

## Inaugural Greetings of the Superior General

### *Meeting of the Superior General, the Members of the General Consulta and the Major Superiors of the Order of Camillians*

Some introductory notes on ethical, socio-cultural, historical and Asian religions from China

Taiwan-Lotung, 18-22 June 2018

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***Dear Camillian religious,  
Health and peace in the Lord of our lives,  
You are all welcome to Taiwan and to Lotung!***

We are beginning our annual meeting of the general government and the major Superiors of the Order of Camillians for the year 2018. The subject of this event is ***‘Together in the Continent of Asia to Know, Celebrate and Discern the Future in order to Revitalise the Camillian Missionary Spirit’***.

Events such as these are a concrete and practical expression of a style of *collegial government* which witnesses the involvement of all those who have taken on the responsibility of leadership, that is to say the ministry of authority amongst the religious of our Order, at this specific moment in history.

Let us read our General Statutes: ‘The superior general also consults the provincial superiors, vice-provincials and delegates in matters of major importance which concern the entire Order. If possible once a year and, whenever this is necessary, he shall convene the provincials, vice-provincials and delegates, whose delegations have at least twelve perpetually professed, to address various questions with the general consulta...All superiors, respecting just and legitimate differences, should be watchful that what is particular does not harm unity, but, rather, fosters it. They promote amongst the various parts of the Order fraternal communion, the exchange of pastoral experiences and activities inherent in our ministry, and material help’ (n. 79).

In addition to the characteristic aspects of ordinary management of the Order (secretariat, financial administration, ministry, missions...) which always require dialogue at our international meetings, we also always seek to offer space and time to fraternal encounter in order to foster mutual knowledge amongst us all as members of the same religious family. In an atmosphere of sincere and respectful dialogue, we seek to reach necessary discernment as regards the most demanding questions that require greater dedication and a serious in-depth analysis for the good of the whole of our Order.

Amongst the objectives of this meeting there is also that of offering thanks for the over sixty years of presence of the Camillians in Taiwan: a) learning about the various socio-political, cultural and religious aspects of Asian culture; b) an introduction to the exercise of *interreligious dialogue*: how to use and live Christian and Catholic phrases in a minority context in relation to other local religions (Buddhism, Taoism, Confucianism and Hinduism); c. learning at a deeper level about our Camillian missionary presence in Asia (Taiwan, the Philippines, Indonesia, Thailand, Vietnam, India and Australia), between realities and challenges, and exploring the prospects for the development of a Camillian future in Asia; and d) what is the identity of Camillian mission today? Can we define some of its original characteristics?

In his Message for the *World Missionary Day* of 2017, Pope Francis reminded us constantly that

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<sup>1</sup> Paper given on the occasion of the opening of the annual meeting of the Camillian major Superiors in Taiwan (Lotung, 18-22 June 2018). Fr. Leocir Pessini is the current Superior General of the Camillians (2014-2020). A doctor in moral theology and bioethics at the Faculty of Theology of the Our Lady of the Assumption Pontifical Catholic University of San Paolo (Brazil), he attended courses in clinical pastoral education (CPE) for five units at Saint Luke's Hospital, Milwaukee, WI, USA. He is the author of numerous works in the fields of bioethics, the theology of pastoral care, and the humanisation of the world of health.

every Christian today is a *missionary disciple*: ‘The Church’s mission, then, is not to spread a religious ideology, much less to propose a lofty ethical teaching. Many movements throughout the world inspire high ideals or ways to live a meaningful life. Through the mission of the Church, Jesus Christ himself continues to evangelize and act; her mission thus makes present in history the *kairos*, the favourable time of salvation’

Pope Francis quotes the encyclical *Deus Caritas Est* (n. 1), reminding us that ‘being Christian is not the result of an ethical choice or a lofty idea, but the encounter with an event, a Person, which gives life a new horizon and a decisive direction’. The world has a substantial need for the Gospel of Jesus Christ. He, through the Church, continues the mission of the Good Samaritan, healing the bleeding wounds of humanity and, with the mission of a good Shepherd, ceaselessly looking for those who are lost because of distorted pathways that have no exit.

The mission of the Church (not an end in itself but an instrument and mediation of the Kingdom) is animated by a spirituality of continuous exodus. One is dealing with moving out of one’s own wellbeing, of nurturing the courage to reach all of the fringes that need the light of the gospel (cf. *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 20). Our Order as a living part of the Church (cf. Const. n. 1) is profoundly in harmony with the perspective indicated by the Pope.

Our Constitution states: ‘The Church is missionary, and evangelization is the task of the whole people of God. Our Order assumes its role and becomes involved with its special charism in the range of missionary activities, faithful to the Lord’s command to heal the sick and preach the Gospel’ (n. 56).

Lastly, in all our ministerial and missionary activity we have as our Constitutional mandate to express certain fundamental human values as testimony to our faith in the resurrection: ‘By the promotion of health, the treatment of disease and the relief of pain, we cooperate in the work of God the creator, we glorify God in the human body and express our faith in the resurrection’ (n. 45).

This introductory note for our annual meeting of the general government of the Order with the major Superiors seeks to collect certain perceptions and insights about the cultural values that emerged at meetings, conversations, readings and journeys in the continent of China and Taiwan during the month of May 2014. I had accepted an invitation of the Chinese Medical Association to take part as a speaker in Shanghai in an international symposium on ‘Futile and Useless Treatment (Dystanasia) and Palliative Care’. I took advantage of the visit to visit the activities and works of our Camillian religious in Taiwan who recently celebrated the sixtieth anniversary of their arrival on that island, which is also called Formosa, where they bear witness to an important and admirable presence in the world of care and health.

In preparing these notes on a *world* that has aspects and perspectives that are so different from ours, the world we call the *Western world*, I remembered that I had read the study of an American author on religious sociology (unfortunately I can no longer remember his name!) who advances the following thesis: the first millennium of the Christian era was characterised by the civilisation of the *Mediterranean*; the second was characterised by the civilisation of the *Atlantic*; and the third will be dominated by the populations of Asia, the inhabitants of the region of the *Pacific* ocean.

At the present time there is no lack of evidence to confirm this thesis. One may think of the frenetic economic development of the Asian megalopolises, with well-organised enormous airports, large viaducts, tunnels, and roads with millions of cars, high-speed trains, and underground systems, but also with the inevitable congestion and a consequent pollution of the air. Everywhere you can see building works with enormous cranes used to build gigantic building complexes. Bicycles have by now been replaced by thousands of modern motorbikes, above all in Taipei.

