

SECULAR ETHICS: UNDERSTANDING CHINA'S SOCIALIST ETHICS

Roderick O'Brien[♦]

Adelaide, Australia

Abstract

Catholic ethicists and theologians do not live in a closed world where the only ethical systems are Catholic or even religious. There are many secular ethical systems, and one of these is China's Socialist Ethics. This article briefly introduces China's socialist ethics, including the historical context, and some significant features. Five elements of the system are provided for readers, as well as some examples of promotion of the system through ethics education. The article also addresses the relationship of China's modern socialist ethics with China's rich ethical tradition (including such well-known instances as Confucianism). The article introduces significant problems facing the development of China's socialist ethics. The article concludes with the observation that China's socialist ethics is not static, but is a work in progress, and is well worth the attention of religious ethicists in India and beyond.

Keywords: Communism, Corruption, Ethics, Ethics education, Socialism,

1. Introduction

Writing in the context of the challenge of secular ethics, Fr Shaji George Kochuthara has reminded us that there is a whole spectrum of branches of ethics that disclaim any allegiance to faith. He has pointed out that future theological ethicists (moral theologians) will need to learn to dialogue with such branches of ethics, actively

[♦]**Fr Roderick O'Brien** is a diocesan priest. He is pastor of St Augustine's parish in the Archdiocese of Adelaide, Australia. His ecclesiastical training was at St Paul's National Seminary, Sydney; and he also holds a Master's degree in Comparative Asian Studies from the University of Hong Kong, and a Doctorate in Philosophy from the University of South Australia. Email: obrien1949@hotmail.com

engaging their propositions in the public sphere, even though sometimes there is confusion over the identity and uniqueness of Christian ethics.¹ Now I would like to put before you a particular example of secular ethics, which does not come from far away. This is China's socialist ethics.

India has a great tradition of religion and ethics. This pluralist tradition stretches back centuries, and we can begin with a simple quotation from the Tamil classic, the *Thirukkural*: "Real joy springs from virtue alone; all other joys are painful and devoid of pleasure."² The other great traditional centre of ethics in Asia is China. With equally ancient traditions such as Confucianism and Daoism, China ranks with India as one of the great cultures of the ancient and modern world. Yet in recent decades, China has taken an entirely different path for building the ethics of the future: the construction of China's Socialist Ethics.

We cannot just dismiss or ignore the particular propositions of China's socialist ethics. Even though this may be a very aggressive version of secularism, it is part of our neighbourhood, and part of the dialogue of life in our future. There must be a place for China's socialist ethics. Political and economic relations between India and China have waxed and waned. But our readers with a much longer perspective on ways of living will look beyond these temporary shifts. And I invite readers with an interest in ethics to seek to understand China's Socialist Ethics as an unusual, but influential, contribution to the ethical future of Asia. In this short article, I will introduce China's Socialist Ethics. The introduction must necessarily be brief, without too much academic detail, and with illustrative examples rather than comprehensive study. If this introduction helps the reader to begin their own research, then it will have served its purpose well.

2. The Nature of China's Socialist Ethics

The first feature of China's socialist ethics is that it is firmly secular. Religions have an important place in pluralist India, and are a source of ethics. By contrast, religions are strictly controlled and pushed to

¹Shaji George Kochuthara, "Context and the Future of Theological Ethics. The Task of Building Bridges," in ed. James F Keenan, *Catholic Theological Ethics Past Present and Future: the Trento Conference*, Bangalore: Theological Publications in India, 2011, 298.

²M. Rajaram, trans., *Thirukkural: Pearls of Inspiration*, 2009, New Delhi: Rupa Publications, 9.

the margins in China's current society, and have little or no influence in the development of ethics.

