Pan-chiu Lai / Jason Lam (eds.)

Sino-Christian Theology

A Theological Qua Cultural Movement in Contemporary China

152

PETER LANG

"Sino-Christian theology" usually refers to an intellectual movement emerged in Mainland China since the late 1980s. The present volume aims to provide a self-explaining sketch of the historical development of this theological as well as cultural movement. In addition to the analyses on the theoretical issues involved and the articulations of the prospect, concrete examples are also offered to illustrate the characteristics of the movement.

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Retrospect and Prospect of Sino-Christian Theology:
An Introduction

LAI Pan-chiu & Jason T. S. LAM

Several years ago Yang Huilin and Daniel H. N. Yeung (Yang Xinan) edited the first English source book on Sino-Christian Studies in China, collecting 22 essays authored by contemporary Chinese scholars covering many related areas, including not only Christian theology in contemporary China, but also history of Christianity in China, social analysis of Christianity in contemporary China, etc.[1] In contrast, the present volume consists of focused discussions of Christian theology authored by contemporary Chinese Christian theologians themselves. This comprising essays from scholars from Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and overseas, aims to provide a self-explaining sketch of the historical development of a theological movement called "Sino-Christian theology" (*hanyu jidu shenxue*), analyses on the theoretical issues involved in this movement, concrete examples to illustrate the characteristics of the movement, and articulations of the prospect of this theological as well as cultural movement.

Historical Background and the "Cultural Christians" Debate
"Sino-Christian theology", which is often abbreviated as "Sino-theology" (*hanyu shenxue*), usually refers to an intellectual movement emerged in the Chinese-speaking world, particularly Mainland China, since the late 1980s, although this term is understood sometimes literally and in a broader sense to cover all theological discourses written in the Chinese language. Given the cultural, social and political contexts of Communist China, the emergence of Sino-Christian theology is a rather strange cultural phenomenon. Before the 1980s, the study of Christianity, especially Christian theology, was basically a prohibited area for academic discussion. However, individuals' research interests can never be barred by political ideology or administrative restrictions. Some Chinese intellectuals started their academic study of Christianity as part of their studies of western culture, though publications remained scanty in amount at that time. After studying Christianity from the perspectives of western philosophy, history, literature, etc., a few of these scholars became interested in the study of Christian theology. Accompanying the more open political atmosphere developed since the 1980s when the open and reform policy has

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1   Yang Huilin & Daniel H. N. Yeung eds., *Sino-Christian Studies in China* (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2006).

been implemented gradually, more and more Chinese scholars joined this intellectual movement. They published a lot of academic books and papers related to Christianity, including some books translated from foreign languages. This group of scholars researching into the study of Christianity is sometimes collectively called "cultural Christians" (*wenhua jidutu*) and embodies an important cultural trend in contemporary China.

The first two articles of this book, "The Emergence of Scholars Studying Christianity in Mainland China" and "Historical Reflections on 'Sino-Christian Theology'", written by Jason Lam (Lin Zichun) and Li Qiuling respectively offer us concise accounts of the emergence of this theological as well as cultural movement.[2] On top of that, they also outline the proposals articulated by the prime proponents of Sino-Christian theology (particularly Liu Xiaofeng and He Guanghu), the significant role of the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies in the movement and related important documents (e.g. *Logos & Pneuma* [Daofeng], the organ journal of Sino-Christian theology) involved, and the relationship among them. Furthermore, historical and sociological analyses are also provided to facilitate some preliminary theological reflections on the emergence of the movement. Some points made in these papers will be mentioned in the discussions hereafter.

From the above background information about Sino-Christian theology, it is quite understandable that from the very outset the proponents of the movement do not aim at constructing a Christian theology in the (western) traditional sense. They are primarily scholars from different academic disciplines researching into the study of Christianity rather than "Christian theologians". In other words, they are scholars of Christian culture rather than believers or practitioners of Christianity as a religion. They were interested in the academic study of Christianity, rather than believing in Christianity, though a few of them might take the Christian faith as their personal faith. However, the emergence of this group of scholars is already a significant cultural as well as theological phenomenon because before that there had been very rare serious studies of Christian theology in the Chinese academia. Apart from the publications produced by this group of scholars, there were also some theological activities undertaken by the institutional churches in China, taking the theological seminaries as its institutional bases and orientating itself towards the Christian churches and their ministries. It is quite clear that Sino-Christian theology

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2   The two articles are originally published as Jason Lam, "The Emergence of Chinese Scholars Studying Christianity in Mainland China", *Religion, State and Society* 32 (2004), pp.177-186; Li Qiuling, "Historical Reflections on 'Sino-Christian Theology'", *China Study Journal* (Spring/Summer 2007), pp.54-67; some expressions are slightly modified in this volume. An abridged French version of the two articles by Lam and Li is available as "Réflexion sur l'histoire de la sino-théologie et des études chrétiennes en langue chinoise", *Transversalités* 103 (2007), pp.113-127.

differs from the theology adopted by the institutional churches with regard to their respective institutional affiliations and intellectual orientations. Sino-Christian theology tends to identify itself as an academic discipline of human sciences or social sciences undertaken in university setting, rather than a function of the Christian church. Furthermore, owing to their religious and academic background, most of these scholars were not properly trained in Christian theology and they are not very familiar with all the branches in the traditional curriculum of theological studies, especially biblical studies.[3] As a result, from time to time, the cultural Christians' approaches, methods or emphases in their academic studies of Christianity are quite different from those of the church leaders or the theological seminaries. Thus the church leaders may have some mixed feeling of surprise, doubt, joy, fear, and so on towards the emergence of this group of scholars.

In the eyes of the church leaders, especially those who had received the traditional theological training formally in theological seminaries, the approaches to the study of Christianity adopted by the cultural Christians look rather arbitrary and fundamentally deviate from the "normal" practice of doing Christian theology. It is thus rather natural that some church leaders were skeptical and even critical towards the theologies proposed by the "cultural Christians". Apart from the question whether the "cultural Christians" are Christians, an equally fundamental question is whether the "theologies" proposed by the "cultural Christians" are *Christian* at all. For some church leaders, the theological discourses made by the "cultural Christians" are entirely flawed because they fail to take serious the integrity of the Christian tradition and the authority of the Bible.[4] It is expected that although these two approaches to theology seem to address the same subject matter and share similar goals, e.g. promoting the understanding of Christianity among the Chinese people, they are so radically divergent that some sorts of tension, competition or even conflict between them seem to be inevitable. In fact, this is exactly what happened when Liu Xiaofeng and He Guanghu articulated their respective theological proposals in the early 1990s.[5] The heated debate sparked off by the emergence of "cultural Christians" and their theological discourses is often rendered as the "cultural Christians debate".

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3 Liu Xiaofeng might be the only "cultural Christian" of his generation who had been formally trained in Christian theology. He studied Christian theology at doctoral level under the supervision of Heinrich Ott at Basel University, after studying foreign languages, philosophy, comparative literature, etc. in Mainland China.

4 For example, Liang Jialin (Leung Ka-lun), "Youshi women qiandezhai ma?" (Another Debt we own?), in Institute of Sino-Christian Studies ed., *Wenhua Jiduti: Xianxiang yu Lunzheng* [*Cultural Christian: Phenomenon and Argument*] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 1997), pp. 106-112.

5 Their respective agendas are found in Yang & Yeung eds., *Sino-Christian Studies in China*, pp. 52-89, 106-132.

The term "cultural Christians" was coined probably by some church leaders in Mainland China, with the implication or connotation that these Chinese scholars of Christian studies were significantly different from the ordinary practicing Christians. However, the meaning of "cultural Christians" is quite ambiguous and even misleading because it seems to imply that "cultural Christians" are "Christians" in a "cultural" but not "religious" sense. In other words, they are "non-religious" and thus different from those Christians who profess and practice Christianity as their own religion. This demarcation between "cultural Christians" and, if there is such a term, "religious Christians" is actually far from clear. Some people can be Christians in both "cultural" and "religious" senses of the word. For example, Liu Xiaofeng himself would prefer to use the term "cultural Christians" to refer to the intellectuals from Mainland China with personal experience of religious conversion, rather than those who are merely interested in studying Christianity as a cultural phenomenon without any personal religious faith.[6] According to this definition, in terms of personal faith, "cultural Christians" are also "religious Christians"; they are not "religious" merely in the sense that they are not officially registered members of any Christian church or regular church-goers.

The debate related to the "cultural Christians" phenomenon occurred among many scholars from Mainland China and Hong Kong. It was started and carried on by a series of articles published in a rather popular Christian weekly newspaper *Christian Times* (*shi dai lun tan*) from the fall of 1995 to the spring of 1996,[7] lasting for a whole year and thus catching much attention of the public. The third and fourth articles in this volume, "The 'Cultural Christians' Phenomenon in China" by Peter K. H. Lee (Li Jingxiong) and "Conceptual Differences between Hong Kong and Chinese Theologians" by Chan Shun-hing (Chen Shenqing),[8] review the whole debate and introduce the different views articulated by various participants. Other than the differences between Hong Kong and Mainland scholars, Chan argues, the diversity among scholars from the same region is by no means less significant than that between regions. This brings up the question that the differences of opinion may not be attributed to the differences in social and cultural situation alone. It has to do also with the various theological trends

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6 Liu Xiaofeng, "Sino-Christian Theology in the Modern Context", in Yang & Yeung eds., *Sino-Christian Studies in China*, p.63.

7 Their writings are collected in Institute of Sino-Christian Studies ed., *Cultural Christian*, pp.94-196.

8 The two articles are originally published as Peter Lee, "The 'Cultural Christians' Phenomenon in China: A Hong Kong Discussion", *Ching Feng* 39/4 (Dec 1996), pp.307-321; Chan Shun-hing, "Conceptual Differences between Hong Kong and China's Theologians: A Study of the 'Cultural Christian' Controversy", *Asia Journal of Theology* 12 (1998), pp.246-264. Another reference to "cultural Christians" can be found in chapter 2 of Fredrick Fällman, *Salvation and Modernity: Intellectuals and Faith in Contemporary China* (Lanham: University Press of America, rev. ed. 2008).

which had influenced the scholars involved and may probably affect the future development of Sino-Christian theology.

Intellectual Orientations and Theoretical Issues
Given the historical review outlined above, it is important to examine the intellectual orientations and the theoretical issues involved in the movement for a deeper exploration. Four articles are included in Part II to illustrate the theological, humanistic, linguistic and cultural orientations and implications of Sino-theology and to highlight some of the theoretical issues involved.

During the 1980s some so-called "cultural Christians" began to use the term "Sino-Christian theology" to describe their theological proposal(s). According to their understanding, the most fundamental feature of Sino- Christian theology is its employing *hanyu*, which is often called the Chinese language (*zhongwen*),[9] as its medium of expression and this makes Sino-Christian theology different from theologies articulated in other languages. It is important to understand this proposal against the wider context of Christian theology in modern China. The first article of Part II, "Theological Translation and Transmission between China and the West" authored by Lai Pan-chiu (Lai Pinchao) gives us such an overview. Against this background, Sino-Christian theology apparently differs from indigenous theology (*bense shenxue*), which was quite dominant in Mainland China before 1949 and continued to flourish in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Whereas indigenous theologies tend to focus on the relationship between Christianity and *traditional* Chinese culture, Sino-Christian theology emphasizes the importance of the relationship between Christianity and *contemporary* Chinese society. Similarly, Sino-Christian theology as a concept also differs from other possible alternatives such as China's theology (*zhongguo shenxue*) and Chinese people's theology (*huaren shenxue*), though the references of all these concepts may largely overlap. Similar to the term "Chinese", which may be understood in political (referring to China as a nation), ethnic (referring to the Chinese people), cultural (referring to the Chinese culture) and linguistic (referring to the Chinese language) terms, there are many possible ways to define the relevant theological endeavors. It is rather obvious that Sino-Christian theology prefers to define its own theological endeavor in linguistic terms. This makes it distinct from some other approaches to Christian theology prevalent in contemporary China. With regard to its relationship to the theologies in other

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9   The expression "*hanyu*" reflects the awareness that China is a multi-ethnic country, in which there are many other ethnic groups in China, although these ethnic minority groups are overshadowed in both cultural and numerical senses by the most dominating tribe of *han*. Since there are many languages with various dialects being used by different ethnic groups in China, it is more accurate to call the official language of China "*hanyu*" rather than "*zhongwen*", which literally means the Chinese language or the language of China.

languages, Lai points out that in the past Christian theologies in China were mainly translated from the West. However, Lai also argues, the two most active periods of Chinese theological innovations, namely the rise of Chinese theology in the 1920-30s and the revival in the 1980-90s, coincide with massive translations. Furthermore, both theological translation and innovative construction were usually triggered by some contextual concerns. They are complementary rather than mutually exclusive. Lai expects that as the Chinese situation is rather unique, the theological renaissance partly constituted by the emergence of cultural Christians may one day become capable to contribute significantly to the international theological discussion. At that time, the theological exchange between China and the West will no longer be a one-way traffic from the West to China.