Lastly, in my report, which takes a summarising form, I will present some data and information of a socio-historical-political and economic character that can help us to understand the leading role of China and Taiwan in Asia.

I was able to develop a bioethical reading of this panorama of Asia starting with my participation in four world congresses on bioethics when I was a member of the executive committee of the *International Association of Bioethics* (IAB), an organisation that organises events of an international character. These four congresses were: the fourth world congress organised in Tokyo (Japan) in 1998 on the subject ‘Global Bioethics: North-South, East-West’; the seventh world congress organised in Sydney, Australia, in 2004 on

the subject 'Listening Deeply: Creating Bridges between Local Bioethics and Global Bioethics'; the eighth world congress held in Peking (China) in 2006 which addressed the subject 'Searching for a Just and Healthy Society'; and the tenth world congress held in the city of Singapore in 2010 which discussed the subject 'Bioethics in the Globalised World'.<sup>2</sup>

This paper will begin with a description of certain *socio-cultural and historical aspects of China*, as well as the cases of Tibet and Taiwan (1). It will then address some aspects of the *Chinese one-child population policy* which has recently been made more flexible with permission being given to each couple to have two children, remembering at the same time the grave question of the violation of human rights, starting with the massacre in 1989 in Tiananmen Square (2). It is simply impossible to understand the values, the culture and the sub-culture of Asia without knowing, albeit in an introductory way, about *Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism*. For some scholars of the sciences of religion, we are dealing more with *philosophies of life* that teach people to behave in a virtuous way and to cultivate harmony and interior peace than with *religions* because they did not speak about God. What has happened to Christianity in China (3) we will then ask ourselves, and I will emphasise some characteristics of Buddhism and similarities between Jesus and Buddha (4). We can then ask ourselves about what we can learn from the values of Chinese culture (5). Lastly, some characteristics are listed for Asian Confucian bioethics (6) in comparison with European and Anglo-American Western culture, with the identification of some fundamental characteristics of Asian bioethics (7).

### ***1. Some Socio-Cultural and Historical Aspects of Mainland China***

The continent of Asia is made up of an immense mass of water and land (the Pacific area) and it is a continent that has five of the most numerous nations of the world and these have 60% of the world's current population. China now has 1.37 billion inhabitants (2017) and India has 1.258 billion inhabitants (2012). China is ninetyeth (0.738) on the HDI (Human Development Index); India is at number 131 (0.642); Taiwan (2014) is at number 21 (0.882); and Brazil (2017) is at number 79, with 0.754 points on a list of 188 countries.

All the principal religions of the world are to be found in Asia: Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity and Islam. In this region of the world, Christians make up a minority that varies between 3% and 5% of the local population, whereas people who adhere to Chinese popular beliefs make up 32.1%; Buddhism 13.5%; philosophies of life, such as Confucianism and Taoism, 32.2%; atheism 7.3%; traditional beliefs 8.6%; and others 2%. We have before us a perfect multi-religious mosaic marked by a diversity of beliefs. In this continent the practice of traditional Chinese medicine is very widespread, above all in China and countries which have a Chinese majority. In the sub-continent of India, ayurvedic medicine is practised a great deal.

At the same time, economic globalisation and the rapid spread of the social media have also generated radical changes in traditional cultures and various Asian countries have become leaders in world economic growth. The 'Asian tigers', in the form of mainland China, have today produced the second economy in the world, outstripping Japan, and China should soon become, on the basis of the forecasts of Western economists, the first country in terms of economic growth, outstripping the United States of America.

By the year 2020, China, which today is a world leader in the production of nanotechnologies and ranks third in the production of biotechnologies, will have a GDP (gross domestic product) equal to that of

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<sup>2</sup> I accompanied the movement of global ethics through participation in these world congresses from the outset with the world congress that was held in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in 1994, until the last edition in the year 2016, the eighth world congress, which was held in Edinburgh, Scotland. The next world congress, the fourteenth world congress on bioethics, will be held in India (Karnataka) at the St. John's National Academy of Health Sciences and its subject will be 'Health for All in an Unequal World: the Obligations of Global Bioethics'. This a very stimulating and provocative idea for us Camillians above all: this general subject is based on the celebration of various anniversaries in the world of health and health care. In the year 2018 we will commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UN, 10 December 1948) and the fortieth anniversary of the Declaration of Alma Ata whose global goal was 'health for all by 2000'. More recently, the World Health Organisation has announced the need for 'universal health coverage' for all the inhabitants of the planet and called attention to questions connected with fairness in health-care systems.

the United States of America and also will have available enormous financial reserves. It will have the largest banks in the world as well as fifteen megalopolises with over twenty-five million inhabitants each. The number of rich people today in China is equivalent to the entire population of Germany and it is growing rapidly. The entrance of China into the global economy constitutes, according to Larry Summers, the Chancellor of Harvard University (USA), 'the third most important event in the history of humanity, after the Italian Renaissance and the industrial revolution in Great Britain in the nineteenth century'.

However, despite the extraordinary advances of its economy over recent years, the country has alarming social inequalities: 10% of the richest families have 57% of the national income and 85% of the entire wealth of the country, with 400 million Chinese living below the poverty threshold, that is to say less than two American dollars a day.

Another problematic question is China's respect for human rights. Even though the government has never confirmed this, Amnesty International has reported that China is at the present time the country that has the highest number of death sentences in the world: about two to two and a half thousand executions every year.

At the level of energy, since 2009 China has been the country which consumes most energy in the world, more than the United States of America. About 70% of its energy needs are met by coal, a highly polluting source, and 20% by oil, of which about a third is imported from Africa. The government is trying to give priority to wind and solar energy but it is also planning to construct new nuclear power stations and expand the production of hydroelectric power (6.4% of the total). The 'Three Gullies' plant on the Tang-Tso River was inaugurated in the year 2006 and today it is the largest hydroelectric power station in the world, being larger than that of Itapúa in Brazil.

China is, so to speak, an authentic continent on its own. It is known for its size and attracts people because of its syncretism: it is the most populous nation on the planet and the third in the world in terms of territorial range. It is a multi-ethnic country, with a population made up of the Chinese Han (91.5%), Mongols, Tibetans, Aborigines, Uyghurs and Muslims, amongst others.