Marxist theory holds that material economic relations form the basis of society, while other relationships, including ethical relationships, form a superstructure on the basis of economic relationships. From about 1980, China's Marxist theorists have been attentive not only to the development of material civilization, but also to the development of a "socialist spiritual civilization," which includes ethics. This use of the word "spiritual" is simply in contrast to "material", and should not be understood according to religious uses of the term. The purpose of the socialist spiritual civilization was to foster people's morality and social behaviour within the context of the communist ideology. The development of a socialist spiritual civilization has not only a positive side of developing an indigenous political and moral ethos, but also a negative side, in condemning alternative political and moral theories. Thus the campaign against spiritual pollution of 1983 and the campaign against bourgeois liberalization in the late 1980s were intended to strengthen the socialist spiritual civilization by protecting it from unwanted social impact, especially from western liberal ideas trickling into China.

The second feature of China's socialist ethics is that it is grounded in a particular view of history, and a particular set of historical experiences. In his studies of the state of capitalism, Karl Marx established a new theory of history. While his studies contained many moral fulminations against the way capitalism was practised, Marx did not see himself as a moralist. On the contrary, he set out to prove without reference to morality that capitalism contained within itself the seeds of its own destruction, and that the demise of capitalism, and its ultimate replacement by a communist society, was a historical inevitability. This view of history underpins China's socialist ethics, giving it a historical purpose and a historical basis.

For China's current leaders, the pivotal point of China's modern history came in 1949, when the People's Liberation Army drove the forces of the Guomintang (Kuomintang) from mainland China, and opened the way to a new regime led by the Communist Party. The present leadership regards this as an irreversible historical choice, and the contemporary Communist Party as the continuation of that new regime. In practice, this means that the development of society is not a matter of political choice, but a process which can only be led by the Communist Party. The ethics which we study today are the ethics developed and propounded by that Party.

In the early years after 1949, there was not much attention to ethics. The rebuilding of the material structure and establishing the economy and the new political regime took precedence. A few slogans were enough, such as "Serve the People," propounded by the leader Mao Zedong (Mao Tse-tung). Within less than a decade, it seemed that the achievement of the communist society was immediately possible, and the Chinese leadership threw the nation into the Great Leap Forward (1957-1958), to achieve the communist nirvana. The leap was a disastrous failure economically, but was soon followed by the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), to establish a truly communist culture and society. After this became a debacle, the leadership gradually arrived at a new theoretical and historical position: the ultimate goal is still a communist society, but that achievement is pushed into the future (even the distant future), and in the meantime China will be in the stage of socialism. Thus the ethics which are now propounded are socialist ethics, intended for this intermediate stage of socialism.

The third feature of China's socialist ethics is that these ethics emerge from the controlling heights of the Communist Party, and not from the broad masses of society. In a sense, socialist ethics are a construction from above, rather than an evolution from below. This means that the doctrines and even the practice of socialist ethics must be sought in the leading work of the Communist Party. The social sciences, armed with surveys and statistical data, might be able to gauge the effectiveness of these ethics in the community, but the community will not be the source of these ethics.

The Chinese Communist Party has proved to be resilient and capable of significant adaption. For example, in this stage of socialism, where private enterprise has a part in the economy, the Party has adapted its policies and structures to assimilate entrepreneurs and new financial structures. At the same time, the Party is nimble in developing the ethics needed for this new period. These ethics may be socialist ethics, but they are directed at a modern period of economic and social development.

3. Selected Elements of China's Socialist Ethics

In this short article, it is only possible to introduce some elements of China's socialist ethics. Five have been chosen here for their potential interest for readers.

First, China's socialist ethics are meant to provide a complete system of ethics, which is internally consistent and coherent.³ The system has not grown haphazardly over generations, but is carefully thought out in a relatively short time frame. The reader can expect modification and development, but the system is remarkably coherent. One can use the analogy of a tree. The trunk of the tree has its roots in the socialist material civilization, and grows as the socialist spiritual civilization. The branches of the tree extend particular fields of ethics (for example, the ethics of the legal system) and sub-branches and even out to twigs represent the sub-fields (for example, subfields of the ethics of the legal system include the ethics of the different legal personnel: judges, lawyers, notaries, and procurators). Let us take an example: in Australia, ethicists are debating whether professional ethics is an application of general principles of ethics, or whether professional ethics has its own base in the demands of professionalism. Such a debate would not be relevant in China: socialist ethics are meant to provide a complete system.

