

# The Priority of Personhood and the Future of China

(An abstract)

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A person is neither a thing plus consciousness as materialism would have it, nor is he mere life biological in the highest form, but he is life spiritual as defined by God's *imago*. The Eastern Church Fathers see that the existence of a person is signified by his unique presence in both *ekstasis* and *hypostasis*. Through his *ekstasis*, a person is intrinsically relational seeking out to relate with the *hypostasis* of the other. But in absence of the other, he would relate with himself in self-reflexivity. In self-reflexivity, a person is conscious of meaning so that he seeks to achieve a goal of value. Goal-orientedness in life bespeaks the personal historical consciousness both forward looking to the future and backward looking to the past, which is a prior condition for one's embarking onto the path of integration and formation. While animals can exercise the will, only person can have self-determination as an application of the will in one's self-historical consciousness that takes into account the value of becoming when one decides to commit to a certain path in life. The human person as created being is by nature not fully formed, but is capable of being formed according to the image of God in conformity with the Son who alone truly represents the Father. Yet to realize this

formation, a person has to synthesize the infinite spiritual possibilities in the concrete finite life situation, to be accomplished by prayer and guidance of the Holy Spirit.

If person is formable, it means that person is not amorphous but has specific definition of his particularities. In other words, there should be person-form that defines a person as the *imago* of God. This person-form for humans includes embodiment that serves as a concrete platform for realizing the person. As concerns persons with infinite possibilities of depth, form, as the Latin root *forma* illustrates, should be taken not as a limiting idea as seen in objects incapable of depth but as concrete expression of fullness in beauty as manifested in the glory of God. As for corporate personhood, the coherence is attained either in love or by coercion but only when each person is respected in love can true unity be achieved. The name as a vessel that holds a person both defines the boundary of authority under the person concerned as well as opens up relational networks with respect to other persons. If the name of a corporate body defines the boundary of corporate personhood, then culture is the medium within which this personhood exists. As such, culture is a second order reality of reconstituted life-world of collective human consciousness from which corporate identity as well as corporate consciousness are reinforced and sustained. Though a human person cannot live apart from cultural reality, his relation to nature is just as intimate in a first degree. His physical embodiment is an intrinsic mark of solidarity with the rest of creation although he transcends as person in his personhood. Sharing the divine nature of the *imago Dei*, human person is assigned with the responsibility of co-creation, co-redemption and co-regency.

In Chinese culture we may observe that only the emperor can exercise self-determination as a person. The

same paternalism translates to other social structures. As a result, most Chinese people have repressed personhood and is susceptible to self-absolutization and abuse of power when opportunities arise. While the Chinese metaphysics of *Dao* assumes liveliness of the universe, it does not give enough solid grounding to develop personhood as the doctrine of the Trinity provides. It is however worthy of note that personal deity was worshipped in the earliest Chinese dynasties of Shang and Chou and the *Dao* metaphysics may be a result of rationalization of the earliest religion. Today's China is faced with the challenge of consumerism that brings China to a moral concern of a crisis level. The money-first attitude bred under consumerism is just one expression of a narcissistic culture whose people have not found a worthy life goal and the true object of devotion. From everywhere, the outcry for a return to authenticity forces us to face the real issue: Are we treating ourselves as persons and others likewise? This is critical for the future of China.