At a Constitutional level, the country is divided into twenty-two Provinces, five autonomous regions (including Tibet), two regions under special administration (Hong Kong and Macao) and four municipalities. Its official language is Mandarin. There are some regional languages, amongst which the principal ones are Min, Wu and Cantonese. The Great Wall, which is near to Peking (60km), was built 2,200 years ago and is 5,000 kilometres long. It is the masterpiece of the first emperor of China, after the unification of the country. Today it does not defend the country against invaders and it does not create isolation or separation. It has become the symbol of the historical identity and the pride of the Chinese people.

Tibet is a region that has a Buddhist tradition. Its religious practice defines the identity of the Tibetan people, for whom the Dalai Lama is the supreme authority. For China, Tibet has been a part of the nation since the thirteenth century. In 1720 the leaders of Tibet asked the Chinese for help in repelling the presence of the Mongols. From that moment onwards the Chinese took over control of that region. During the twentieth century, Tibet asked to be recognised as an independent country but in 1950 China carried out a military occupation of its territory. This domination by the Chinese has always been rejected by the Tibetans. In 1959 the Chinese suppression of a rebellion by Buddhist monks forced 100,000 Tibetans into exile. The spiritual leader of the country, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, fled to Dharamsala in the north of India, where he established the government in exile. In 1989 the Dalai Lama was awarded the Nobel Prize for Peace.<sup>1-2</sup>

The Island of Formosa, now called Taiwan, is a large island with other lesser islands, and lies 160 kilometres from mainland China. It became the refuge of the nationalist Chiang Kai-Shek after the communist Mao Tse-Tung had taken power in 1949. The part of his government in exile in Taiwan created a separate State which sees itself as the real Republic of China. It is interesting to note that the wives of Mao Tse-Tung and of Chiang Kai-Shek were sisters.

With defeat in the Sino-Japanese war in 1895, China was forced to cede Taiwan to Japan. At the end of the Second World War, the island declared its independence from China. After decades of military and political tensions, trading relations and flights are now gradually being re-established. Today Taiwan has a population of 23.2 million (2012), made up of Taiwanese Chinese (84%), Chinese from mainland

China (14%), and indigenous ethnic groups (2%). As regards religion, the following scenario exists: popular Chinese beliefs, 43.1%; Buddhism, 26.5%; Taoism, 12.6%; Christianity, 6%; new religions, 6.7%; agnosticism and atheism, 4.4%; others, 0.7% (source from 2010).<sup>1-2</sup>

Western medicine is highly developed in Asia and many countries today have become high-quality health-care centres, with lower costs for medicine and surgery compared to the United States of America and Europe, thereby attracting patients from all over the world. This is the case today in India, for example, with health-care centres certified by the North-American *Joint Commission*, a body that guarantees the quality and excellence of health-care services in the United States of America and throughout the world. A tragic aspect of this health-care reality is the many accusations that are made about the presence of international organ trafficking

Because of its size and its cultural, social, political and religious diversity, in the frenetic development of Asia reference is made by some thinkers to 'Asian bioethics'. Usually, a comparison is made with 'Western bioethics' which places emphasis on the autonomy of individuals, the rights of individuals and on justice assured through contracts and negotiations.

'Asian bioethics', for its part, is based upon social harmony which is reflected in a vision of a well ordered society in which duties have a predominance over individual rights and individual preferences are subordinated to familial and social wellbeing as a whole. These elements together can be summed up in the phrase 'familial communitarianism'. Just as in the West we criticise the exaggerated emphasis that is placed on individual autonomy and individualism, which obstruct the construction of a community project (the society of 'I' without 'we'), so Oriental thinkers criticise the dangerous emphasis placed on social order which easily nourishes paternalism and patriarchy in the family context and the context of health, as well as the abolition of the right to 'dissent' and 'protest' in civil society (the society is 'us' without 'I'). A closer examination and a further cultural anthropological vision (inculturation) could highlight the fact that some of the traditional values of Asian society would be able to assure a more balanced vision of the place of the individual in society. This exercise could be useful for both Western culture and Oriental culture.

Nobody doubts that our moral beliefs and our ethical decisions are influenced by our cultural context, which includes the beliefs and the practices of a specific religious tradition. In our Western world, in general, this is Christianity. Many cultural practices that are present in many Asian countries encounter difficulty in being accepted in other cultures. For example, the genital mutilation of girls, a practice supported by mothers in some cultures because of their fear that their daughters will not marry unless they accept this ritual. It is also very difficult to overcome the social conditions that encourage such atrocities. For example, in countries where the rape of children is very common there are mothers who burn the faces and the breasts of their daughters in the hope that they will become less attractive for those who try to rape them. This certainly causes disgust. Another example is racial discrimination. Recognising the civil and political rights of all people, independently of the colour of their skin, must certainly be a moral value recognised at a universal level.

## **2. *The Policy of One Child and the Massacre of Tiananmen Square (1989)***

In China if the unborn child is female, there is a high possibility that it will be aborted or despised because of the cultural values and the policies of the government which, in fundamental terms, values a male unborn child. Although a severe control of births exists through the 'one-child policy', which has been applied for forty years, the government has recently decided in favour of a certain level of openness, allowing couples to have a second child, whether it is female or not. Forced abortion in the case of a female unborn child and the rigid control of births are two policies of the state which nobody dares to 'dissent' from.

Here it is striking to read the book by Nie Jing-Bao, *Dietro il silenzio: voci cinesi sull'aborto* (2005) ('Behind the Silence: Chinese Voices about Abortion'). Today, an entire generation of Chinese exists who

do not have brothers or sisters; each one of them is an only child.<sup>3</sup>

Tiananmen Square was the scene of the student revolt of 4 June 1989 when two to seven thousand young people were massacred according to unofficial reports. According to official reports, there were only 241 deaths. The film of a young student in front of a line of tanks, like a toreador, went round the world and made history. Nobody knows what happened to that young man after that. That picture became a symbol of Chinese repression. Everything began with the death of the reformist leader Hu Yaobang at the age of seventy-three. He was the former general secretary of the Communist Party and had been removed from his post because of his support for reformist policies. Chinese people came together in Tiananmen Square in Peking. The mourning for Hu was transformed into a strong protest in favour of democracy. The protests extended to universities and to other cities. On 4 May thousands of students in five cities organised the largest political protest since 1949, the year when the Communist Party, with Mao Tse-Tung, had seized power.