Second, China's socialist ethics are not dependent on universal values, to be discerned across all societies. The debate about universal values and Asian values, which was particularly strong at the end of the last millennium, was of concern not only to China but also to other Asian states such as Singapore. Those who rejected universal values (especially as designated by western scholars or politicians) preferred the view that Asia in general and China in particular is in some way unique, and therefore not subject to universal values.⁴ There are dissenting voices in academia, but practically China's socialist ethics are not built on universal values.

Third, in recent years the Communist Party has articulated its ethical ideology in terms of core socialist values.⁵ Although China has achieved remarkable economic gains, observers and locals expressed concerns that the people had simply lost their moral compass. In 2014, Xi Jinping, who is Secretary-General of the Communist Party of China and the country's President, called for more attention to core socialist values. These comprise a set of moral principles summarized by central authorities as prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony,

³Mingli Huang: *Research on Socialist Ethical Belief*, Nanchang: People's Publishing House, 2006, 401-408.

⁴China Society for Human Rights Studies, ed., *Oriental Culture and Human Rights Development*, Beijing: Oriental Press, 2004, 84-91.

⁵anon: *Public Servants Professional Ethics Training: Common Course*, Beijing: Central Party School Publishing House, 2012, 26-32.

freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship. On other occasions, different principles have been used. The expression of socialist core values must be regarded as a work in progress, not a finished product.

An example of the consistent use of core socialist values may be found in the professional ethical standards set for procurators, one of the legal professions. When their first Code of Ethics was published, it was simply a list of four values: loyalty, justice, honesty, and being civilised. A longer Code, published in 2009, retained these four values, but gave more details of their application.

Fourth, the Marxist origins of China's socialist ethics cannot be discounted. For example, in establishing a just war theory, China's ethicists look to the purposes of the war. Is it to fight against an oppressive class? to repel invaders? to enable a revolution which establishes a progressive society? Then it is a just war. Mao Zedong argued that the seizure of power by armed force, the settlement of the issue by war, is the central task and the highest form of revolution. By contrast all the wars carried out by the oppressing class to suppress revolution, wars which intrude on other nations, and wars which stop revolutionary progress are not justified. To sum up, all counter-revolutionary wars are unjust, all revolutionary wars are just.

In recent decades China's scholars and practitioners have become aware of the modern developments of scholastic just war theory, and of the attempts in international humanitarian law to limit the impact of war, and they have rediscovered the rich Chinese tradition of just war, developed in school of military philosophy.⁶ Socialist just war theories remain rooted in China's revolutionary past, and remain rooted in class terms. It seems likely that these theories will become more sophisticated. We can expect development of ethical doctrine, which draws on China's own past and on contemporary international thought.

Fifth, China's socialist ethics represent a significant break with the ancient ethical traditions of China. One of the most significant changes introduced by the new regime after 1949 was the Marriage Law of 1950. The traditional patriarchal view of the relationship between men and women was to be replaced, in marriage, by a more equal relationship. Since family life is the heart of the traditional

⁶Ping-Cheung Lo and Sumner Twiss, ed., *China's Just War Ethics: Origin, Development, and Dissent*, (2015) Abington: Routledge, 2015.

community in China and the family is the Confucian model for the state, this change cannot be underestimated. The introduction of the Marriage Law was accompanied by popularization campaigns from 1950 to 1955, and is regarded by the Party as one of its greatest ethical achievements.

We will see that the break is not complete, and that developing socialist ethics may include traditional ideas. Yet socialist ethics is essentially something new, a modern response to the changing social conditions.

4. Promotion of Socialist Ethics

Teaching and promotion of ethics is traditionally prominent in China, and the developers of socialist ethics continue this tradition. First, promotion includes a variety of moral exemplars, the most prominent of whom is the soldier Lei Feng.⁷ He even has his own day in the national calendar, on 15 March. Lei Feng was a soldier in the People's Liberation Army, but he is not cited as an example of martial ardour. It is as a peace-time soldier that Lei Feng is cited for his virtues, including his care for his comrades and for the public, his devotion to duty, and his love for the Communist Party. If he existed at all, he lived from 1940 to 1962, and his early death was not from some heroic exploit, but because of being hit by a telephone pole dislodged by a reversing truck. His exemplary life is developed in various ways, depending on the needs, and three levels will suffice here.