The next two articles of Part II, "The Value of Theology in Humanities: Possible Approaches to Sino-Christian Theology" by Yang Huilin and "Sino-Christian Theology: the Unfolding of 'Dao' in the Chinese Language Context" by Zhang Qingxiong, address some theoretical issues involved in the construction of Sino-Christian theology. Yang's article attempts to evaluate the value of theology against the context of humanities in China from the perspective of modern hermeneutics. This kind of attempt is quite necessary because Sino-Christian theology is developed mainly in the academia of Communist China. The participants of the movement are mostly non-believers and Christianity has never been a major constituent in this culture. In order to justify its place in the Chinese academia, Sino-Christian theology has to explain from the academic point of view why it is so important to include theology in humanities and why it is beneficial to translate and adopt some "foreign" concepts in the Chinese academia. Zhang's article adopts a more philosophical, mainly Wittgensteinian, perspective, emphasizing on the connection between language (related to word and *dao*) and the related form of life of the relevant language users. Zhang further illustrates that with the aid of human words, the divine Word recognized by the Christians will generate some new contents. Therefore when Christian theology comes to the Chinese context, an exciting new form (Sino-Christian theology) is expected to emerge.

In his "The Paradigm Shift: from Chinese Theology to Sino-Christian Theology" included in this volume, Chin Ken-Pa (Zheng Qingbao) attempts to spell out the implications of Liu Xiaofeng's theological proposal with some further elaborations. According to Chin, Liu's theology assumes that Sino-Christian theology should be placed in parallel with theologies of other languages, since all theologies are the consequences of accepting the divine Word into the respective native languages (and forms of life). According to this view, when the divine Word comes to the Chinese context and when the academics in China listen to it, it is not merely a process of translation or adaptation, but the formation of a new paradigm. It is because it is not only the

adoption of a foreign classic or tradition, but the acceptance of the divine Word which might "interrupt" or even "endanger" the transmission of the original "pure" Chinese tradition. At this juncture, perhaps one may be able to understand why in spite of Liu's seemingly awkward expressions, his theological proposal aroused a lot of heated debates from different academic perspectives.

Basic Characters and Contingent Features
After sketching the background of Sino-Christian theology as an intellectual movement, we are going to delineate some of the basic characters of Sino-Christian theology. We will see that due to the institutional, personal and historical factors, Sino-Christian theology is neither static nor monolithic. It did not start as a school of theological thought with one single founder and a clearly articulated theological position, although the prime proponents' proposals were widely discussed. The movement does not have any particular doctrinal formula agreed by all of its proponents and followers. It has no representative doctrine of God, Christology, ecclesiology, etc. It even does not have a philosophical framework or methodology shared by its advocates. On the contrary, there are significant differences among the prime proponents of Sino-Christian theology with regard to their approaches to Christian theology. For example, Liu Xiaofeng's theology appears to be more "Barthian", being influenced particularly by Barth's early publications without proper attention paid to his later ones, whereas He Guanghu's more "Tillichian". Other than translating several books by Tillich, He Guanghu proposes that given the context of Mainland China, Tillich's theology should be translated and introduced before that of Barth. He Gaunghu's theology also attempts to make use of traditional Chinese culture, which is considered by Liu as unnecessary or even wrong theological attempt. In addition to the divergence among its proponents, another important factor for the variations of Sino-Christian theology was that even the delineation of Sino-Christian theology made by individual proponent might not be very clear and consistent.

Nevertheless, since the launching of Sino-Christian theology, it has bore several identifiable characters shared by the prime proponents, particularly Liu Xiaofeng and He Guanghu, even though some of these characters were rather "contingent" – meaning that these characters might change or even disappear in the course of subsequent development. Before we move on to the discussion concerning the development of Sino-Christian theology, it is helpful to briefly sketch these characters first:

1. Sino-Christian theology takes *hanyu* or the Chinese language as the medium of expression. Sino-Christian theology is defined in neither political, nor cultural, nor political terms, but by the language it uses.[10]

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10 This is a rather definitive character, though not entirely free from ambiguity. It is not entirely clear as to whether the theology written in Chinese by a foreigner (whose

2. Sino-Christian theology, which is inevitably contextual because the language it uses is shaped by the Chinese cultural, religions, social and political contexts, takes seriously the contemporary Chinese context.
3. Sino-Christian theology takes the academia, particularly universities, rather than churches or theological seminaries as its institutional basis.
4. Sino-Christian theology emphasizes its intellectual, cultural and humanistic nature of theology rather than its ecclesiastical function.
5. In terms of methodology, Sino-Christian theology employs the methods shared by some other disciplines in humanities without excluding the method(s) particularly to Christian theology.[11]

Of course, other than these rather basic characters, there are also some dominant but not essential features appearing in the writings of some but not all representatives of Sino-Christian theology.

As we are going to see, due to the theological diversity among its proponents, the conceptual ambiguities involved and the subsequent developments brought forth by some other scholars, some characters are no longer the definitive characteristics of Sino-Christian theology. In other words, Sino-Christian theology as an intellectual, cultural or theological movement underwent some significant changes in its subsequent developments. In order to have a more adequate understanding of the movement, it is thus very important to pay attention to the recent developments and to reconsider which characters or features should be regarded as contingent rather than essential to the movement.

Sino-Christian Theology at the Crossroad

In the year 2000, an important book on Sino-Christian theology was published.[12] In addition to a few essays by Liu Xiaofeng and He Guanghu, the book includes many essays from other scholars in Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and even overseas. Some of the authors articulated their own ideas of Sino-Christian theology, while some others provided critical comments on the ideas of Liu Xiaofeng and He Guanghu. In a paper published in that volume, Lai Pan-chiu argues that instead of focusing on Liu Xiaofeng's theology, Sino-Christian theology can and should be understood in a much broader way.[13] The strategy adopted in the paper is to emphasize the distinction between two senses of the word "Sino-Christian theology" – one narrower and one broader. Through

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mother tongue is not Chinese) should be recognized as part of Sino-Christian theology.

11 Whether Christian theology is to be regarded as part of the human sciences is an issue for further discussion.

12 Daniel Yeung ed., *Hanyu Shenxue Chuyi* [*Preliminary Studies on Chinese Theology*] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 2000).

13 Lai Pan-chiu, "hanyu shenxue de leixing yu fazhan luxiang"(Typology and Prospect of Sino-Christian Theology), in Daniel Yeung ed., *Preliminary Studies on Chinese Theology*, pp.3-21.

reviewing the relevant primary and secondary publications, it argues that the word "Sino-Christian theology" is being used in two different ways. Broadly speaking, "Sino-Christian theology" could refer to any theology written in the Chinese language, so that one can trace the history back to several centuries ago, say, starting from Ming dynasty.[14] Nevertheless, sometimes Sino-Christian theology seems to designate specifically the theological thinking of some cultural Christians, i.e. a kind of philosophical expression of personal faith gaining a footing in the academic society of the humanities and the social sciences. In this sense, Sino-Christian theology is radically different from both the seminary-based church dogmatics and the "indigenous theology" adopted by many theologians in Hong Kong and Taiwan.[15] One can find the evidence for this narrower understanding of Sino-Christian theology in the works of Liu Xiaofeng, who clearly opposes theological indigenization and emphasizes on the individuality of faith and theology. Such a conceptual ambiguity in Liu's own discourses on Sino-Christian theology shows that Sino-Christian theology remains in its infancy stage of searching for its own niche and orientation. On the one hand, it would like to adhere to a long-standing tradition (Sino-Christian theology in the broad sense); on the other, it is dissatisfied with the tradition and tries to develop a particular approach out of the current context (Sino-Christian theology in the narrow sense).

This strategy of distinguishing the two senses of Sino-Christian theology and favoring the broader sense makes possible for more people, including Lai Pan-chiu himself, to take part in Sino-Christian theology as a theological or cultural movement, without being a Sino-theologian in a narrow sense of the word. An implication of this strategy is that some of dubious or controversial characters of Sino-Christian theology can be regarded as something non- essential. In other words, it is for some contingent or personal reasons that some scholars, particularly Liu Xiaofeng, tends to emphasize the individual character of faith, the non-ecclesiastical character of Sino-Christian theology, etc. The approach proposed by Liu is to be regarded as merely one of the possible approaches and by no means the only possible or legitimate way to do Sino-Christian theology.

In addition to the distinction between the narrow and broad senses of Sino-Christian theology, Lai's paper further argues that it is advisable for Sino-Christian theology to adopt a broader sense of the word in order to make room for the participation of other scholars because there are many other scholars who study Christianity from historical and sociological perspectives rather

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14 Liu Xiaofeng, "Sino-Christian Theology in the Modern Context", p.52.

15 This usage of "Sino-Christian theology" can be found also in Chen Zuoren (Stephen Chan), "Zhongyiben daoyan" (Introduction to the Chinese Edition), in Dionysius, *Shenmi Shenxue* (*Mystical Theology*), Bao Limin trans. (Beijing: Sanlian, 1998), p.27; and "Jiaoyi, shenxue yu :wenhua Jidu tu" (Doctrine, Theology, and 'Cultural Christians'), in *Cultural Christian: Phenomenon and Argument*, pp.244-254.

than from philosophical or theological perspectives. Furthermore, it is not necessary for Sino-Christian theology to exclude indigenous theology and the use of resources of traditional Chinese culture. As Sino-Christian theology remains at its infancy stage of development, there is no need and no hurry for its advocates to give an exclusive definition of Sino-Christian theology and to confine it to a particular type of theology. It is because the healthy development of Christian theology in China may need various types of theology.[16]

Based on the idea of this diversity, Jason Lam developed a "Typological Consideration of Sino-Christian Theology".[17] Through examining the history of Christian theology and adopting the typology of modern theology suggested by Hans W. Frei,[18] Lam argues that the divergence between the theology constructed in the Chinese academia and that in the ecclesiastical setting is only a contingent phenomenon emerging in a rather special socio-political setting in Mainland China. Since the two institutions have not been given much room to communicate to each other, and they both have very different developing agendas, their theological discourses constructed in the past show significant differences. In stead of taking them as a contradictory dichotomy of either-or, a healthier approach to handle their diversity is to assign the seemingly opponents to a continuous theological spectrum, in which various types of theology with different orientations and setting would flourish in their own ways and have dialogue with each other.

Nowadays, the distinction between the broad and narrow senses of "Sino-Christian theology" has become widely accepted. In recent years, there are more publications related to "Sino-Christian theology" in the broad sense than those focusing on the narrow sense. For example, a recent volume of *Logos & Pneuma* (vol. 27 [2007]) takes "Sino-Christian Theology in Ming & Qing Dynasties" as the title for the main theme. This is all too obvious that it assumes a very broad understanding of "Sino-Christian theology". As Wang Xiaochao observes, in recent years, the study of Sino-Christian theology entered into a stage of "various articulations under one flag" (*yimian qizhi, gezi biaoshu*). Though some of these articulations of Sino-Christian theology are deviated from the ideas of the prime proponents, Wang suggests, one has to accept this diversity because as the participants have diversified academic, cultural and religious backgrounds, it is neither necessary nor possible to unify their opinions.[19]

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16 For a revised English version of the paper, see Lai Pan-chiu, "Typology and Prospect of Sino-Christian Theology", *Ching Feng* 6.2 (2005), pp.211-230.

17 Jason Lam, "Hanyu Jidujiao shenxue de leixing xue si kao" (Typological Consideration of Sino-Christian Theology), *Logos & Pneuma* 23 (2005), pp.165-184.

18 Hans W. Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992).

19 Wang Xiaochao, "Guanyu Hanyu shenxue neirongde ruogan gouxiang" (Some Considerations of the Content of Sino-Christian theology), *Logos & Pneuma* 29 (2008), p.167.

Recent Development and Prospect

Partially due to the cultural, social and political atmosphere of China as well as the efforts made by the cultural Christians and many other institutions, including particularly the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, the academic study of Christianity enjoyed a phenomenal growth in China in the last two decades. In recent years, several important developments or changes, which will affect the theological development in Mainland China, became more and more apparent.

The first noticeable change to be mentioned is the cultural, intellectual and religious background of the researchers. As He Guanghu notices, there are some significant differences between the scholars of Christian studies of his generation and those of the younger generations.[20] In a recent questionnaire-survey conducted on the younger generation (aged roughly 35 to 45) of Mainland China scholars engaging in the study of Christianity, it is found that in comparison with the scholars of previous generation (aged 45 or above), there are more and more scholars of the younger generation taking Christianity as their own religion and actively involving in church activities. Some of them admit that their academic studies of Christianity are partially motivated by their Christian faith. A report of the survey, "Preliminary Survey on the New Generation of Scholars of Christian Studies in Mainland China", prepared by Gao Xin is appended to this volume. In light of these findings, there may be more healthy interactions or even cooperation between the academia and the Christian churches in the future. Though Sino-Christian theology needs to preserve its own identity as an academic enterprise, it does not necessarily mean that it has to be separate from or hostile to the ecclesiastical circle. This point is also indicated in the second chapter of this volume authored by Li Qiuling, who belongs to the older generation of Mainland China scholars engaging in Christian studies. As the study of Christianity includes both the humanistic and ecclesiastical dimensions,[21] the prospect of Christian studies in Mainland China may benefit from the healthy interactions between the academia and the Christian churches in China.

