cf. 09-17-2007, [www.xtnews.gov.cn](http://www.xtnews.gov.cn).

<sup>23</sup>：《中國教徒的靈修》，載《鼎》2003，。 Anonymus, “Spirituality of the Chinese Christians”, *Tripod*, Vol. 23, 2003, Total No. 128.

<sup>24</sup>，載《信德》，1997，年7月1日，，1997年5月27日，。“Beijing Diocese Holds Solemn Memorial Ceremonies in Fangshan” and “Immortal is Father Zhang Qingtong, who died a martyr for protecting women”, *Faith Newspaper*, 07-01-1997, p. 3. Cf. *Beijing Daily*, 05-27-1997, p. 5.

<sup>25</sup>，1997，第13版。“Another Proof for the Japanese Invaders’ Murder of the Clergy and Lay in Zhengding” and “Visit of Dutch Friends”, *Faith Newspaper*, 11-01-1997, p. 13.

<sup>26</sup>：《天理難容—美國傳教士眼中的南京大屠殺：1937-1938》，Zhang Kaiyuan ed. *Heaven will not Tolerate it! The Massacre at Nanking through the Eyes of an American Missionary: 1937-1938* (transl. by Jitsu Kato), Nanjing University Press.

<sup>27</sup>：，載《聯合早報》，2002，。 Xie Mushui, “Moral Considerations of the State-Church Relationship”, *Lian He Zao Bao*, 11-26-2002, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup>The new Canon Law stipulates that the clerics “are forbidden to assume public offices which entail a participation in the exercise of civil power” (Code 285.3), and “are not to have an active part in political parties and in governing labor unions” (Code 287.2), but the Church encourages the faithful to enthusiastically participate in the political affairs of the state.

<sup>29</sup>“Wen Jiabao: ‘Don’t let off any conscienceless enterprises!’” 09-22-2008,