For children, Lei Feng serves as an example of good deeds. He is depicted darning their socks for his comrades, helping old ladies to cross the street, and other deeds. Children are encouraged to be "little Lei Fengs," while altruistic adults are encouraged to be "living Lei Fengs." For public officials at all levels, Lei Feng serves as a model of devotion to duty, without seeking personal reward. On 15 March, police officers set up desks in the street to answer questions from the public. Banners are raised with the Maoist slogan "Serve the People" and the more modern "Learn from Lei Feng". Selfless devotion to duty is not a feature of life in China — concerns about corruption are everywhere — and Lei Feng is an exemplar of public service. Finally, for the Party, Lei Feng serves as an exemplar of obedient membership. His diaries are said to proclaim: I have only one desire

⁷Benjamin Penny: "An Exemplary Society" chapter 3 in Geremie Barmé and Jeremy Goldkorn, ed., *China Story Yearbook 2013: Civilising China*, Canberra: Australian National University, 2013.

in my heart. I want to be wholeheartedly dedicated to the Party, socialism, and Communism. The imagery of the diary is modest: Lei Feng did not aspire to leadership, but simply wanted to be a rustless screw for the great cause of communism.

The promotion of socialist ethics draws on a host of moral exemplars, the saints of the new cause. The case of Lei Feng is sufficient today.

The second feature of the promotion of socialist ethics is the use of campaigns. Since 1949, many campaigns have been used in politics, in the economy, in agriculture, in family planning, and many other areas of social change. Ethics is but one area. Mass mobilization campaigns were usually intense but of short duration, because of the difficulty of sustaining the human input for a long period. Campaigns may include rallies, study of the latest Party documents, and are supported by a fanfare of posters, art, drama, and other supporting literature. Modern campaigns have been largely free of the denunciations and mass trials which marked earlier periods.

A campaign launched by Hu Jintao (Party General Secretary from 2002 to 2012) can serve as an example. Hu's contribution to communist ideology was his proposal for a harmonious socialist society, and this underpins the launch of the "eight honours and eight disgraces" campaign in 2006. The simple list was intended as a moral yardstick for Party officials, but also extended to the general public. The official news agency has provided an English translation:

- Love the country; do it no harm.
- Serve the people; never betray them.
- Follow science; discard ignorance.
- Be diligent; not indolent.
- Be united, help each other; make no gains at others' expense.
- Be honest and trustworthy; do not sacrifice ethics for profit.
- Be disciplined and law-abiding; not chaotic and lawless.
- Live plainly, work hard; do not wallow in luxuries and pleasures.

Each of these can be further simplified into particular virtues: loyalty, righteousness, wisdom, diligence, generosity, trust, watchfulness, goodness. The campaign ran for about three months

intensively, with study programmes, books, selections from Chinese traditional literature, and songs for children.⁸

Third, there is a long tradition in Chinese education of formation in virtue. The modern education system in China is heir to this tradition, and has adapted it to the promotion of socialist ethics.⁹ In a general sense, moral education is now directed at the entire society in its ideological, political, and moral activities. This education applies in society, in schools and universities, and in families. In a narrower sense, moral education applies in schools and universities. Much of the effort which is made in moral education incorporates both traditional and modern approaches. Thus we have seen that the "eight glories and eight disgraces" campaign, although aimed primarily at party cadres, was extended into schools. Songs were written for children, and the eight glories and eight disgraces were presented in eight rhyming couplets. Each couplet comprised seven characters for a glory and seven characters for its matching disgrace, and these could be easily taught in the traditional mode of rote learning. Nevertheless, modern methods are also in use. Students can take part in Lei Feng computer games, where they score points through good deeds of increasing difficulty. Textbooks are available at all levels. University students have to take compulsory foundation courses in ethics. Often these courses combine ethical education with information about the legal system and ideological formation.¹⁰

A fourth development in the propagation of socialist ethics has been increased work in the ethics of professional workers. The successful socialist in Maoist China was a generalist whose strength lay in being "red" rather than "expert". But the pendulum has swung, and the way in which society has developed in China has required a greater emphasis on professional expertise — even in professions which were despised in the Maoist era, such as lawyers. The new "red" is formation in professional socialist ethics.