On 29-30 May the students erected the statue of the goddess of democracy in the square. On 3-4 June government forces used military force against the protesters in the square. On internet any mention of the date of 4 June was rapidly removed by censorship. This tragic anniversary is remembered throughout the world, but not in China.

Marcelo Ninio, a reporter for the newspaper *Folha de São Paulo*, after a visit to China wrote in his article 'Most Chinese Students are Unaware of the Massacre of 1989' as follows: 'in the collective memory of the country, the student protests of 1989 have been buried under years of censorship and are the victims of the triumph of the official narrative which emphasises only what matters'.

Raquel Martins, a Brazilian, the daughter of the journalist Jaime Martins, who has lived in Peking since the age of one and herself witnessed the massacre of Tiananmen Square in 1989, observed that 'the Chinese government has been able to brainwash the country... At the beginning we thought that it was only a jet of water. But then the tanks arrived. A boy tried to cross the road and the tank drove over him, in front of us. They asked us to take photographs. "Foreigners, show the world what our government is doing"... I continue to think that few Chinese know about that massacre', concluded Raquel.<sup>4</sup>

In the West we have in the Declaration of Human Rights (1948) of the United Nations an 'example of moral progress', the Magna Carta of the defense of the intrinsic dignity of every human being. However many Asian writers and politicians think that this Western movement in support of human rights is 'a form of cultural imperialism'. In their view, it is the imposition of a set of liberal values produced by Western society on the Oriental world which, culturally, has existed for millennia resting on a more hierarchical approach (for example dynasties, castes, etc.), with authority considered on a par with divinity (governors with divine rights), based on pluri-millennial traditions.

With the aim of combating poverty and overpopulation, the Communist Chinese government imposed the one-child policy on its citizens from 1979 onwards. However, this programme created numerous social problems that are beginning to appear only now with all of their consequences: few young people and few females; the number of males increases and the number of females decreases; and the elderly part of the population has increased. Chinese demographers who live in the West predict that the one-child policy will be seen as a fatal error of the social policy of the Chinese government, together with other tragic errors of recent Chinese history such as the devastating famine of 1959-1961 and the turbulent cultural revolution of the decade 1966-1976 at the time of Mao Tse-Tung. Whereas these two errors cost the lives of hundreds of thousands of people – it is calculated between 80 and a 100 million deaths – this tragedy, in a relatively short period of time, if the government does not quickly correct the one-child policy by changing course, will have an enormous impact, with terrible consequences for the future of China.

The one-child policy, together with the pro-market reforms, which were launched almost at the same time, are seen by the Chinese government as the factors responsible for the catalysing of the economic transformation of China. The pro capita income in China was less than 200 American dollars in 1989; by 2012 it has reached \$6,000. China has removed millions of people from poverty since the one-child policy

<sup>3</sup> The first time that I was in China, in Peking, eight years ago, in 2006, on the occasion of the eighth world congress of bioethics, I sincerely admired the observation of a young Chinese tourist guide which accompanied us in the monumental Tiananmen Square and confessed "I belong to a generation of Chinese who feel that they are alone"!

was implemented – the official voices of the Chinese government boast of this achievement. Today, Chinese women on average have 1.5 children, according to independent estimates, compared to 6 children at the end of the 1960s. We know that for a nation to maintain a population balance the fertility rate must be at least 2.1 children for every woman. At this rate, China will soon reach a population of 1-4 billion and will then begin a long and dangerous decline.

The statistics of the Chinese Communist government maintain that the one-child policy impeded the birth of 400 million Chinese. The negative effects of this policy are not even mentioned to the social scientists who visit China to examine population questions. Demographers, including those who work for the Chinese Communist Party, know that in every country that becomes richer and has better levels of instruction for the population, women naturally have fewer children. In Japan and in Italy, for example, fertility rates have declined without the government having to force women to have abortions.

Since the implementation of the one-child policy, at least 335 million abortions have been provoked officially, 200 million women have been sterilised, with frequent medical controls to discourage pregnancies in women who have already met their 'quota' of children. In cities, families usually have one child, whereas families that live in the countryside, whose first child was a girl or a child with mental or physical problems, have been legally authorised to conceive a second child. Ethnic minorities are encouraged to have more children.

The traditional values of Chinese culture are more appreciated by boys than by girls because it is men who continue the family line. Because of the use of scans, an already widespread but illegal diagnostic test, selective abortions are based upon the sex of the unborn child, and this, in addition to cases of the infanticide of girls and the abandonment of children, is creating a profound imbalance in the gender ratios. In some rural areas 135 males are born for every 100 females. How will these boys in the future find a wife if there are not enough women? These Chinese who will not find a female companion to give continuity to their families are called *sterile branches*. It is calculated that by the year 2005 one Chinese in every four will be sixty or over and in the year 2020 about 30 million men of marriage age will run the risk of not finding a companion.

The women who live in rural areas have to subject themselves to controls four times a year to ensure that they are not pregnant. In the case of illegal pregnancies, they are forced to have an abortion and are punished with the loss of their jobs in government institutions, pay heavy fines and become the objects of social stigma. In urban areas, in factories, there is a rigid official control of women's menstrual cycles. Today more than half a million Chinese work in implementing this policy, in special operational institutions called 'government clinics for family planning', and they do not want to lose their jobs. The fines since the one-child policy began amount to about 330 billion American dollars – that money ends up in the hands of the local authorities without there being any need to account for it. The curious things about this one-child policy is that it has created a gigantic police structure to 'supervise the female womb' in Chinese women which is practically self-sufficient and difficult to dismantle without provoking another crisis.<sup>5-7</sup> At the beginning of the year 2016 there was a loosening of the one-child policy (which had been operational for almost forty years) which authorised every couple to have two children and this meant that in 2016 17.89 million Chinese were born. The one-child policy had some exceptions. For example, almost all the fifty-five ethnic minorities in the country were not obliged to obey this law. Couples who lived in rural areas could have a second child if the first child was a girl. According to the demographers who are specialised in Chinese demographics, the one-child policy impeded the current population from reaching 1.7 billion inhabitants.