Secondly, some Mainland China scholars of Christian Studies, particularly of the younger generation, would prefer to identify themselves as "Christian Scholars" (*jidutu xueren*) in order to distinguish themselves from the "cultural

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20 He Guanghu, "Jianshan dai you rencai chu: ershi shijimo zhi ershiyi shijizhu Zhongguo Jidujiao yanjiu xuezhe su miao" (Trends of Chinese Scholars in Christian Studies at in the Turn of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century), *Logos & Pneuma* 29 (2008), pp.53-75.

21 Lai Pan-chiu, "Jidu Zongjiao Yanjiu de Renwen yu Jiaohui Xiangdu" (The Humanistic and Ecclesiastical Dimensions of the Study of Christianity), in Xu Yihua & Zhang Qingxiong eds., Jidu jiao xue shu [Christian Scholarship], 2 (Shanghai: Shanghai Guji, 2004), pp.167-192.

Christians" who do not have clear commitment to Christianity.[22] Some of these scholars of the younger generation, notably Sun Yi and Zhang Xuefu, even argue that the methodology of human sciences are inadequate for Sino-Christian theology which should take seriously the Christ event, proceed from a Christian theological perspective and not to reduce theology to some sort of philosophy.[23] In fact, Liu Xiaofeng also emphasizes on the centrality of the Christ event in theological thinking and the distinctiveness of theological method vis-à-vis other human sciences,[24] but Liu does not stress the role of the church in theological thinking as Sun and Zhang do. This new self-identity of "Christian scholars" clearly signifies an important development of the movement.

Thirdly, in terms of its relationship with theologies in other languages, Sino-Christian theology has moved gradually from focusing on translating and introducing the works of famous western theologians to placing greater emphasis on the creative re-interpretation of western theologies and the articulation of innovative theological discourses with Chinese characteristics. This can be seen from the recent publications of the two volumes concerning *Karl Barth and Sino-Christian Theology* (2008).[25] In fact, the first volume is a reprint of a previous volume published in 2000. Comparing the contents of the two volumes, one may find a rather subtle yet significant development. Both volumes have introductory essays on Barth's theology, but the second volume addresses wider range of issues and presents Barth's theology in a more comprehensive and systematic way. An even more significant development is that in the first volume there is only one paper on the significance of Barth's theology for

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22 Chen Yaqian, "Xueyuan yu Jiaohui: Jidutu Xueren jiqi Kunhuo" (Academia and Church: Christian Scholars and their Perplexities), in Xu Zhiwei ed., *Jidu jiao si xiang ping lun* [Regent Review of Christian Thoughts] 5 (Shanghai: Shanghai Renmin, 2007), pp.215-226; Wen Wei-yao (Milton Wan), "Shenxue yanjiu yu Jidu jiao jing yan" (Christian Studies and Its Corresponding Religious Experiences), *Logos & Pneuma* 29 (2008), pp.123-153.

23 Zhang Xuefu, "Yanshuo zhi Dao he Shangdi zhi Dao – Jianlun Jidujiao Shenxuede Benzhi" (The Word of Speaking and the Word of God: With Special Reference to the Nature of Christian Theology), in Xu Zhiwei ed., *Regent Review of Christian Thoughts* 5, 195-204; Sun Yi, "Shenxue Yanshuo yu Renwen Jinlu" (Theological Speaking and Humanistic Approach), in Xu Zhiwei ed., *Regent Review of Christian Thoughts* 5, pp. 205-214; Sun Yi, "Hanyu shenxue yu Jidu shijian" (Sino-Christian Theology and the 'Event of Christ'), *Logos & Pneuma* 29 (2008), pp.183-198.

24 Liu Xiaofeng, "Sino-Christian Theology in the Modern Context" pp.72-79.

25 Andres S. K. Tang (Deng Shaoguang) & Lai Pan-chiu eds., *Bate yu Hanyu Shenxue: Bate shenxue de zai si* [Karl Barth and Sino-Christian Theology: Barth's Theology Reconsidered] (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma, 2000, reprint 2008) and the second volume Ou Li-jan (Ou Li-ren) and Andres S. K. Tang eds., *Bate yu Hanyue shenxue er: Bate shi shi si shi zhou nian ji nian wen ji* [Karl Barth and Sino-Christian Theology II: Essays to Commemorate the 40th Anniversary of his Death] (Hong Kong: Logos& Pneuma, 2008).

Christian-Confucian dialogue,[26] but in the second volume there are three essays on Barth and Buddhism.[27] Furthermore, the roles played by Barth's theology in these essays are different. In the essay in the first volume, it is basically a unilateral application of the insights of Barth's theology to the Confucian-Christian dialogue. In the essays on Barth and Buddhism in the second volume, one may find some sort of bilateral dialogue between Barth and Buddhism, including an attempt to evaluate Barth from a Mahayana Buddhist perspective. This development reflects that Sino-Christian theology has become more mature in its attitudes towards Western theologies as well as the resources of traditional Chinese culture.[28]

Fourthly, the approaches adopted by Mainland China scholars of Christian studies also shifted from being dominated by the human sciences, particularly philosophy and to a less extent literature and history, to include more and more the methods in social sciences, including sociology, anthropology, etc. This development reflects not only the growth of what is called empirical or positive studies (*shizheng yanjiu*) in Mainland China, but also the awareness that Christianity is no longer something belonging exclusively to western civilisation and it has become a cultural as well as social phenomenon or reality in contemporary China. Over the past few years, the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies has published several books related to the sociological and/or anthro-pological studies of Christianity in China. These studies include both empirical studies of the practices of Christianity in Beijing, Tai'an and Duanzhuang with some well-articulated theoretical frameworks. On top on these, the Institute of

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26 The chapter in the first volume is: Chen Jiafu (Keith K. F. Chan), "Renxing yu Jidu: Bate de jidulun renguan yu yeru duihua" (Humanity and Christ: Karl Barth's Christological Anthropology and Christian-Confucian Dialogue), pp. 291-325. For a modified English version of the paper, see: Keith K. F. Chan, "Karl Barth's Christological Anthropology and Christian-Confucian Dialogue", *Ching Feng*, 42/1-2 (March-June 1999), pp.1-33.

27 The three chapters in the second volume are: Deng Shaoguang (Andres S. K. Tang), "Chanzong yu Bate de yuyan wenzi guan" (Zen and Barth's View on Language and Word), pp.469-482; Deng Shaoguang, "Cong Tiantai Foxue kan Bate de jidulun" (A Tien-tai Buddhistic Interpretation of Karl Barth's Christology), pp.483-500; and, Lai Pan-chiu, "Cong Foxue kan Bate de zuiguan ji renxinglun" (Barth's Doctrine of Sin and Humanity in Buddhist Perspective), pp. 501-524. For a modified English version of Lai's article, see: Lai Pan-chiu, "Barth's Doctrines of Sin and Humanity in Buddhist Perspective", *Studies in Inter-religious Studies* 16.1 (2006), pp.41-58.

28 Lai Pan-chiu, "Theological Translation & Transmission between China and the West", *Asia Journal of Theology* 20.2 (October 2006), pp.285-304 (reprinted in this volume); "Inheriting the Chinese and Christian Traditions in Global Context: A Confucian-Protestant Perspective", *Religion & Theology* 10/1 (March 2003), pp.1-23; "Development of Chinese Culture and Chinese Christian Theology", *Studies in World Christianity* 7.2 (2001), pp.219-240; reprinted in Yang & Yeung eds., *Sino-Christian Studies in China*, pp.280-303.

Sino-Christian Studies is launching a translation series of "Western Academics and Public Ethics", which introduced some state-of-art publications of public theology in the western world. The integration and mutual enrichment between empirical studies and theoretical works may yield another flourishing scene in the academic studies on Christianity in the future. This may become not only an important trend in the development of Christian Studies in China as a whole, but also a contribution to the practical or pastoral activities of the Christian churches.

Fifthly, other than the diversification of approaches, the scope of study has become broader and broader. In the past very little has been done to the area of biblical studies. Since most "cultural Christians" are not strongly affiliated to the institutional churches, the role and authority of the Bible in the construction of Christian theology was an important issue involved in the "cultural Christians" debate. But in recent years, due to efforts made by the Chinese University of Hong Kong and some other institutions, there are more and more properly trained biblical scholars in Mainland China. With regard to the publications in China related to biblical studies, phenomenal growth can be detected in both qualitative and quantitative terms. The Institute of Sino-Christian Studies is also launching the first comprehensive textbook series on biblical studies in Mainland China. These publications are supposed to exert some lasting influence on the future generations. In fact, the recent issue of *Logos & Pneuma* (vol. 31 [Autumn 2009]) took "Biblical Studies and Chinese Academia" as its main theme. Most of the articles published in the issue are written by younger generation of scholars and show their potential to match the international academic standard. An even more encouraging sign is that You Bin, one of the theme initiators, has proposed an agenda of "Sino-Christian Scriptural Hermeneutics",[29] disclosing the intention to produce a more integral discipline of theological studies in the Chinese context.

Sixthly, following the developing trend in biblical studies, when scholars re-read the Bible and the whole Christian tradition in dialogue with the Chinese culture, a brand new type of scriptural theologising may emerge in China. In "Sino-Christian Theology, Bible, and Christian Tradition", the first article of Part III, Lai Pan-chiu examines the development as well as prospect of biblical studies in Mainland China. Lai argues that in spite of the difficulties to be overcome, biblical studies in China has the potential to make distinctive and innovative contributions to biblical studies worldwide. There are some recent publications in biblical studies vividly confirming Lai's expectation that the Chinese contexts (including the Chinese texts) can play vital as well as creative roles in the Chinese interpretations of the biblical texts. One of them might be the second article of Part III, "Messianic Predestination in Romans 8 and

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29 You Bin, "Zou xiang hanyu xueshu yujing de Jidu jiao jing xue" (Towards a Sino-Christian Scriptural Hermeneutics), *Logos & Pneuma* 31 (2009), pp.43-64.

Classical Confucianism", authored by Yeo Khiok-khng [Yang Keqin]. In the essay, Yeo develops an inter-textual reading between Confucius and Paul or between the *Romans* and the *Analects*. Although the two sides seem quite incommensurable at first glimpse, Yeo demonstrates in his account that a cross-textual reading can facilitate a Chinese-Christian worldview which is open to the future without discounting the past. This case illustrates the possibility of constructing a Sino-Christian theology in an innovative way.[30] Although the theological significance of this kind of biblical studies may remain far from clear, the Chinese interpretations of the Bible have recently attracted the attention of some foreign scholars.[31]

Seventhly, with the developments mentioned above, Sino-Christian theology is moving towards a full-fledged study (or studies) of Christianity, rather than focusing on the theological aspect alone. Some years ago *Logos & Pneuma* changed it subtitle in Chinese[32] from *Chinese Journal of Theology* (*hanyu shenxue xuekan*) (up to vol. 11, Autumn 1999) to *Christian Cultural Review* (*Jidujiao wenhua pinglun*) (starting from volume 12, Spring 2000).[33] This change of subtitle, in hindsight, might have indicated that the scope of the journal was broadened to cover those non-theological (usually systematic or philosophical) studies on Christianity or Christian culture. This move is further reinforced by the recent publication of a bilingual journal in Taiwan titled *Sino-Christian Studies: An International Journal of Bible, Theology and Philosophy* (*Hanyu Jidujiao Xueshu Lunping*). The subtitle of the journal in English clearly indicates not only its international character but also the width of its scope which includes not only philosophy and theology, but also biblical studies. In other words, the goal or target of Sino-Christian theology as an intellectual movement is no longer restricted to systematic theology, which was the focus of discussion during the 1980s and 1990s. After two decades of development, the aim of the movement seems to be expanded from the establishment of Sino- theology to the establishment of "theological studies" as a whole or "theology" in a broad sense, which may better be called "Sino-Christian Studies".

Admittedly, during the last two decades, academic publications on Christianity from both the prime proponents and younger scholars have grown

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30 Another book-length example can be found from Lin Yan, *Zai Hanwen Guji Chuangshi Shenhua de Liangguangxia Chongdu* Chuangshiji 1-3 [Re-reading Genesis 1-3 in the Light of the Creation Myths of Ancient Chinese Texts] (Lanzhou: Lanzhou University Press, 2008).