As an example, we can look at the fields of law (judges, procurators, lawyers, and notaries). The formation usually begins at university with the general foundation course in ethics, ideology, and legal system, and then with the option of further training courses in

⁸Editorial Group, *"Eight Glories and Eight Disgraces" Lectures for Study*, China Yanshi Publishing, 2006.

⁹Li Maosen: "Moral Education in the People's Republic of China," *Journal of Moral Education* 19, 3 (1990) 162.

¹⁰Guofeng Chen, Shaoli Zheng, ed., *Professional Ethics and Legal Basics*, Intellectual Property Publishing House, 2006.

professional ethics. However, it is unusual to have a compulsory course. After graduation, students prepare for the Unified Judicial Examination covering entrance to the four professions of law. Since its inception in 1986, this examination has included questions of legal ethics, usually based on the various codes of ethics for the professions. If the questions are there, then the students will study! Once in the profession, the new professionals are subject to the particular code of ethics or code of conduct for that profession. Codes are relatively new, with the first code for lawyers in 1990, for judges in 2001, and for notaries and procurators in 2002.

Professionals are expected or required to undertake Continuing Professional Development programmes, which may be offered by the All China Lawyers Association (and its branches at various levels), by universities and colleges, and by the government-established National Judges College, National Procurators College, and the National Lawyers College. Ethical conduct is also promoted through the regular magazines and on-line communications of the Lawyers Association. Finally, there is a complex system of awards for good conduct and enforcement of penalties for misconduct maintained by the Ministry of Justice (supported by the Lawyers Associations for lawyers and the Notaries Associations for notaries), the Supreme People's Court for judges, and the Supreme People's Procuratorate for procurators. Overall, a comprehensive system has been set up within a relatively short space of time, which is a significant achievement. However, more work needs to be done to ensure the quality and effectiveness of the various elements of the system. Corruption, particularly in the judiciary, presents great social problems for the people of China.¹¹

5. The Great Compromise: Acceptance of Traditional Ethics

During the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (usually dated 1966 to 1976), traditional ethical values came under fierce attack, especially in the campaign against "the four olds". Yet observers a decade later commented that traditional values, especially Confucian values, underpinned the discourse of ordinary Chinese about public morality. By 1986 the Party had to admit the sustained power of traditional morality, and to try to assimilate it into socialist ethics. While presenting socialist ethics as the higher stage in human moral progress, the Party claimed that socialist ethics naturally incorporated

¹¹Ling Li: "'Performing' Bribery in China – Guanxi-practice, Corruption with a Human Face," *Journal of Contemporary China* 20 (2011) 68.

all the best elements in various ethical systems and traditions developed throughout history. In a programme begun in 2001 to develop civic virtues, the Party claimed that it included the traditional virtues developed by the Chinese people over thousands of years, and which, under the leadership of the Party, incorporate good traditional morality.¹²

What does this mean in practice? The Chinese tradition is multi-faceted with various indigenous schools of thought and the influence of a major world religion: Buddhism from India. Yet one particular tradition has been favourably accepted by the Party: imperial (or state) Confucianism. There are explanations for this. First, Confucianism is essentially secular, and thus more in tune with the aggressive secularism promoted by the Party. Second, it is essentially Chinese, and owes nothing to other cultures. Third, elements of Confucianism were adopted by the emperors as the official ideology, and became assimilated into the state. This version of Confucianism upholds the state, usually by analogy with the family, and encourages the subordination of the people. This highly developed state Confucianism is the tradition which has been most easily adopted by the Party. As recently as 2014, the Party Secretary General Xi Jinping claimed that the Chinese Communist Party is the successor to and promoter of fine traditional Chinese culture. Implicit is the claim that to reject the Party is to reject the richness of Chinese tradition.