### 3. Chinese Religions – Philosophies of Virtuous Lives? – and Christianity<sup>8-10</sup>

Confucianism is a powerful philosophy with an enormous social influence in many parts of Asia. It is an ancient philosophy that originally came from China (2,500 years ago) and it is very active and studied in the contemporary world. Confucius (551-479 BC) was, and continues to be, an enlightened teacher, a source of wisdom amongst many wise men. It is possible to learn about the spiritual profile of Confucius from the *Anecdotes* (*lun yu*: 'chosen words') written by his disciples. One of the characteristics of

Confucianism is that it is not a 'moral theory' directed towards solving moral dilemmas, nor is it described as a religion. Its concern is the practice of the virtue of benevolence; it is an ethical guide that includes and guides all the other virtues. R. Fan, a scholar and supporter of 'Confucian bioethics', has observed: 'The morality of Confucianism is rooted in a way of living directed towards virtue and sustained by rituals or rites. The goal is not to solve cases that are principally controversial but to understand what living as a virtuous human being means'.<sup>11</sup> For Confucius, humanity should be understood as care for those near you, as is explained in the golden rule: 'what you do not want for yourself, you should not want for other people'. Jesus, five centuries later, would speak in the same way. In the view of Domenico de Masi, a famous Italian thinker and sociologist, it is impossible to understand China without understanding Confucianism. 'This is not a religion in the strict sense of the term but, rather, a philosophical, ethical, political and ritual vision, a model of life based upon ancient Chinese wisdom and the teachings of Confucius who never addresses supernatural questions and confined his thoughts intentionally to the human experience' (p. 61).<sup>12</sup>

During the *Tang* dynasty, which was founded in 618, Confucianism was seen as the 'exterior dimension', that is to say the social and political dimension of human life, whereas Taoism and Buddhism were the 'interior dimension'.

Interaction with the West led many Chinese intellectuals to see Confucianism as an element responsible for the technological, social and political backwardness of China. 'Demolish the Thought of Confucius' became a slogan of the *Movement of the Fourth of May 1919*. With the rise of Mao-Tse Tung to power, this conflict became more acute because although they had not eliminated the holy texts, the revolutionaries saw Confucianism as the cause of the backwardness of China and a 'poison left behind by feudalism'. During the so-termed Cultural Revolution of 1966-1976, to profess Confucianism meant to risk one's life. For this reason, many intellectuals fled abroad, took up classic Confucian principles and argued that this thought was not incompatible with technological progress, democracy and freedom, and opposed the rapid adaptation of China to Western culture, which was accused of neglecting the ethical dimension of life.

In China the overwhelming majority of rites and ritual are of a familial character – for example funeral rites. For those nearest the family, the colour of mourning is white. A portrait of the deceased person is placed on the domestic altar at the side of the 'family relatives'. In this way, the deceased person takes their place as an ancestor of the family. There are important rites in relationships with other people as well – for example the rituals of welcome. But the important thing is that spirit and form are needed to achieve the maturation of the human personality and the order of human relationships in the direction of a creative and meaningful life. This ancient philosophy provides insights and interior resources for individuals and families so that they can address existential problems and the maladies of life, appealing to the wisdom of the past and the force of rituals.

The veneration of ancestors is at the centre of Chinese religiosity. For the Chinese, everything does not finish with death. Death constitutes a passage to a different life and relationships between the living and the dead continue to exist. The concept of the family is extended, in substantial terms, to ancestors and past time as well. 'Veneration for the dead has been at the centre of Chinese piety since ancient times. The fact that one can no longer communicate with the dead, for many Chinese, has been, and remains, the most important reason for not being able to convert to Christianity' (p. 198),<sup>13</sup> observes the Catholic theologian Hans Kung.

China is also present in Taoism (the legendary wise man *Lao-Tzé: Old Teacher*, about the fourth century BC), a religion that presents a reference to immortality. Its great promise-belief is the following: when he or she dies, a Taoist goes to one of the heavens or one of the islands of happiness outside China. The 'Taoist Church' is the principal heir of this ancient Chinese popular religion which today is particularly rooted above all amongst the rural Chinese (75% of the 1.3 billion Chinese). This religious experience was not 'cowed' by the fifty years of Communist persecution carried out against all the religions. For the people, holy water and incense, solemn celebrations based upon the unfolding of the year, celebrations of the Chinese New Year with lions and dragons that dance to ward off evil spirits, always exist. In addition to Taoism, Buddhism is also rooted in China and it is the only religion that comes from areas outside China itself. Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism constitute the triple face of Chinese religion.



The so-termed ‘cultural revolution’ led by Mao Tse-Tung (1949-1976), accompanied by the Communist revolution, abolished the *divine status* and the *divine prerogatives* of Chinese governments and took the place of the ‘son of heaven’, causing the deaths of about eighty million Chinese, according to historians. The so-called great proletarian cultural revolution (1966-1976), undertaken by Mao’s wife, opposed the ‘four old men’: old traditions, old customs, old ideas and old culture, and naturally it was against all religions and everything that was ‘Western’.

With the advent of Mao Tse-Tung, an idolatry cult of his personality was imposed that is still nurtured today. In the centre of Tiananmen Square is located an enormous and pompous mausoleum dedicated to him where his embalmed body lies covered with a red flag with the Communist symbols of the hammer and sickle. Every day hundreds of thousands of Chinese, in lines kilometres long, wait for hours to stand in the ‘hall of eternal respect’ and be able to pay homage to the founder of modern China and lay a flower. At the entrance of the ‘forbidden city’ there is a large colour photograph of Mao Tse-Tung. It is estimated that about two million Chinese, fearing persecution during the ‘cultural revolution’, abandoned ‘mainland’ China and found refuge in Taiwan.