31 See Chloë Starr ed., *Reading Christian Scriptures in China* (London: T & T Clark, 2008).

32 The English title remains unchanged - *Logos & Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology*.

33 In fact, this is also the Chinese title for a book series or "book in lieu of journal" (yi shu dai kan) called "*Christian Culture Review*" (*Jidujiao wenhua pinglun*) published in Mainland China (Guiyang: Guizhou Renmin, 1990 -) edited by Liu Xiaofeng.

phenomenally and in exciting ways. It is not difficult to find that various disciplinary approaches are employed to conduct serious studies of Christianity. However, it is also important to note that the theological construction of Sino-Christian theology remains far from well developed. There are some volumes related to Sino-Christian theology published recently, but these volumes look like collections of essays or introductory writings rather than truly book-length research monographs. [34] It remains very difficult to find any systematic articulation of Christian theology to be identified as a showcase for Sino-Christian theology. Therefore more substantial works of Sino-Christian theology are called for in order to become a truly mature theological enterprise. If becoming more reflective or critical on oneself is one of the signs for becoming mature, Sino-Christian theology seems to begin to mature. The last chapter "Reflection on Enlightenment – a Proposal of the Focus of Sino-Christian Theology" by Lin Hong-Hsin (Lin Hongxin) may be an example showing Sino-Christian theology's becoming more reflexive and critical of oneself. Lin's essay reviews the Chinese Enlightenment – the May 4th movement – in light of an examination of the European Enlightenment. According to Lin, a lesson to be learnt from the historical development in Europe is that the once revolutionaries may turn to anti-revolutionaries, the supposedly enlightened ones to those barred from light. When the cultural Christians began to introduce Christian thought into China, they themselves or the others might consider them as the enlightened ones who might bring enlightenment to China. However, if Sino-theologians are really concerned with the contemporary situation of China, Lin reminds, they should always take a critical stance towards themselves and keep on asking: Are we really enlightened? In what aspects shall one continue to further develop the present state of Sino-Christian studies?

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34 Some examples can be found in Liu Xiaofeng, *Hanyu shenxue yu lishi zhexue* [Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 2000); Yang Huilin, *Jidujiao de Dise yu Wenhua Yanshen* [Basic Features and Cultural Extensions of Christianity] (Harbin: Heilongjian Renmin, 2002); He Guanghu, *Tien ren zhi ji* [The Heaven and the Human] (Beijing: China Social Science, 2003), *Yue ying wan chuan: zongjiao, shehui yu rensheng* [The Moon in Streams: Religion, Society and Life] (Beijing: China Social Science, 2003); Zhuo Xinping, *Shensheng yu Shisu Zhijian* [Between Sacred and Profane] (Harbin: Heilongjian Renmin, 2004); Jason Lam, *Duo yuan xing Hanyu shenxue quan shi* [A Polyphonic View on Sino-Christian Theology] (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma, 2006); Lin Hong-hsin's 3-vol. series, *Shui qi meng shui* [Who Enlightens Whom?], *Dian yu xian* [Point and Line], and *Luo ye sui feng* [Fallen Leaves Gone with the Wind] (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma, 2008); Chin Ken Pa, *Shangdi, guanxi yu yan shuo* [God, Relation & Discourse] (Shanghai: VI Horae, 2008); Paulos Huang (Huang Baoluo), *Hanyu xueshu shenxue* [Sino-Christian Academic Theology] (Beijing: Religious Culture, 2008); Wen Weiyao, *Shenming de zhuanhua yu chaoba* [On the Transformation and Transcendence of Humanity] (Beijing: Religious Culture, 2009).

Concluding Remark

In view of these recent developments, the intellectual, cultural or theological movement, which took "Sino-Christian theology" as its flag in the 1980s and 1990s, may better understand its own task in terms of "Sino-Christian studies" which may better reflect the future direction of the movement. This is not to give up the study of Sino-Christian theology as such, but to place this "hard-core" in a wider framework of Sino-Christian studies, which includes the studies of all the aspects of Christianity, including theology, social institutions, scriptures, history, and even the material cultures. This move, to a certain extent, may help the scholars already involved in the movement to avoid some unnecessary controversies concerning whether and how Sino-Christian theology is Christian theology, to rally more participants (especially those engaging in non-theological studies of Christianity) to this academic forum or platform, and to exercise greater influence on the academic studies of Christianity in the Chinese speaking world.

Although it is repeatedly stated in this introductory essay that Sino-Christian theology is still in an infancy stage of development, new ideas and perspectives are expected to appear from time to time in this burgeon field of discussion. It is hoped that the theological discussion in China will make distinctive and significant contribution to the international theological discussion. To this end, the present volume may be regarded as a very little first step forward.[35]

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35 Some materials included in this introduction are adopted from Lai Pan-chiu, "From Sino-Christian Theology to Sino-Christian Studies: A Cultural-Theological Movement in Contemporary China," paper presented at the 7th International Conference of North East Asia Council of Studies of History of Christianity, held at Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China, 24-26 August 2009.

PART I

Historical Review

The Emergence of Scholars Studying Christianity in Mainland China

Jason T. S. Lam

The study of Christianity in universities and research institutes is nothing unusual. It is rather remarkable, however, that Christian studies have become established in the cultural and educational system of communist China and have been developing rapidly since the late 1980s. A considerable number of scholars are now pursuing the serious academic study of Christianity and publishing their findings, and are doing so not in seminaries or other ecclesiastical settings but in institutions of the social and human sciences run and financed by the state. Their research includes not only studies of Christianity from historical and socio-logical perspectives, which may often be considered value-neutral from a religious point of view, but also the production of confessional theology, although the latter is much smaller in quantity than the former. Some scholars who are interested in religion even become committed Christians. In this article I introduce the phenomenon of the production of theology in these circumstances, articulating the factors that make it possible, analyzing the nature of the theology produced in this situation and making a theological reflection on the orientation of theology relevant for Asian countries.

A Description of the Phenomenon

Apart from writings criticizing Christianity from the "advanced" communist perspective there was only scanty publishing on Christianity in communist China before 1980; it was all translated works that were usually closely related to the study of western philosophy. Since the 1980s publishing has been growing rapidly in terms of both quantity and quality. At the outset the publications were still mainly translated works on Christianity from the perspectives of history, cultural studies, sociology, religious studies and even theology. Later on articles, books and journals by Chinese scholars appeared in increasing numbers. In the higher education system religious studies departments and research institutions were established in some important universities such as Beijing and Nanjing.[1] Nowadays some of these offer religious studies programmes from undergraduate level up to postgraduate level and publish

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1 For details and figures, see He Guanghu, "Religious Studies in China 1978-1999 and their Connection with Political and Social Circumstances", *Studies in World Christianity* 7(2001), p.28.

textbooks. Some distinguished scholars have emerged and have been playing important roles in the development of religious studies.[2] Even in liberal Chinese societies like Hong Kong and Taiwan it is unusual to find Christian studies programmes offered and academic books published by the state education system. It is a significant fact that the academic study of Christianity has become a formal part of the communist cultural and educational system.

Following Liu Xiaofeng[3] we can divide the research interests of these scholars into five types:

1. Religious studies: the study of Christianity as one of the world religions from the perspectives of philosophy, sociology, anthropology and cultural studies.
2. History of Christian thought: the study of patristic, scholastic and contemporary Christian thought.
3. History of Christianity: the study of the history of the western churches and the churches in China.
4. Arts and literature: the study of Christian arts and literature though the ages.
5. Christian theology: the study of Christian doctrines.

Most of these studies can be pursued without a commitment to Christian faith and most of the discussions are developed in the realm of the human and social sciences. However, some of the scholars involved agree that in certain circumstances to have a genuine understanding of Christian theology proper and to develop meaningful discourse about it may require a commitment of faith. It is important, therefore, to analyse the attitude of these scholars towards the Christian faith.

In their attitude towards Christianity the scholars in Mainland China can be divided into three groups:[4]

(A) These scholars take Christianity as one of the world religions. They have no religious commitment themselves. They regard Christianity as a "foreign" religion and are concerned to identify those of its features that are different from Chinese culture. In a sense they are doing comparative study between Christianity and Chinese culture.

(B) These scholars are not committed to the Christian faith either; but they do not study Christianity from a cultural-nationalistic perspective: their approach is

2 Liu Xiaofeng, "Gongchandang wenhua zhiduzhong de jidujiao xueshu" (Academic Studies of Christianity in the Cultural System of the Communist Party), in Institute of Sino-Christian Studies ed., *Wenhua Jidutu: Xianxiang yu Lunzheng* [*Cultural Christian: Phenomenon and Argument*] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 1997), p.65. Here after cited as: *Cultural Christian*, p.85.

3 Liu Xiaofeng, "Academic Studies of Christianity in the Cultural System of the Communist Party", in *Cultural Christian*, pp.65-66.

4 Chen Rongnu, "Dangdai zhongguo zhishifenzi yu hanyu jidujiao xueshu de jiangou" (Contemporary Chinese Intellectuals and the Construction of the Sino-Christian Academic) in *Cultural Christian*, p.262; Li Qiuling, "Shenxue yu wenhua de hudong" (The Dynamics between Theology and Culture), in *Cultural Christian*, pp.132-33.

more value-neutral. Their frame of reference is shaped by the academic standards of the social and human sciences. Some of them show an appreciation of the Christian faith, however.

(C) These scholars have a personal commitment to the Christian faith and comprise the only group committed to doing Christian theology proper. They do not do dogmatic theology in a traditional way, however, since they are working in the realm of the human and social sciences and have to adopt the so-called religiously unbiased approach required in these academic circles.

Needless to say, the divisions amongst these groups are rather fluid and their interaction means that people sometimes move from one group to another. Group A is the largest, then Group B, and Group C is the smallest. Group C is the most active, however, and includes the most prominent figures of the circle. They are sometimes called the "Cultural Christians" (*wenhua jidutu*) because although they have a personal commitment to the Christian faith many of them are not baptized members of an institutional church, nor do they have a direct relationship with any seminary or ecclesiastical institution. This is one of the reasons why several years ago vigorous debate arose between them and some scholars in Hong Kong, who mainly work in seminaries and institutions with an ecclesiastical background.[5]

A Historical and Sociological Analysis of the Phenomenon
In most Chinese societies Christian studies and especially theology are usually done in seminaries and institutions which are run by the church or at least have a Christian background.[6] The special feature of the emergence of scholars studying Christianity in Mainland China is that they have no relationship with existing ecclesiastical institutions and are all located in the cultural and educational system run by the communist government. The development of this remarkable phenomenon is worth further analysis from the historical and sociological perspectives.

After the communist government was established in Mainland China in 1949, and especially during the ten years of the Culture Revolution, the Christian churches were forced to surrender all their educational institutions, including schools, universities and seminaries, to the state. Subsequently they had to struggle for their existence and accommodate themselves to their new

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5   See Part II of *Cultural Christians*, pp.96-196, which contains all the articles of debate emerged in the year 1995-1996.

6   The Baptist University of Hong Kong, for example, was originally established by the Baptist Church and thus has a department of religion and philosophy; the Chinese University of Hong Kong has a department or cultural and religious studies (and a divinity school financed by churches as a constituent part) because Chung Chi College, one of the member colleges of the university, was formed by members of formerly Christian universities in Mainland China.

situation under an atheist socialist government. The general repression of religion ceased over 20 years ago and religious freedom is now enshrined in the constitution. However, since the churches' academic resources were completely abolished for such a long time the seminaries in Mainland China have until recently been struggling to produce clergy to meet the needs of the churches. They have therefore had no extra resources to devote to research and the institutional churches have not been able to produce high quality academic studies.

A humanities faculty is not complete without the study of religions, however. Ever during the Cultural Revolution, therefore, the study of philosophy, history and other subjects in secular universities included material on various religions, though this was usually present so that the religions in question could be "criticised". Once ideological control was relaxed, however, this material began to attract the interest of scholars in its own right.[7]

Despite the atheist stance of the communists and their eagerness to impose their ideology on every area of the cultural and educational system, it was an undeniable fact that communism was a product of the history of western thought. Its origin therefore had to be studied in that context; and one of the essential constituents of western thought is Christianity. Indeed, the writing of Marx, Engels and even Lenin include discussions of creation, original sin, the Trinity and other elements of the Christian faith. As early as 1956, therefore, the communist government was already planning to translate 1630 western philosophical works over a period of 30 years. This was the beginning of the process of introducing a vast amount of western thought into the Chinese cultural and educational system. Some older-generation Mainland scholars learned about Christianity in this way. The more important point, however, is that it prepared the human resources and experience needed for the translation of a large number of Christian classics and a large quantity of developing Christian theology in recent years.[8]

The cultural and educational system nevertheless provides only a necessary but not a sufficient reason for the appearance of serious academic Christian studies in Mainland China. There are plenty of academic resources such as seminaries and even universities with a Christian background in other Chinese societies, but none of these societies has ever seen such a dramatic growth in Christian studies as that which has occurred in Mainland China over the last one and a half decades. There must, then, be other reasons for this exciting phenomenon.