By contrast, theological ethics have been quietly rejected. China has many millions of adherents of religions, the most popular being Buddhism. But attempts by believers to make a contribution to the development of Chinese ethics have fallen on deaf ears. Catholic believers have observed the range of ethical problems in China, and offered Catholic Social Teaching as a helpful contribution to solving these problems. Such offers are effectively blocked. The Party is now willing to accept social action (especially fund-raising) to help solve China's economic woes, but not the theological ethics which underpin those actions.

What does this mean for the future? We can expect a nuanced development of socialist ethics in China, as the various schools of Chinese ethics (Confucianism is only one of a number of competing schools) contribute to a more varied socialist ethics. But this will not

¹²Weidong Xia, ed., *An Outline History of Communist Party Thought in Moral Construction*, Shandong: Shandong People's Press, 2006, 253-255.

mean a wholesale abandonment of modern ethics and a return to a more primitive tradition. For example, while socialist ethics will draw on the Confucian tradition of family life, there will be no place for the return to concubinage and other condemned family structures.

6. Significant Ethical Problems

No doubt we can see significant achievements in the establishment of China's socialist ethics. But it would be a distorted picture if the reader could not know that there are many problems. The next five paragraphs provide some examples of these problems.

The first example is the state of ethical behaviour in China. To understand what is happening, we can divide China's recent history into two periods. In the first period, from about 1949 to 1978, the emphasis was on the destruction of old ethics, and the establishment of a new communist society with its own ethics. We can call this period utopian, we can call it Maoist. But there is no doubt that it was an exciting period, not only for Chinese but also for foreigners who discovered a kind of pure ethic in the new China, and especially in the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution. But in fact, the apparent purity of ethics hid an economic and social catastrophe. Traditional ethics were thrown aside, without any real replacement. People were left rudderless. When China began in 1978, under paramount leader Deng Xiaoping, to stagger out of the destruction, the utopian dreams of the Maoist era were replaced by a new economic reconstruction where, in the hope that all would eventually become rich, some could get rich first, in a scramble that commentators have compared to the American Wild West. Along with the social project of the Maoist era, the morality of the Maoist era collapsed. But what was to take its place? Deng Xiaoping is famous for his aphorism: It does not matter whether the cat is white or black so long as it can catch mice. Since the goal ('mice') is economic development, the means ('cat') could be moral or immoral. One commentator described the people's plight as a journey from utopianism to nihilism and to hedonism.¹³ Other commentators used expressions such as 'moral landslide' and 'moral collapse'. In the face of this disaster, a few turn nostalgically to Maoist utopian ethics, some turn to China's traditional ethics,¹⁴ some turn to religious (theological) ethics, and the Party tries to construct a new

¹³Jiwei Ci, *Dialectic of the Chinese Revolution: from Utopianism to Hedonism*, Redwood City: Standfor University Press, 1994.

¹⁴Ruiping Fan, ed., *The Renaissance of Confucianism in Contemporary China*, Berlin: Springer, 2011.

socialist ethics for the new period. All of these options are responses to the collapse of ethics, the moral landslide. The result includes a complex interaction of ideas.

Our second example is the most worrying for the Party: corruption. In the 2014 *Transparency International* index of public perception of corruption, China ranked 100th, just behind Liberia, Panama, and Algeria. In 2007, Party leader Hu Jintao said that the task of fighting and preventing corruption determines the Party's legitimacy and survival. The situation is so alarming that the current Party leader, Xi Jinping, has embarked on a long-running anti-corruption campaign more intense than any earlier campaigns. But there are precedents for campaigns that blew hot for a while, and then cooled.

One of the key values in a functioning society is trust. Corruption is particularly dangerous in eating away at public and private trust. Individual corruption continues unabated, but in recent years the corrupt individual has been partly replaced by networked corruption involving numerous criminals, especially in government and the judiciary. These networks maintain sophisticated defences, and are hard to dislodge.