For Catholic Christians, remembering the presence in China of one Italian missionary is always a matter of duty: the Jesuit religious Matteo Ricci who arrived in China in 1583 (accompanied by Michele Ruggieri). He learnt written and spoken Chinese very well and learnt to present himself more as a philosopher, moralist, mathematician and astronomer than a Christian missionary. Matteo Ricci enjoyed great prestige at the court of the Emperor of China. Unfortunately, the destiny of the Jesuits ended in 1707 when Pope Clement XI prohibited the Chinese Christians from having their rites, the veneration of their ancestors and Confucius, and the use of their two traditional names for God – the Lord of Heights and the Lord of Heaven. Anybody who wanted to remain or become Christian had, in one way or another, to stop being Chinese. This was the kernel of the whole problem of inculturation in the Chinese mission. In 1717 the Chinese reacted by expelling the missionaries, destroying churches, and the effecting the forced abjuring of the Christian faith. The work of the whole of the lives of Matteo Ricci and the Jesuits was ‘smashed to dust’. Today there is the official patriotic Church and the clandestine *underground* Church, with a state government more tolerant of the existence of, and co-existence with, other religious cults.<sup>13</sup>

The so-called westernisation of China contributed to the spread of a new materialism and a consumerist lifestyle as a result of which people have been ready to forgo all values, causing the loss of the so-termed ‘social and spiritual homeland’ of the people. Despite the growing prosperity of a small group of rich people, millions of Chinese still face the threat of new forms of poverty, unemployment, and an imminent massive flight towards the cities, increasing at the same time a perception of a lack of existential meaning, moral permissiveness, an increase in crime, corruption and the use of drugs, and a crisis of the ‘family’, which at a cultural level has been so highly valued.

Contrary to all the ‘scientific’ prophecies about the ‘death’ of religion, one can observe, in the new secular context as well, all the power of survival of the great religions. Even Chinese Marxists today recognise that religions are not merely the ‘opium of the people’ but, instead, complex and resilient phenomena with deep ethnic roots. They have been a fundamental element of Chinese culture for thousands of years and this culture cannot be understood without reference to their presence, in particular Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism.

The *wise man* is the typical and characteristic subject of ‘wisdom’ religions in the Far East. The *mystic* is very different and is characteristic of Indian religions: Hinduism and Buddhism. Even more different is the *prophet*, a characteristic of the so-called three religions of the Middle East: Judaism, Christianity and Islam. The Chinese religions have a sapiential character because the value attributed to old age and wisdom has been a constant of Chinese culture.

#### **4. Some Notes on Buddhism and the Similarities between Jesus and Buddha**

The four noble existential truths of Buddhism constitute a response to the fundamental questions of the human being. 1. What is suffering? It is life itself: birth, work, separation, old age, illness and death. All of this is suffering. 2. Where does suffering come from? The preoccupation to live, attachment to things,

ambition, hatred and blindness: these dynamics lead to one reincarnation after another. 3. How can suffering be overcome? By eliminating desire! Only in this way can one avoid a new karma, which is the result of good or bad actions. Only in this way can we impede a systematic return to the cycle of births. 4. What is the pathway that should be followed? The middle way of reason: not being slaves of pleasure or self-punishment.

In analysing the human condition as though it were a clinical case, the four noble truths reflect the stages of diagnosing an illness (suffering), to understand its cause (desire), to identify the cure of the illness (ending of desire) and to prescribe the remedy that assures healing (the pathway of the eight elements). One is dealing here with a mental and physical practice that is needed to achieve liberation from this world. Both Jesus and *Gautama* (Buddha) in their preaching did not use a sacred language; instead they used the language of the people. Jesus spoke the Aramaic language of the people and Buddha used an Indo-Arian dialect. Both of them did not codify and did not even write down their teaching. Their teachings were codified starting with the memories of their disciples after their deaths. They expressed their values using proverbs, brief narratives and simple parables that everyone could understand, phrases and images taken from daily life that were accessible to everyone, without being bound by formulas or dogmas. Both were opposed to religious tradition and its custodians, to the ritual caste of priests and to doctors of the law who seemed to be insensitive to the sufferings of the people. Both of them gathered friends around them, a circle of disciples and a wider group of followers.

Apart from these similarities in their behaviour, we also have similarities in their preaching. Here are some aspects that Jesus and the Buddha have in common. 1. They are present as 'teachers'. Their authority does not come from their academic or school training but from their extraordinary experience of a reality that is completely different. 2. They are the bearers of a message of joy (*metanoia* – 'going against the current') and of trust (*shraddha* – faith). One does not have here an orthodoxy but, instead, an orthopraxis. 3. They start from the provisional and ephemeral condition of the world, from the transitory character of all things and the redemption of man. All of this is evident in blindness and madness, in chaotic situations, in involvement with the world and the lack of love for other people. 4. They do not have the aim of giving an explanation of the world or of implementing deep philosophical speculations or a learned set of juridical cases. 5. They point out a pathway of liberation from selfishness, from dependence on the world, and from blindness. This is obtained not from theoretical speculation, not from philosophical reasoning, but from a religious experience and an internal transformation. 6. To attain salvation, both of them ask for special conditions of an intellectual, moral or ideological character. It was sufficient for a human being to listen, understand and then draw his or her conclusion. Nobody was asked about their faith or requested to engage in a profession of orthodoxy. 7. The pathway proposed is a middle way between hedonism and asceticism. This is a pathway that allows a human being to meet the other with a new approach of proximity and welcome! In addition to the commandments that correspond broadly in both teachings, the fundamental requisites of goodness and shared joy, of loving compassion (Buddha) and compassionate Samaritan love (Jesus) are comparable.

From the outset Buddhism, which rejects the idea of an almighty God the creator, in part joined popular religion and its gods, such as the good religion of wizards and witchdoctors of Tibet and Indian Tantrism. In this context it is believed that the powerful gods of nature, of the mountains, of storms and of hail always need to be placated with invocations and gifts. Buddhist temples are often defended against dragons and serpents which in the East are venerated as supernatural and beneficial beings!<sup>13</sup>

In the view of Hans Küng, the original contribution of Buddhism to world ethics lies in our being continuously challenged to grow in order to go beyond ourselves. Everyone must follow their own road. What matters in a decisive way is to forget oneself, to train oneself in self-denial, an approach of forgoing through looking for benevolence and consensus rather than rejection and exclusion; compassion rather than indifference and insensitivity; openness and acceptance rather than envy and jealousy; balance and safety rather than a thirst for power, success or prestige.<sup>13</sup>

Japan, China and India are going through a profound process of transition towards a new socio-economic reality in the global context. In this transition, it is necessary not to abandon the great advances of the modern era but, rather, contemporaneously overcome their limits and their inhumanities. This transition,

which assures a future to humanity in the oriental part of the globe, must necessarily bring with it a rather precise request: to cultivate not only science but also wisdom, in order to avoid the abuses of a scientific research that transforms human beings into guinea pigs; not only technology but also spiritual impetus, in order to control the unpredictable risks of high efficiency technology; not only industry but also respect for nature and ecology; not only democracy but also ethics that are capable of addressing the interests of people and groups in power. In an increasingly globalised world, we have the fundamental challenge of drawing up global and international ethics.<sup>13</sup>

### ***5. What Can we Learn from the Values of Chinese Culture?***

China is the custodian of the oldest culture present on the earth with its five thousand years of history. The cultures and the religions of Mesopotamia, of the Sumerians, of the Babylonians and the Assyrians, of the Egyptians, of the Greeks and of the Romans have all inexorably disappeared. In museums we find traces of their vitality and their values. Chinese culture has continued until today and has survived despite the historical fractures through which it has passed.