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7 Chen Cunfu, "Wenhua jidutu xianxiang de zonglan yu fansi" (Review of and Reflection on the Phenomenon of the "Cultural Christian"), in *Cultural Christian*, p.9; He Guanghu, "Religious Studies in China 1978-1999", pp.22-25.

8 Liu Xiaofeng, "Academic Studies of Christianity in the Cultural System of the Communist Party", in *Cultural Christian*, pp.67-68.

Liu Xiaofeng, a prominent figure in the circle, points out that although Chinese societies like Hong Kong and Taiwan have never experienced ideological control like that in communist Mainland China, they rarely produce writings that are widely transmitted in, and accepted by, the wider circle of the human and social sciences beyond the ecclesiastical institution; and the reason for this, in his view, is that Christian studies in these places are mainly conducted in institutions run by churches. Although the institutional churches enjoy complete freedom in these societies, they are to a large extent profoundly influenced by their fundamentalist and evangelical wings and have little intention of influencing the cultural and academic realms. What is more, although these liberal societies allow complete religious freedom, based on the political principle of the separation of church and state, the cultural and educational system is reluctant to let the institutional church have too much influence. A further consideration is that because of their Chinese cultural identity and their market-led economic orientation, these modern secular societies rarely listen to the voices of Christian intellectuals and they have limited audiences to make their discourse influential.[9]

Some Mainland scholars try to explain the phenomenon of which they are a part from a sociological perspective on the basis of their own experience. As noted earlier, communism is a product on the basis of western thought. More specifically, it is an heir of the Enlightenment and thus inherits its revolutionary character. It is critical of all kinds of tradition and its antireligious stance is only one of its may "anti" position.[10] Early Chinese communist intellectuals were inspired by this spirit and succeeded in their political revolution. After the communist government was established communism was not only the directive of the political realm, it was also transformed into an intellectual discourse for justifying and establishing socialist China as a modern national state. As such it not only combated western imperialism but also took a critical stance towards traditional Chinese culture as a conservative spirit hindering the acceptance of "advanced" communist revolutionary thought by ordinary people; but it is in this way that communism as a stream of western thought has accommodated itself to traditional Chinese society and become an autocratic ideology with the help of political power. [11]

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9 Liu Xiaofeng, "Academic Studies of Christianity in the Cultural System of the Communist Party", in *Cultural Christian*, p.71.

10 The Enlightenment spirit is critical of religion but not necessarily antireligious. The antireligious stance of most communist governments may partly originate from their political motives.

11 Liu Zongkun, "Xiandai yujingzhong de wenhua jidutu xianxiang" (The Phenomenon of the Cultural Christians in the Modern Chinese Situation), in *Cultural Christian*, p.47.

There has been something of a foundational shift in the cultural and academic world in this communist state. Although some radical Marxists still resist the development of Christian studies, they have in a sense become the arena for the expression of an inner tension within western culture between communist and Christian thought rather than of an external tension between an eastern and a western religious tradition.[12] Although it cannot be denied that at the grass-root level antichristian attitudes still arise mainly from national and cultural identity, among intellectuals nurtured by the communist government, who provide the major transformational force in the cultural and educational system, such attitudes arise more from an Enlightenment spirit than from an eagerness to sustain a cultural identity.[13] At an earlier stage, when the communist government needed to strengthen its control, it tended to treat those who embraced traditional Chinese cultural thinking as resisting the politically orthodox position of communism by a form of cultural nationalism. Meanwhile although the tension between Christianity and communism can hardly be eased, communist thought can never completely prevent people from studying Christianity, as Christianity is in a sense the predecessor of communism in European intellectual history. Scholars studying Christianity are of course very unlikely to transform themselves into a dominant political power in the Chinese national state.[14]

The communist government has thus completely transformed the ecology of the cultural and educational system for the sake of making communism an autocratic ideology in the modern national state of China. One side effect of this has been the suppression to a certain extent of the exclusivist stance of scholars embracing traditional Chinese culture in the academic realm. Meanwhile, through the communist cultural and educational system Christian thought has silently participated in the making of modern thought in this ancient country. Once the control of an autocratic ideology was relaxed in the academic realm, therefore, a wide variety of types of thinking had a more or less equal chance of developing and gaining popularity among intellectuals. This has been the scene since 1978, when Deng Xiaoping came to the political foreground and began gradually implementing his policy of "reform and openness".

The above description may appear too idealistic, so let us look at the concrete situation. In 1952 all Christian universities and religion departments in

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12 Liu Xiaofeng, "Academic Studies of Christianity in the Cultural System of the Communist Party", in *Cultural Christian*, p.69.

13 Liu Zongkun, "The Phenomenon of the Cultural Christian in the Modern Chinese Situation", in *Cultural Christian*, pp.47-50.

14 One of the reasons why Cultural Christians keep themselves distant from the institutional churches, although there is no bar to their becoming involved with them, may be that want to avoid being suspected of trying to gain popularity among the vast numbers of Christians in Mainland China.

Mainland China were closed. A few Christian classics were still being translated from the 1950s to the early 1970s, but they did not attract much attention because ideological control was severe in the academic realm. After the end of the Cultural Revolution in the late 1970s, a new situation developed. The communist government admitted the errors of the Cultural Revolution, and the belief that all religions are antirevolutionary was criticized as an oversimplified dogma.[15] All kinds of religious studies then began to re-establish normal development.

By now the scholars who had had formal academic training in religious studies and theology before the Cultural Revolution had either died or were very old.[16] Religious studies could now rely only on intellectuals trained in other disciplines. Of the five areas of research in Christian studies (see the discussion in the previous section,[17] the history of Christian thought (area 2) and the history of Christianity (area 3) have experienced the fastest growth. This was because although departments of religion had been closed for a long time some intellectuals were still able to receive training in philosophy and history even during the Cultural Revolution, and these people were now better prepared for study in areas 2 and 3 than in the other areas. Many of the Mainland scholars recently involved in Christian studies graduated from philosophy and history departments during the period form the late 1970s to the early 1980s. Some of them have gradually but successfully transformed themselves into scholars in the area of religious studies and a few in Christian theology. Some distinguished figures have had the chance to study overseas in religion and theology departments and have returned to reinforce the movement. Religion departments and research institutions thus began to be established in the state education system from the late 1980s after this generation of scholars gained sufficient research experience and acquired the relevant positions in the system. The number of translated works and even original writings they produced then increased dramatically. Now the younger generation nurtured since the late 1980s is becoming another major dynamic element in the circle.[18]

An Analysis of the Nature of Theology
A special feature of this phenomenon is that most scholars involved do not learn Christianity from the institutional churches but mainly through their own

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15 For an overview of the discussion in China, see He Guanghu, "Religious Studies in China 1978-1999", pp.25-27.

16 Before 1949 the Second World War and the Chinese civil war meant that most people in Mainland China were unable to receive a formal education.

17 Liu Xiaofeng, "Academic Studies of Christianity in the Cultural System of the Communist Party", in *Cultural Christian*, pp.65-66.

18 Chen Cunfu, "Review of and Reflection on the Phenomenon of the Cultural Christian", in *Cultural Christian*, pp.13-15.

academic studies and experience in translating Christian classics. It is not surprising that some thereby develop a keen research interest in religious studies. A small proportion – though the actual number is very few – even has a commitment to the Christian faith and has developed high-quality theological discourse. Liu Xiaofeng points out the significance of this phenomenon as evangelization without missionaries.[19] I would add that they in turn become missionaries and preach the Christian message to intellectuals without the aids of the institutional churches. Their writings are transmitted in the human and social sciences among Chinese intellectuals and the churches in Mainland China play no part in this process. This is a very special phenomenon in the history of Christianity, especially in the modern history of Christianity in Asia, and it directly affects the nature of the theology these people produce.

The importance of one point can hardly be overemphasized for the above phenomenon to occur: the lessening of ideological control in the communist state, which has led to a vacuum in both the public sphere and the individual mind and an openness to all sorts of ideas. In the academic realm a quasi-liberal situation has developed: all types of religious and cultural thought can be studied and appreciated, as long as this does not lead to the development of a social movement. Some scholars involved confess that they suffered from ideological control in the past and now find consolation in the studying Christianity in the new situation. As a researcher situated in Hong Kong I should admit that my interaction with the group of scholars studying religions in Mainland China is still limited. I can only try to predict the development of their studies, basing my conjecture on the assumption that ideological control in the academic realm will not revert to that of the Cultural Revolution. This conjecture is important, however, for an appreciation of the theological discourse these scholars are and will be producing, which is relevant for our theological reflection.

As I have stated repeatedly these scholars are working solely in the academic realm and have very little, if not none, interaction with the institutional churches. The result is that their studies and even their theology are produced in the realm of the social and human sciences and make use of the corresponding language. (Here I am mainly referring to Group C, the "Cultural Christians") They are therefore experiencing a great tension as they construct their theology. On the one hand, if they overemphasize their confessional stance they run the risk of losing their place in their institutions, as these are supposed to be religiously unbiased. On the other hand they acknowledge that it is because of their personal conviction that they are able to produce genuine Christian theological discourse rather than religious studies discourse. If they withdraw from this position, they will become members of Group B. This explains why

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19 Liu Xiaofeng, Hanyu Shenxue yu Lishi Zhexue [The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 2000).

Group C is few in number. They may be criticized by Group A from a cultural-national position and by Group B from a supposedly religiously unbiased position. Nevertheless Group C is the most active and influential of the groups. Indeed it sometimes happens that members of Group A who withdraw from their cultural-national position and members of Group B who are drawn from the Christian faith become members of Group C.[20]

Regardless of the changing inner dynamics amongst the groups and the number of scholars they comprise one thing is quite certain: they have to pursue their studies and do their theology in the realm of the human and social sciences and using the appropriate language. This is not their own choice but a given condition. Some of their works are "exported" to other Chinese communities, and scholars working in seminaries and other ecclesiastical settings have detected the difference in nature in their works. As communication between scholars in different regions increases rapidly and in view of the fact that the objective of some of the Mainland "theologians" is to establish a global Chinese theological circle, some theological reflection on the phenomenon is relevant. I believe that such reflection will also have significance for theologians in other Asian countries where Christianity is a religion of foreign origin rather than indigenous.

A Theological Reflection on the Typology of Theology
As a matter of fact, theological discourse produced in the realm of the human and social sciences using corresponding languages are not something new in the western world. Most traditional universities in Europe and private universities in the USA still have a divinity faculty or theology department. Nonetheless theologians working in such institutions since the time of the Enlightenment (for example Friedrich Schleiermacher, John Henry Newman, Edward Farley) have at times felt the need to produce a discourse of justification for the presence of their discipline in the modern university system. While theological seminaries run by Christian denominations operate outside the state education system, relatively value-neutral religion departments form in new universities, and here theologians find it difficult to involve a confessional stance in their academic discourse in the modern secular cultural and educational system. Therefore, although scholars in divinity faculties and even religion departments continue to produce Christian theology this has its own distinctive quality and is sometimes regarded as a type of "theology" different from the traditional confessional discourse.

In most Chinese societies there is a long tradition of the study of Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism, in university departments of philosophy,

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20 Chen Rongnu, "Contemporary Chinese Intellectuals and the Construction of the Sino-Christian Academic", in *Cultural Christian*, p.263.

history, literature, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies and of course religious studies. In such departments these religions are studied differently from the way they are studied in institutions run by the respective religious communities. In the latter case scholars can develop confessional discourse freely; but scholars working in the former institutional settings need to adapt their discussion to the rules of the above-mentioned university disciplines and may be required to justify the involvement of their confessional stance. As Liu Xiaofeng points out, if the study of traditional religions is to occupy a proper place in the modern cultural and educational institution it has to undergo transformation. Nevertheless, regardless of their own faith commitment, scholars of traditional Chinese culture and religions in universities in Chinese societies can still produce high-quality discourse accepted by intellectuals. The same thing can apply to the study of Christianity.[21]

The question of the transformation of the study of religion is a crucial one for Christian theologians in Mainland China. It also has significance for theologians elsewhere. Liu Xiaofeng has articulated the importance of producing this kind of Christian theology in the modern world. In any modern secular state, whether it is socialist or liberal democratic, the cultural and educational system (including universities, research institutes and the like) is the major environment where a religion or culture can find intellectual disciples and form intellectuals and even produce academic discourse. Nevertheless they are considered to be private sectors and it is difficult for them to extend their influence beyond their own religious communities. If the influence of Christian theology is not to be restricted to the institutional church, then, its discourse must be of a kind that is acceptable in the academic realm of the modern secular world system, we can see that Christian studies in the West and the study of traditional Chinese culture and religions in Chinese societies have constantly been adapting themselves to that system. Thus they can survive in the system as studies of ancient cultural heritage and continue to exert influence on intellectuals.