Our third example relates to human dignity. While the exemplar Lei Feng was happy to regard himself as the screw in the socialist machine, not everybody shares this vision. A particular problem comes in the rigorous enforcement of the one-child policy. Birth-limitation policies had existed from time to time since 1949, but in 1979 a new policy imposed a one-child limit.¹⁵ The policy was designed to fit the modernizing which has taken place since then, ensuring that increases in production were not overwhelmed by increases in population. There have been a series of issues around this policy: first, traditional preference for boys has led to female infanticide or (since ultrasound became available) selective births; second, women have suffered most in the enforcement of the policy through late abortions, sterilizations, and severe penalties; third, reduction in the number of children has meant that a large number of elderly citizens have no-one to support them at a time when pension systems are rudimentary at best. Families in general, but women and children in particular, have become unwilling casualties in the search for economic wealth. There has been some tinkering with the limits of the policy (and some opportunities for couples to have two children)

¹⁵Xuefeng Chen, "The Social Impact of China's One-Child Policy," *Harvard Asia Pacific Review* 7, 1 (2003) 74-76.

but overall the system of draconian compulsion remains the same. As one would expect, there is debate about the ethics of this policy. After all, the policy applies almost uniformly, and is intended to serve the present and future needs of the community for economic growth, with a shared sacrifice by individuals and families. But such a secular ethic is far from the human dignity promoted in, for example, Catholic Social Teaching.

Our fourth example relates to the economic disparity which currently exists in China. As measured by the Gini coefficient, the disparity in China has risen from 0.45 about twenty years ago to 0.73 in 2012. This is highly visible, as the rich enjoy a life-style which is inaccessible to the poor. Socialist ethics has developed a response which is aimed at reducing both the cause of economic disparity, and the very obvious differences in life-style. Thus when we look to the campaign of the eight honours and eight disgraces, we see that two of the disgraces are directed to the causes of disparity: the injunction to make no gains at others' expense and the injunction not to sacrifice ethics for profit. Another of the disgraces is directed at the visible life-style, calling on Party members and by extension the whole community not to wallow in luxuries and pleasures. This kind of general injunction is supported by particular campaigns, such as the recent campaign (repeating earlier campaigns) to limit the size of banquets and the consumption of expensive alcohol at banquets.

7. Socialist Ethics and Ethical Practice

The purpose of this brief paper is to introduce socialist ethics. A very important question, but beyond the scope of this paper, is whether or not the people of China actually practise these ethics. Suffice to say that there have been numerous studies of ethics practice by Chinese and foreign scholars, especially in the area of international business. These studies suggest that socialist ethics indeed has an impact on practice in China, but that other ethical systems (especially based on traditional relationships) also have an impact.¹⁶

8. China's Socialist Ethics into the Future

The breach of the Berlin Wall in 1989 was a significant moment in twentieth century history, symbolising the collapse of many communist regimes in Eastern Europe. But it must not be forgotten

¹⁶Hao Fan: *Report on China's Ethics and Morality*, Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2012.

that a number of communist regimes continue to exist — mostly in Asia. The most important of these is in China. While Europeans might no longer pay attention to communism and to socialist ethics, Asians must continue to do so. The other Asian communist regimes in Vietnam, Laos, and North Korea continue to be influenced to some extent by developments in China. This is our future. Although some political commentators from time to time predict the collapse of communist regimes, there is little sign that this is about to happen.

Even if there should be a change of regimes in communist Asia, we would still be wise to understand the content and impact of socialist ethics. Experience from Europe suggests that even in a post-communist society, the habits formed under the communist regime will continue to influence post-communist ethical behaviour. Moreover, socialist ethics provide a challenge to the dominance of capitalist ethics, and that will still have value in post-communist society.

India and China face many problems, and some of the problems which they face are similar, yet there are quite different solutions in ethics. The two great civilizations of Asia, each with a long history of ethics theory and ethics practice, have much to share. For Asia's theological ethicists, there is particular value in entering a completely different system of secular thought, and examining China's socialist ethics. Yet a brief survey such as I have provided can only be a beginning. China's socialist ethics are constantly being developed and nuanced, as the Party responds to new situations. In the near future, we are likely to see greater interaction between socialist ethics and selected elements from China's rich ethical tradition, especially Confucianism. Perhaps one day there will also be a place for the valuable contribution of religious ethics.