One of the values of oriental culture which was amply suggested by Buddhism and by other pantheistic religions such as Shintoism (in particular in Japan) is veneration and respect for nature. Every advance must always be pursued 'in harmonious co-existence with mother nature'. Westerners, in relation to nature, have always had the temptation to intervene, to transform it, and to change it.

Here are the roots of the ecological crisis of *today* which is bound up with the whole question of the environment and global warming. The frenetic economic and material development of China is the cause of the fact that on certain days, with a mixture of fog and pollution, Peking becomes practically grey and one cannot see the colour of the sky. What a tragedy!

These thoughts of mine about Asia, its religions, its ethical values and its lifestyles are not offered when we study philosophy, the philosophy of religions, and even less theology. Today, without knowing this other part of the world, it becomes difficult to understand humanity as a whole. Many scholars of religion ask themselves whether Christianity in its Catholic version after the precious historic opportunity experienced with Matteo Ricci still has a future in China, taking into account the meaning that we give today to the term 'mission'. The Holy See and the Chinese government are discussing the question of the appointment of Catholic bishops in China and the presence of the patriotic Church. Might we not be surprised by a visit of Pope Francis to China?

China is carrying forward the greatest experiment in economic development ever attempted by humanity. Hitherto in history, every advance has led to an intolerable number of victims and as regards this inhuman rule China is no exception. However, learning from its successes and failures, it could finally be possible realistically to think about, and to plan, a future without victims. From the great Chinese experiment we could learn how to make a economy work that seeks to bring together in a more synergic way state socialism and market capitalism. From the errors of China we could learn how it is possible to install a certain form of economic freedom without resorting to political oppression; how it is possible to move out of poverty without violating human rights...

From the Confucian spirit of China we can learn loyalty and empathy, benevolence and wisdom, modesty and sincerity, faithfulness and kindness, interior peace and moral integrity, and a capacity for indignation in the face of injustices; we can learn to give priority to society and the family rather than to individual selfish interests, to respect for the integrity of nature. In short, we could commit ourselves to the search for happiness, here and now, in our daily lives. From the Taoist spirit of China we can learn spontaneity, the control of desires, mediation, respiration techniques, the honesty of acknowledging our errors, the search for the essential and the rejection of the superfluous, self-discipline, professionalism and unflinching respect for nature.<sup>12</sup>

### ***6. Some Characteristics of a Confucian Asian Bioethics***

I would like to share with you some resonances of the values of Asian life from some fragmentary notes of my journeys in China (Peking and Shanghai) and Taiwan, and from my participation in international events dealing with bioethics in Asia. We are face to face with a profoundly different and surprising world compared it to our Western culture.

Confucius was a great Chinese teacher and wise man and lived during an epoch of immense conflicts and social disorder. The concept of *Jen* is the most fundamental concept of Chinese philosophy. All the other discussions about principles and material forces have the task of helping a human being to discover *Jen* which in fundamental terms means *solidarity* and *compassion*. Let us now look briefly at some fundamental reference points (or principles of life) of bioethics from the perspective of Confucius.

**Compassion.** This is founded upon benevolence (*Jen*). A human being without compassion is not a human being. The feeling of compassion determines the beginning of humanity. Chinese medicine is nourished by humanity and ability. Confucian physicians always seek to put compassion (empathy) at the top of the list.

**Honesty.** This is the oriental way of expressing justice: it means ‘the right thing to do’ as much as ‘doing the right thing’. Honesty, as understood by the Chinese tradition, also refers to the wish of an individual to sacrifice himself or herself for a noble cause, such as patriotism or filial devotion. In Christianity this Chinese ideogram of honesty is used to describe the way in which *the lamb of God* dies for humanity. A good and honest physician will do his best to take care of the patient regardless of payment and personal advantages!

**Respect.** This refers to correct conduct and behaviour in social interactions. It is performing the role assigned to each person in each condition of life, for example the respect that nourishes feelings of filial devotion. According to the Confucian tradition, children should respect their parents and their elderly people and they should extend this respect to the wider family, in which fraternal love is emphasised together with that mutual respect that is needed to structure all social relationships. Physicians are not only professionals of healing: they are also consultants in many situations. Respect is the basis for appropriate interpersonal relationships and is envisaged as being a social standard of life.

**Responsibility.** Truthfulness refers to the responsibility of a person. A person must act according to his or her promises and conditions of life. Knowledge and practical action must be consistently in harmony with each other. Thus a person should be responsible for what he or she does. A responsible physician heals according to his or her ability and knowledge and his or her responsibility is based upon mutual trust between the physician and the patient. Each person should act according to what is expected of them in their profession and condition of life. Our inviolable responsibility is to take care of our bodies. Not to do this is irresponsible.

**Ahimsa:** not doing evil. In reality, this is a typical teaching of Hinduism and Buddhism. In Sanskrit *Ahimsa* is translated as non-violence and reverence for life. In practice, it means abstaining from food derived from animals, forgoing war, rejecting all thoughts about eliminating life and seeing all living beings as our fellows, thereby demonstrating profound respect for life. An obedient son carefully preserves what has been given to him by his parents and the greatest example is his human body. One must take care of one’s own body and not wound the bodies of other people.<sup>11,14,15</sup>

We can always learn something new from different cultures, religions and philosophies of life, just as we can draw insights from these principles of life of Asian culture.