Some Chinese scholars have pointed out that the changes which have occurred in the last half century in Mainland China are basically a drastic form of modernization in a relatively short time-span. The communist government is attempting to domesticate a form of modern political thought (communism) in order to construct the "orthodox" cultural discourse of the national state in China (see the descriptions of this phenomenon by Liu Zongkun and Liu Xiaofeng). Although we are often reminded that we have already entered a post-modern age, the global project of modernization is still constantly influencing the social, political and cultural context. We should of course not unreservedly welcome this process, since it may conceal various forms of colonization. Nevertheless, whether we like it or not we are facing a situation in which local contexts,

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21 Liu Xiaofeng, The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History, pp.55-57.

cultures, traditions and identities are more readily transformed than ever before. Christian theologians should be conscious of this changing context so that theology may be able to play a part in the process.

The challenge for theologians working in academic circles in these circumstances is to produce genuine Christian theology in the realm of the human and social sciences which does not lose its confessional stance. If we accept the need to produce this kind of theology, then we need to examine how this is to be done. The discussion so for seems to give the impression that theology produced in ecclesiastical settings and theology produced in the academic realm should exhibit completely different qualities. The former starts form a confessional stance while the latter must originate in a so-called religiously value-neutral context. However if theology is to be genuinely "Christian" it must be based in faith in Jesus Christ. It seems, therefore, that producing a confessional "Christian theology" in the academic realm is basically impossible. Do we need to insist on a dichotomy between these two types of discourse, however?

At this point I would like to refer to Hans Frei, a theologian who has spent a lifetime grappling with this issue. Frei points out that the status of Christianity in the modern western world has become ambiguous, such that two mutually exclusive views of Christian theology have emerged. On the one hand,

Christian theology is an instance of a general class or generic type and is therefore to be subsumed under general criteria of intelligibility, coherence, and truth that it must share with other academic disciplines.

while on the other hand,

Theology is an aspect of Christianity and is therefore partly or wholly defined by its relation to the cultural or semiotic system that constitutes that religion. In this view theology is religion-specific, and whether or not other religions besides Christianity have theologians or something like them would have to be adduced ease by specific case.

In addition Frei points out that the first view sees theology as a cognate discipline to philosophy while the second sees it as closer to anthropology and sociology.[22]

Both types of theology exhibit problems by their very nature. Since the first type makes use of some existing philosophical system and its corresponding language to express Christian thought, it is not speaking first from the point of view of a believer but tries to describe Christian faith from a perspective that

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22 Hans Frei, *Types of Christian Theology* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), pp.1-2.

may not be commensurable with that faith. The second type, however, commits itself to the confessional stance and produce genuine Christian discourse. The problem here is that people outside the confessional circle may not be able to understand the language of the religious community concerned. Cultural Christians in Mainland China get into both types of trouble. They want to produce discourse from a confessional stance but must use the language of the human and social sciences. They thus suffer from a great intellectual tension.

Frei's unfinished project *Types of Christian Theology* may shed light on the matter. He thinks that Christian theologians in the West as well are continuously struggling to do theology in the tension between these two poles. Instead of simply dividing their works into two opposing categories, however, he finds that it is more appropriate to arrange them into a continuous spectrum with the two supposedly mutually exclusive positions at the two ends. In his system Frei articulates five typologies, with type one representing those approaches that are closer to philosophical disciplines and type five those that are characterised by a confessional stance. If one is anxious both to maintain one's own convictions and produce a discourse that will be understood, then the optimal choice would probably be the middle point, type three, which would be likely to produce the most balanced discourse between the two poles.

Christian theologians have in fact from the very beginning been faced with the challenge of encountering the context they are living in. theology addressed itself to the Greek and Latin cultures of the Roman world, and then to the Neoplatonism and Aristotelianism of the medieval period. In recent times it has been addressing itself to modernism and postmodernism. One of the challenges to theologians today may be that theology needs to appropriate the language of the human and social sciences. In other words academic theology may need to introduce history, sociology, linguistics, philosophy and so on into its discussion, or even restructure itself to fit the discussion of these disciplines into itself as a kind of modern science (to use Ernst Troeltsch's term becoming a *Wissenschaftliche Theologie*). The traditional way of doing dogmatics may not be an appropriate option in some circumstances. The mission of this type of theology is as follows:

Theology as academic enterprise and as Christian self-description in the Church must be correlated. Philosophy and theology must be correlated. External and self-description of Christianity must be correlated, and in each case, two factors are autonomous yet reciprocally related, but that reciprocity and mutual autonomy is not explained by any more basic structure of thought under which the two factors would be included.[23]

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23 Hans Frei, Types of Christian Theology, p.38.

In line with this aim, Frei points out that the correlation envisaged in type three must not rest on a tight method, but always remain an experiment and an imperfect one. Hence this type of theology must endure an ever-present tension, risking contradiction and confusion but trying to be hermeneutically consistent.[24] A theology of this type is "a carefully modulated way of articulating the faith philosophically but therefore fragmentarily, even though in a fit, descriptive fashion. At *some* point, though not too quickly, *philosophical* agnosticism has to set in the interest of full-blooded Christian theology." [25] Nevertheless, "*if* you're not a theologian of type one or two – that is to say, if you are *not* systematic in your correlation between general meaning and academic criteria and the specific self-description – you are not too worried about cutting your philosophical losses." [26]

Although the academic situation in Mainland China is unique, it is a worthwhile enterprise for theologians in other Asian countries to consider the issues arising; they are often neglected in Asian countries where Christian studies are conducted mainly in Christian institutions. If this were to continue, Christianity might be doomed to play a role only in the private sector but never in the public sphere affecting the making of modern culture. The churches might continue to grow, but Christianity might well remain with the status of a popular religion, unable to assume its full responsibility for transforming culture. Not only would it lose its role in the world, but the power of Jesus Christ would become irrelevant. [27] If the period of communist rule has accidentally and paradoxically created an appropriate situation for Christian study to become a formal part of the cultural and educational system of the state, this implies that the Christian faith already possessed the potential to influence the construction of modern Chinese thought in Mainland China. Liu Xiaofeng claims that this is a chance Chinese Christian intellectuals cannot afford to miss. [28] Are Asian theologians aware of the changing context in which and with which we are doing theology under the agenda of modernization and are we prepared to give of our best to the Master? I believe that this is a relevant and important question.

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24 Hans Frei, Types of Christian Theology, pp.77-78.
25 Hans Frei, Types of Christian Theology, p.91.
26 Hans Frei, Types of Christian Theology, pp.89-90.
27 Liu Zongkun, "The Phenomenon of the Cultural Christian in the Modern Chinese Situation", in Cultural Christian, p.55.
28 Liu Xiaofeng, The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History, p.4; see also He Guanghu, "Religious studies in China 1978-1999", pp.30-31.

Historical Reflections on "Sino-Christian Theology"

LI Qiuling
(Translated by Alison Hardie)

"Sino-Christian theology" (*Hanyu Shenxue*) has now been in existence for ten years, and has become a notable movement within theology. On the one hand, because its declared aim is to develop Christian theology, it has attracted attention in the religious sphere, particularly in that of Protestant Christianity; on the other hand, because it advertises its humanistic and scholarly content, it has attracted the attention of academia. In its ten-year development, "Sino-Christian theology" has given rise to a number of issues which are worth reflecting on.

The Origin and Development of Sino-Christian theology
In June 1994 the first (biannual) issue of *Logos & Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology* appeared, published by the Research Department of Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre in Hong Kong (which later became the autonomous Institute of Sino-Christian Studies). *Logos & Pneuma* was originally started in 1934 by the Norwegian missionary Dr. Karl Ludvig Reichelt, the founder of the Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre. In addition to spreading Christian culture, the publication primarily focussed on the cross-over between Christian thought and culture and Chinese traditional culture, and on the integration of academic research on religion with religious culture. After its 57th issue, it ceased publication in 1979. *Logos & Pneuma* is the revived form of the original journal, and is obviously intended as a continuation of Karl Ludvig Reichelt's original purpose. But what is noteworthy is that the words "Sino-Christian theology" were added to the Chinese title in the beginning; this was the first time that the term "Sino-Christian theology" appeared in print in Chinese, and thus it can be seen as the birth of Sino-Christian theology.[1] In the foreword to the first issue of the revived

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1 Sino-Christian theology should prima facie mean all Christian theology expressed in Chinese, or Sino-Christian theology in a broad sense. If so, then even disregarding the historical documents of Nestorian Christianity in the Tang dynasty, there was plenty of Sino-Christian theology at the turn of the Ming and Qing dynasties, and any Chinese-language Christian writing thereafter could be included in its scope. But fundamentally, the great majority of these documents were simply a rendering into Chinese of Western writings on Christianity, without any intention to represent a 'Sino-Christian' form of theology. It is precisely this to which the proponents of Sino-Christian theology in the sense in which it is used in this paper are opposed and which they endeavour to avoid. See Liu Xiaofeng, *Hanyu Shenxue yu Lishi Zhexue* [*The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 2000), pp.3-4, 7-8.

journal, the publisher gave the following interpretation of Sino-Christian theology:

> The subtitle "A Journal of Sino-Christian Theology" has been added to the revived *Logos & Pneuma*; the implications of Sino-Christian theology are, firstly, to develop Christian theology and its culture by means of the historical philosophical resources and social experiences of Chinese-language culture, in order to form a Christian theological culture imbued with Chinese-language thought and culture; secondly, to develop the subject of theology within the academic field of Chinese-language thought, and to establish a scholarly dialogue with Confucian, Taoist and Buddhist thought as well as with modernist schools of thought; nowadays, Chinese-language academia (especially in philosophy, sociology, history, politics and cultural studies) is actively developing its own academic space and models, and not following US and European academic paths; Sino-Christian theology should also develop its own academic space and academic models, so that Christian theology can become an integral part of Chinese-language culture and thought, and a component within humanistic scholarship; thirdly, it is the shared enterprise of Chinese-language religious studies scholars from all social areas within the Chinese-speaking world (the mainland, Taiwan, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, and the Chinese communities of North America).[2]

As for the intention behind Sino-Christian theology, according to the recollections of Daniel Yeung (Yang Xinan), an active proponent and promoter of Sino-Christian theology, who at the time was Deputy Head of the Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre and Director of the Research Department of the Christian Centre, and became the Executive Director of the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies at its foundation, it clearly emerged from the strategy of Liu Xiaofeng, the leading proponent of Sino-Christian theology and later the long-serving Special Researcher and Academic Director of the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies. The foreword to the first issue of the revived *Logos & Pneuma* quoted above was obviously penned by Liu Xiaofeng. But it was the serendipitous meeting, mutual understanding and cooperation between Liu Xiaofeng and Daniel Yeung, as controller of an operating budget, which ultimately allowed Sino-Christian theology to emerge. Daniel Yeung's memoirs can help us to understand better the aims of Sino-Christian theology. After recalling his meeting and discussion with Liu Xiaofeng, he writes:

> What surprised and amazed me at the time was his suggestion that the development of Chinese theology – in addition to the traditional church route – could, in China's particular

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2 *Logos & Pneuma*, 1 (June 1994), pp.8-9. In 2000, *Logos & Pneuma*'s Chinese subtitle was changed again to "A forum on Christian culture", which does not contradict the intention of Sino-Christian theology: "to promote research in Sino-Christian culture based on Sino-Christian theology and mutual inspiration and advancement with church-based research in theology and religious studies in humanistic academia." (See "To the new century" in *Logos & Pneuma* 12 [2000])

circumstances, combine the shared endeavours of Chinese academia, and the development of humanistic scholarly research into Christianity, with the aim of systematising and rationalising Christian religious studies, so that it would be recognised as part of the contemporary Chinese humanist tradition, and could thus have a fundamental effect on society and culture.

From then on I kept pondering on the relationship between scholars outside the church and the development of church theology. Considered from the angle of the history of the development of theology, how had ordinary believers within the church or indeed scholars outside the church reformed the traditions of church theology, and how had they acted as a progressive force at theological turning points in each historical period?

How could church theology and such humanistic Christian religious studies advance their mutual understanding and cooperation? That contemporary Chinese academia should spontaneously reconsider the essence and value of Christianity was, from the point of view of missionary history in China, an unprecedented historical moment: how should we respond to it?

What are the points of contact between the understanding of Christianity among Chinese academics from the 1980s onwards and intellectuals in the Tang, Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing and the 20th century?

When some Chinese scholars take part in translating canonical Christian works, through their Chinese and Western humanistic training together with their specialisation in Eastern and Western languages, will they become the interpreters of these classics, and restructure Sino-Christian thought? When the rich philosophical resources of the Chinese language meet the non-indigenous thought system of Christianity, how will they adopt, change or create new ideas, thus enriching Chinese thought itself? [3]

The appearance of Sino-Christian theology was undoubtedly an attempt to respond to these questions. But it is evident that it is by no means the "Sino-Christian theology" in the broad sense which can be understood by looking at the surface meaning of the Chinese phrase literally "Chinese-language theology", namely Christian theology expressed in the Chinese language. In the thinking of the two creators of Sino-Christian theology, these obvious characteristics should be apparent:

(1) A new understanding of Chinese language: "Chinese language" when combined with "theology" no longer denotes merely a system of linguistic symbols, but also includes the rich historical cultural resources which it expresses.
(2) The humanistic and academic nature of Sino-Christian theology: although Sino-Christian theology is still the theology of Christianity, it no longer

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3 Daniel Yeung ed., *Hanyu Shenxue Chuyi* [*Preliminary Studies on Chinese Theology*] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 2000), pp.viii-ix.

insists on the precondition of belief, but emphasises the academic study of Christian theology from a humanistic starting-point; coinciding with new developments in the study of Christianity in mainland Chinese academia, it can even be regarded as a friendly invitation extended to mainland scholars.

(3) "The aim of Sino-Christian theology": the establishment and development of Christian theology remains the aim of Sino-Christian theology, but it is noteworthy that this aim is no longer that of "bringing China to Christ" so familiar in the history of Christian proselytising, but that of the entry of Christian theology into mainstream Chinese culture; it is the enriching of the resources of Chinese-language thought by means of Christian theology, and Christian theology's incorporation into Chinese humanistic scholarship.
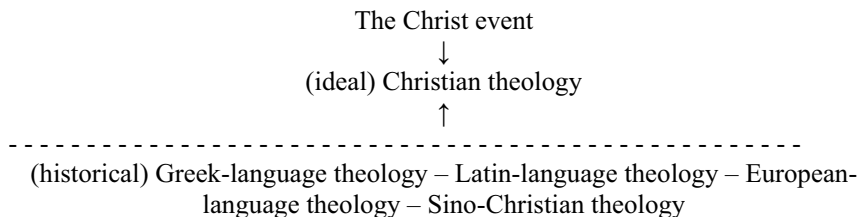
Somewhat later, in the second issue of *Logos & Pneuma* (spring 1995), Liu Xiaofeng published an article entitled "Sino-Christian Theology in the Modern Situation" (*Xiandai Yujingzhong de Hanyu Jidu Shenxue*), which he subsequently expanded into the book *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History* (*Hanyu Shenxue yu Lishi Zhexue*). He Guanghu, who had been a visiting scholar at the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies in 1995, while he was a research fellow at the Research Institute on World Religions of the China Academy of Social Sciences, published two successive articles in the Canadian Chinese-language *Regent Chinese Journal* (*Weizhen xuekan*), entitled "The basis and significance of Sino-Christian theology" (*Hanyu shenxue de yi ju yu yi yi*) and "The methodology and approach of Sino-Christian theology" (*Hanyu Shenxue de Fangfa yu Jinlu*). [4] In these articles, which were later included in *Modernity, Change in Tradition and Theological Reflections* [5] and *Preliminary Studies on Chinese Theology* (*Hanyu Shenxue Chuyi*) respectively, He Guanghu undertook a quite comprehensive discussion of Sino-Christian theology.

Although the emphases of Liu Xiaofeng's and He Guanghu's arguments were different, their basic line of thinking was identical, particularly in their discussion of the basis of Sino-Christian theology. In their view, the foundation of Christian theology is the word of God itself (the Word), but the Word can only become known through its inspiration of human language. Thus, language is the vector of theology, and the inspiring Word of God must be expressed through human language in order for it to be accepted by man. In principle, all languages can equally express Christian theology. Liu Xiaofeng used the

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4 *Regent Chinese Journal*, (1996) no.2 & no.3.

5 Liu Xiaofeng, Xie Pinran and Zeng Qingbao eds., *Xiandaixing, Chuantong Bianqian yu Shenxue Fansi: de yi, er jie Hanyu Shenxue Yuanzhuo Huiyi Lunwenji* [Modernity, Change in Tradition and Theological Reflections: a Collection of Papers Presented at the First and Second Han-Yu Theologians Round-table Symposium] (Hong Kong: Tao Fong Shan Christian Center, 1999).

following diagram to explain the tripartite relationship between the Christ event, Christian theology in its ideal form, and historical Christian theology:

The Christ event
↓
(ideal) Christian theology
↑
- -
(historical) Greek-language theology – Latin-language theology – European-language theology – Sino-Christian theology

In this diagram, the central position is held by "Christian theology in its ideal form". According to Liu Xiaofeng's interpretation, this is "the Word of God itself, and only God himself is in possession of theology in its ideal form"; "the Christ event" is "the historical revelation of God in person"; any ethno-historical Christian theology is predicated on the Christ event, and is "the concrete historical expression within the parameters of ethnic cultural-linguistic experience" of Christian theology in its ideal form.[6] Thus, theologians of Sino-Christian theology should not view Christian theology, along the lines of "indigenous theology", as Western theology, and merely aim to substitute the Chinese language for a Western language;

As regards the possibility of Christian theology in Chinese, the basic issue is that if the cultural-linguistic experience of Chinese-language thought is to accept and express the Christ event and to acknowledge Christ, Sino-Christian theology must, after a delay of several hundred years, consider the re-foundation of its expression, and emerge from the ideological straitjacket of indigenisation or sinicisation, to face directly the Christ event.[7]

In this sense, the relationship between Sino-Christian theology and other historical Christian theologies is one of equal "co-existence".

From the point of view of the vertical relationship (the faith relationship) between Christian theology in its ideal form and in its historical forms, the relationship between Sino-Christian theology and other theologies in history is one of co-existence. There are no early- or late-comers to the Word; all Christian theologies in history are faith events, and their co-existence achieves the shared accumulation of the cultural-linguistic experience of Christian thought.[8]

He Guanghu's argument further increased the emphasis on language. In this connection, he put forward the concept of "mother-tongue theology". In his

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6 For the diagram and quotation, see Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.89.
7 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.90.
8 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.89.

view, "In general, theologians mostly use the language of their native land, or at least the language that they mainly use in particular situations, to carry out their theological writing." This language can be referred to as their "mother-tongue.

Virtually all theological writing is in the theologian's own mother-tongue, or in other words, theology is basically all "mother-tongue" theology.[9]

What is known as mother-tongue theology is a theology expressed through the theologian's own mother-tongue, which has as its material the existential experience and cultural resources expressed in this language, and principally serves the users of this language.[10]

In this sense, the equality of Sino-Christian theology with other theologies becomes reality. "What is known as Sino-Christian theology is no more or less than a member of the great family of 'mother-tongue theologies', just like English-, German-, French- or Spanish-language theology."[11]

Additionally, He Guanghu has also pointed out the significance of using the term "Sino-Christian theology", and defined the methodology and future direction of Sino-Christian theology. For example, in comparison with indigenous theology, contextual theology etc., Sino-Christian theology's "inclusivity is greater and it is more neutral in its values", and it is better able to embody "the richness of the cultural content borne by the Chinese language over millennia", and so on. Methodologically, Sino-Christian theology should maintain the "instrumental principle" that language "is always simply a vector and a material, and cannot be used to alter religion"; the "openness principle" whereby it "must not only create but even more must absorb, must not only produce original writing but also translate, must not only develop but also collate, must not only be retentive but also be open"; and the "contextual principle" whereby "the 'existential experience' and 'cultural resources' of which Sino-Christian theology is formed should have no temporal or spatial limits, and should not be limited to the past while rejecting the present, nor limited to mainland China while rejecting overseas elements." The future direction of Sino-Christian theology should be "from inward to outward", "from general to particular", "bottom up" and so on.[12]

The Sino-Christian theology championed by Liu Xiaofeng, He Guanghu, Daniel Yeung and others is still fundamentally a form of Christian theology, and not Christianity as an object of study. However, the humanistic and academic status emphasised in Sino-Christian theology has much in common with the

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9 Daniel Yeung ed., *Preliminary Studies on Chinese Theology*, p.26.
10 Daniel Yeung ed., *Preliminary Studies on Chinese Theology*, p.27.
11 Daniel Yeung ed., *Preliminary Studies on Chinese Theology*, p.26.
12 See Daniel Yeung ed., *Preliminary Studies on Chinese Theology*, pp.23-53.

academic study of Christianity in Mainland China, and this has done much to call attention to Sino-Christian theology.[13] In the rise or revival of the study of Christianity taking place in Mainland China at the present time, apart from a few scholars who have received specialist education and training in religious studies, most researchers have come to the study of Christianity from philosophy, history, literature or other humanities subjects. Many mainland scholars may be indifferent to the rallying-cry of "Sino-Christian theology", and may not approve of applying the label of Sino-Christian theology to their research, but they can acknowledge and even accept the advocacy of Sino-Christian theology. They have no intention to establish or develop a theology for Christianity, but are endeavouring to carry out objective research into Christian belief, doctrine, theology, and history, and into the influence of Christianity on various areas of society, to explore the possibility or paths of dialogue, exchange or even integration between Christian thought and Chinese culture, and so on. This is precisely what the proponents of Sino-Christian theology also advocate. Thus the work of the two parties may to a great extent overlap, providing a foundation for further cooperation. The academic study of Christianity in the Mainland at present is scattered and inadequately resourced; its links with the outside world are limited, and research materials are in short supply. The introduction of Sino-Christian theology has had an obviously beneficial effect on this situation, and the cooperation between the two parties has been mutually stimulating; this has led some people to include within the scope of Sino-Christian theology the study of Christianity in mainland academia.[14] Therefore, the account of Sino-Christian theology which follows will also inevitably incorporate, with reservations, some research into Christianity currently being carried out in the mainland.

After its introduction, with the active encouragement of its proponents plus the positive response of Mainland academia, Sino-Christian theology can be said to have borne remarkable fruit.

The Hong Kong Institute of Sino-Christian Studies does not have its own corps of researchers, but has hosted several dozen invited scholars; from a small-scale start, the number of researchers invited to Hong Kong as short-term visiting scholars or guest lecturers currently stands at 10 a year, so that there is an ever-increasing contingent of academics cooperating in Sino-Christian theology. Moreover, the Institute also subsidises Mainland master's and doctoral students doing research on Christianity to come to Hong Kong on short-term courses, providing them with bursaries; there are now as many as 18 higher

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13 In fact, the original intentions of Sino-Christian theology included making use of the ideas of academics in China; see Daniel Yeung's memoirs quoted above.

14 Indeed, if we understand "theology" as the study of a god or gods, the objective study of the Christian faith can also be called a kind of theology. In so far as it is research carried out into Christianity from outside the organised Church and in an academic manner, it is basically compatible with Sino-Christian theology.

education institutions in the mainland which are in receipt of such subsidies, and about 75 bursaries are awarded every year. Many of these research students will be future co-workers on Sino-Christian theology.

The Institute of Sino-Christian Studies has been active in organising and participating in international conferences exploring the development of Sino-Christian theology, such as the 3 round tables on Sino-Christian theology held in 1985, 1987 and 2005, and it actively promotes cooperation between Mainland academia and Christian academic institutions in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan and in other countries, to widen the influence of Sino-Christian theology. The Institute has also established the "Tao Fong Academic Awards" for the study of Christianity in the mainland (consisting of the "Xu Guangqi Prize" for an original scholarly publication and the "Karl Ludvig Reichelt Prize" for a scholarly translation) and a prize for an outstanding thesis by a research student in Christian studies, in order to encourage academic research into Christianity at different levels and of different types.

The outstanding product of the Institute is its massive *Chinese Academic Library of Christian Thought* (CALCT), comprising the "Ancient Series", "Modern Series" and "Research Series", with translations of and introductions to classical works of foreign Christian scholarship through the ages, of which more than one hundred have already appeared. The great majority have also been published in simplified-character editions in the Mainland to great acclaim, and most of the translators are Mainland scholars. In addition the Institute has published collections such as the Tao Fong Translation Series. The Institute's periodicals such as *Logos & Pneuma* and the *Bulletin of the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies* provide a forum for Chinese scholars of Christianity in the Mainland, Hong Kong, Macao, Taiwan, North America and elsewhere. They are the leading periodicals in Sino-Christian studies, and under the banner of Sino-Christian theology they cover subjects ranging from the Bible and the ideas of theologians through the ages to all sorts of hot topics in the modern world; in fact they are quite comprehensive in their coverage.

All these activities have greatly advanced Christian studies in the Mainland, and have attracted wide attention and had positive effects both in China and overseas. The term "Sino-Christian theology" has even been accepted by some churches. Naturally, as well as positive acclaim and participation, some doubts have been expressed. In 1995 and 1996, a debate took place in the pages of Hong Kong's *Christian Times* (*Shidai Luntan*) under the heading of "cultural Christians", relating to research on Sino-Christian theology, in which eight scholars from Hong Kong, the mainland and Taiwan took part; subsequently the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies invited more than twenty scholars to write about this debate for collective publication in 1997 as *Cultural Christian: Phenomenon and Argument* (*Wenhua Jidutu: Xianxiang yu Lunzheng*). In 2000, the Institute again invited twenty scholars to contribute articles discussing the

advocacy of Sino-Christian theology and the resulting debate, which were published in *Preliminary Studies on Chinese Theology*.