## 7. The Foundations of a Possible Asian Bioethics

In a provocative article written by Mark Tan Kiak Min, a scholar of Asian cultures who works at the Ministry of Health of Malaysia, which was published in the review *The New Bioethics*, the author states that a common characteristic shared by the complex diversity of Asian cultures does indeed exist – the importance of the family. ‘A concept that is rather extraneous to Western culture where the individual is seen as a minor element within a wider reality, where the wellbeing of the whole family is taken into consideration when a decision has to be taken, where the autonomy of the family becomes more important than individual autonomy... For the great majority of Asians, the primacy of the family is placed before the

primacy of the autonomy of the individual and privileges the collective rather than the individual...Asians continue to look for a holistic happiness that involves the wellbeing of the family and the community – clashing with the Western sensibility which, instead, privileges the happiness of the individual’.<sup>4</sup>

Hyakudai Sakamoto, a distinguished Japanese philosopher and one of the most esteemed scholars of Asian bioethics, has observed that ‘Asian bioethics has to construct its own cultural, ethnological and philosophical foundations’.<sup>16,17</sup> This scholar offers three fundamental aspects of this ‘new Asian bioethics’.

The first foundation should be that of relying upon a new relational philosophy as regards nature and human beings. The Kantian anthropocentrism of the eighteenth century has to be abandoned. In addition, the naturalism of *laissez-faire* is impossible because we already have the ability and the technology to control the future and human evolution. We must now establish a new humanism without being ‘anthropocentric’ and also cultivate a new methodology by which to employ this new humanism, science and modern technologies to control human evolution.

The second fundamental characteristic is said to be that of reconsidering the idea that the nature of human beings is separate from that of other non-human beings. The philosophical anthropology of the eighteenth century generated the context for the idea of the universality of human rights. Instead, the equal rights of non-human beings must also be taken into consideration. Why do human beings alone have ‘dignity’, asks Sakamoto. In many forms of thought in Asia the idea of human dignity as distinct from the dignity of animals does not exist; they do not have a theoretical basis for this kind of concept. They are concerned to overcome hunger and poverty not through respect for human rights but, rather, through mutual help, a deep sense of solidarity and new technologies.

The third characteristic, which at the same time constitutes a challenge, involves the search for a new philosophical basis for Asian bioethics. Sakamoto observes that such bioethics must be rooted in the Asian ethos which is fundamentally different from the European and Western ethos from many points of view.

What are some of the fundamental characteristics of the so-called Asian ethos? Its original characteristic is holism in opposition to Western individualism. Taoism, Confucianism and Buddhism still deeply influence the Asian ethos. Their doctrines and their precepts are all holistic and greatly value nature, society, the community, proximity and mutual help more than individuals with their rights. It is said to be a sort of ‘anti-egoism’ but not altruism.

Some people might understand and fear this kind of holism as a form of paternalism which has been rejected by Western bioethics in favour of personal autonomy. However, we must observe that some new bioethical questions, such as genetics, ecology and the environment, necessarily require a kind of paternalism not of a Western kind but of an Oriental nature.

Here the key word is ‘harmony’ and Asian bioethics will begin in this way not only by rejecting the concept of ‘individual autonomy’ but also by trying to ‘harmonise with the new holistic paternalism of our traditional Asian ethos’. For Asian culture, ‘nature is not something to be conquered but something with which we must learn to live’. This culture values holistic happiness and the wellbeing of the group or the nation to which people belong than individual human rights’.<sup>18</sup>

Bioethics of an Asian impress, starting in the middle of the twentieth century, has acquired a series of universal characteristics that transcend national frontiers, going beyond religion and political opposition, and has developed a common context with a spiritual matrix rooted in everyday philosophy (Qiu, 2003).

China is now in the season of discussion about how to develop its own traditional international cooperation in a context of globalisation, but we have to recognise that with the strengthening of international development and the continuous development of universal guidelines in medical ethics, the formation of a medical ethics in China is still far from being the promised land. There are many things that the scholars of medical ethics must understand and achieve in order to plan the future direction of bioethics and to promote its spread amongst the professionals of biomedical science and in society.

<sup>4</sup> MARK Tan Klak Min, ‘Beyond a Western Bioethics in Asia its Implications on Autonomy’, *The New Bioethics: a Multi-Disciplinary Journal of Biotechnology and the Body*, vol. 23, 2017, pp. 154-164.

When we speak today about the need to draw up a global bioethics, this would be impossible if we began solely with the Euro-American model of bioethics. We need to enter into dialogue with, and structure the debate according to, the values of this Asian bioethics.

I hope that this introductory look at certain aspects of the life, the culture and the values of China, looked at with a Western outlook, has been a look without prejudices. It has not sought to impose Western values. Its intention has been only to explore and to peer in order to understand the problems in a better way. I hope that will serve as a provocation for an in-depth analysis and a better understanding of the culture and its values of the population of that part of the planet that is practically unknown to us Westerners.

How can we ignore the ethical values of life, or better an ethics of life, or a bioethics, that corresponds to 60% of the world's current population? In a world that is increasingly interdependent it will increasingly become an imperative not only to know but also to understand this world that is so different from ours. Today we cannot remain isolated in our cultures, rooted in ethnocentric attitudes (my culture is better and superior to the other's culture!) We have to acquire a certain 'intercultural competence'.

A very important contribution for the whole of our Order and for the Church would be for us in our Camillian context of the continent of Asia, with its complexity of cultures and religions which cultivate compassion as a crucial value in relationships with other people, a series of scientific studies that could fill in this gap between Christianity and Buddhism, between the Camillian charism and Buddhism, for example. Here, as well, we need religious who are involved in this research and study, as well as in heroic assistance and care, of which we are the protagonists, for wounded humanity in this part of the planet.

This international meeting of the central government of the Order with the major Superiors here in Asia, in Taiwan, with the historical and heroic Camillian service that has gone on for almost seventy years, can in a very real way help us to grow in this direction as well as to revitalise the Camillian missionary spirit. May we with intelligence and wisdom 'bring the gift of salvation', the Samaritan gospel and the Camillian charism to every person who is in need of health and thirsty for God!

Before ending this paper to introduce this meeting of ours, I must express, on behalf of the general government of the Order, my sincerest thanks to the Camillian Province of the Philippines and to the Camillian Delegation of Taiwan, in the person of its Delegate, Fr. Giuseppe Didonè, for the hospitality and the organisation of this event, for offering us the opportunity to be together in Taiwan and to be able to be not mere tourists but real pilgrims, an experience of Camillian missionary life with an Asian flavour!

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