However that may be, in a certain sense, the aims which Sino-Christian theology set for itself at the outset, namely "to develop Christian theology and its culture by means of the historical philosophical resources and social experiences of Chinese-language culture, in order to form a Christian theological culture imbued with Chinese-language thought and culture" and "to develop the subject of theology within the academic field of Chinese-language thought… so that Christian theology can become an integral part of Chinese-language culture and thought, and a component within humanistic scholarship" are gradually becoming reality.

Reflections on Sino-Christian Theology

In 1993 the Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre was simply one of many private academic institutions in Hong Kong, with no special status, and its Research Department, later (in 1995) to become the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, rarely had any particular academic influence in Hong Kong, with its many theological colleges. Although Liu Xiaofeng had made something of a mark academically before he raised the topic of "Sino-Christian theology", his authority in the theological field was limited. But that the rallying-cry of Sino-Christian theology, once issued, could elicit such an immense response, have a number of noteworthy aspects.

In the first place, "Sino-Christian theology" responded to a social need. From the 1980s onwards, China entered on an era of reform and opening up. Specifically as regards Christianity, the policy of freedom of religious belief was gradually reinstated and improved, normal church activities were revived, there was a sharp increase in the number of believers, the average educational level of believers rose, and a strong desire to understand Christian theology emerged. From another angle, China's opening up was, in a certain sense, in actual fact an opening to the West, and in these circumstances, cultural exchange between China and the West reached an unprecedented height; it was inevitable that Christianity, as the basis for Western culture, should be seen as something which people not only wanted but needed to understand. In other words, the interest of Chinese society at large in getting to know and understand Christianity increased day by day. This interest went far beyond anything that could be satisfied by the preaching of ministers in church. Moreover, in the particular social and historical situation of the Chinese Church, there was a severe shortage of clergy and particularly of religious theorists; with the rapid increase in the number of believers, the clergy were fully occupied in pastoral work and were quite unable to satisfy the demand of society at large for knowledge of Christianity. To some extent this demand stimulated the revival of research into Christianity in Chinese academia from the 1980s onwards in response. The development of

Sino-Christian theology at this point and its focus on the Chinese mainland can be described as extremely opportune and appropriate.

Secondly, the fact that Sino-Christian theology was not predicated on belief, but aimed to undertake humanistic, academic research into Christianity, lessened to some extent the opposition between Church and non-Church, believer and non-believer, and also between different denominations within Christianity; it provided a platform for scholars of different beliefs and viewpoints to explore issues together. Fundamentally, belief is arbitrary and exclusive. Innumerable religious conflicts and even wars in the past have arisen from articles of faith which were unacceptable to one side or the other, as well as from underlying political and economic interests. Even within the same faith, different interpretations could still give rise to sharp controversies, even to ferocious strife. Religious tolerance is a modern phenomenon in the West, and inter-faith dialogue is an even newer event. The rise of Sino-Christian theology is an embodiment of this zeitgeist. It not only encourages dialogue among the Catholic, Protestant, Orthodox and other branches of Christianity, but also promotes dialogue between Christianity and other faiths, and even dialogue between people of faith and those of none. This broad inclusivity is a funda-mental reason for the rapid increase in the numbers of those cooperating with it.

Thirdly, Sino-Christian theology advocates making full use of the his-torical-cultural resources of the Chinese language, to understand Christian theology from a basis of the existential experience of Chinese-speakers; this is obviously helpful in reducing the gulf between the Christian and Chinese cultures. The Chinese and Christian cultures are two different cultures which have developed separately with their own characteristics in two distinct geographical areas, whose ways of thought and values are in some ways incompatible. Since the introduction of Christianity into China, there have been frequent clashes between the two. The Jesuit missionaries in the late Ming – early Qing attempted to interpret the Christian faith through certain concepts from traditional Chinese culture, and did a lot to advance their integration, but the subsequent "Rites Controversy" brought all their efforts to nought. After the beginning of the modern period, Christian culture became the culture of power; although its spread in China was obviously successful in a purely cultural sense, further alienation was engendered by its forcible propagation. The "indigeni-sation" movement commenced by the Protestant church in China from the end of the 19th century was an attempt to reduce this alienation. Liu Xiaofeng has said that "the 'indigenised' theology of which he is a critic is of course also a type of Sino-Christian theology",[15] but from another angle, Sino-Christian theology can also be seen as a form of "indigenised" theology, although what it "indigenises" is not just the church's surface organisation, liturgy and language, but its inward thought and existential experience.

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15 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and the Philosophy of History*, p.4.

Fourthly, Sino-Christian theology advocates the introduction of Christian theology into mainstream Chinese culture, so that Christian theology can become an integral part of Chinese-language culture and thought, and a component within humanistic scholarship; this is in line with the current open spirit of Chinese society. Over all, Chinese culture is an open system, and Chinese culture today is in practice the outcome of multi-ethnic cultural integration. The absorption of an external culture is bound to introduce new life into Chinese culture; the introduction of Buddhism is often cited as a successful example of this. From the beginning of last century, China has been on an ideological roller-coaster; an important feature of this was the concept of the "orientalisation of Western learning". But the interesting thing is that while China gradually accepted Western ideas such as science, democracy and so on in the wake of the May Fourth Movement, it still excluded their root, namely Christianity. China today is once again in a period of ideological adjustment. Whether Christian thought, values and indeed theology can assist the spiritual development of Chinese society today is indeed an issue worth exploring and also a direction worth pursuing.

The development and achievements of Sino-Christian theology should be affirmed. However, Sino-Christian theology in itself exhibits some problems which deserve further consideration. These problems derive not only from the original intention of the founders of Sino-Christian theology, because the development of Sino-Christian theology is still being affected by these original intentions, but also from Sino-Christian theology's subsequent course of development, because this course cannot after all be constrained by the original intentions of the founders.

First is the relationship between Sino-Christian theology and the "tradition" of Christian theology.

The origin and development of Sino-Christian theology are largely inseparable from Liu Xiaofeng and He Guanghu's theoretical views on its legitimacy, direction, methodology etc. However, in the views of these two thinkers, we may detect a common problem, which is that they have "deliberately" evaded the "tradition".[16]

In arguing for the legitimacy of Sino-Christian theology, Liu Xiaofeng has put forward the concept of "Christian theology in its ideal form" which is "the Word of God itself, and only God himself is in possession of theology in its ideal form", while the Christ event is "the historical revelation of God in

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16 This "evasion of tradition" refers purely to Liu Xiaofeng and He Guanghu's views on Sino-Christian theology. In practice, they have both organised a large-scale compendium of Christian theological works in translation, as well as both carrying out a great deal of detailed research on the Christian theological tradition.

person", and all theologies in their historical forms are "the concrete historical expression within the parameters of ethnic cultural-linguistic experience" of the Christ event. To put it another way, they are the expression of the Word of God through human language. Therefore, there is no need for Sino-Christian theology to use one form of human language to replace another form, nor to "sinicise" or "indigenise" the expression of another form of human language; the Word of God should rather be directly received and expressed in the form of human language known as Chinese. Thus, the rich historical tradition of Christian theology has been lightly set aside by Liu Xiaofeng. Proponents of Sino-Christian theology must "directly face the Christ event" in the light of their own existential experience.

He Guanghu's argument is based on language being the vector of theology. If language is the vector of theology, the revealed Word of God must be expressed through human language, in order to be received by man. Any language may equally express Christian theology. Since "virtually all theological writing is in the theologian's own mother-tongue", then Sino-Christian theology "is no more or less than a member of the great family of "mother-tongue theologies", just like English-, German-, French- or Spanish-language theology". In fact, this line of argument has no fundamental distinction from that of Liu Xiaofeng; their underlying theoretical basis is that of the Platonic "idea". The Word of God is the single, ideal, unchanging, pure "idea" of theology, and the historical, actual theologies are varying manifestations of this idea. Relative to the idea, all manifestations are deficient, and the manifestations differ among themselves only quantitatively. In the same way, the "tradition" of Christian theology has no particular status either.

However, "directly facing the Christ event" is merely a fine ideal, which can never be realised.

"Christian theology in its ideal form", as the Word of God itself, can only be possessed by God, and therefore can never be grasped by man. In order to be understood by man, the Word of God must "become flesh". In a certain sense, in Liu Xiaofeng's logic, we can understand "the Christ event" as the "incarnation" of Christian theology in its ideal form. However, this "incarnation" of the Word is not abstract flesh but entirely specific flesh, that of the Aramaic-speaking Jesus of Nazareth. The Christ event took place in a specific language environ-ment, and without this language environment we would have no knowledge of the Christ event. When we "face" the Christ event today, we must do this through the New Testament, which took shape in a specific language environ-ment. The process whereby the New Testament became canonised as part of Holy Scripture lasted for several centuries; in this process, the Christian "tradition" was decisive in determining which writings became canonical. The Bible did indeed form the scriptural basis of the Christian tradition, and in a certain sense the Bible itself was also a product of this "tradition". In later times, while Chinese-speakers

remained unaware or barely aware of the Christ event, Christianity had already developed a rich tradition, and amassed a vast quantity of literature; this is a fact which today's Sino-Christian theology cannot and should not avoid in "facing" the Christ event. The present writer pointed out in a previous paper:

> Language is the cradle of existential experience; the Christ event is no exception but must also exist within language. In other words, in actuality there has never been a "general" Christian theology; from the start, some form of human language has always been the vector of theology. To take this further, Sino-Christian theology is not the result of Chinese-speaking Christians "facing the Christ event", but the result of Latin-, English-, German-, French- or Spanish-speaking theologians preaching the gospel in China. Alternatively one may say that the Chinese initially received the revelation from God not directly but indirectly through Westerners. Certainly "there are no early- or late-comers to the Word", but the "Word" which we hear is initially not the Word of God but of man.[17]

In expanding his article "Sino-Christian theology in the modern language environment" into the book *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, Liu Xiaofeng added the following passage:

> Of course, the Word of God is not outside the realm of language; it is the living, vibrant Word, the Word of the Holy Spirit itself, the Word which has uncovered the sinful nature of all historical words (writings and traditions).

"Language" here seems not to mean human language, because it has the ability to "uncover the sinful nature of all historical words". But Liu Xiaofeng does in fact give some affirmation to the Western Christian theological tradition:

> There are no early- or late-comers to the Word, but there are early- or late-comers in preaching the Word; the history of Western and Eastern Christian theology is the prehistory of Sino-Christian theology. Sino-Christian theology must enter into this history, and inherit its multiple strands. The starting-point of Sino-Christian theology's history of ideas lies of course in the New Testament and the Greek and Latin fathers of the church, and not in the Six Classics and the pre-Qin philosophers. To reject the cultural-linguistic experience of Western Christian theology as belonging only to the West may be a "rational trick" played by the national soul of Chinese thought with the help of indigenisation.[18]

Obviously, Liu Xiaofeng is here making some concessions to the Christian theological tradition, but he is still as hostile as ever to indigenisation.

Next comes the relationship between Sino-Christian theology and traditional Chinese culture.

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17 "Some thoughts on Sino-Christian theology", in Daniel Yeung ed., Preliminary Studies on Chinese Theology, pp.192-193.

18 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.91.

In Liu Xiaofeng's thinking, the position of traditional Chinese culture is even more hopeless. Logically speaking, since he emphasises that Sino-Christian theology is expressed in the Chinese language, and states that "Chinese language" refers not merely to a system of linguistic symbols but also includes the "existential experience and cultural resources" which it expresses, it should therefore be implicit in Sino-Christian theology that it values traditional Chinese culture. However, while on the one hand Liu Xiaofeng praises the fact that Chinese-language thought has amassed an extremely rich cultural-linguistic experience, providing unlimited prospects for Sino-Christian theology, on the other hand he also stresses that ideological resources are not concentrated in the ethnic system of thought. In his view

> Christian theology is faith-based rational reflection on and expression of the Word of God; this reflection and expression, as an act of belief, takes place within a particular ethno-historical and cultural-linguistic experience; considered in its historical form, it takes no more than two basic forms: either to base Christian theology on the ideological system and its expressive concept(s) which the ethnic language/culture already has, or else to seek the linguistic expression of the existential experience of the recognition of Christ outwith the existing ethnic system of thought.[19]

The first form, Liu Xiaofeng describes as follows: "From the first group of scholar-official theologians to the present, many Chinese-language theologians in succession have expressed their belief in Christ through a combination of the ideological system of Confucianism, Taoism or Chinese Buddhism with Western-language Christian theology"; he calls this the "ethnic principle" form. The second form "breaks through the ethnic system of thought and religious tradition, and directly expresses awareness of the Christ event in the language of existence"; he calls this "the embodied interpretative form". It is the latter which Liu Xiaofeng advocates.

> The good news of the Christ event is proclaimed to the primordial existential experience of the individual; salvation through the Word of God in Christ comes to individual lives in an ethno-historical context, and not to an ethnic "principle"; an understanding of the Christ event must be rooted in the direct, primordial existential experience of the individual, and not in an ethnic world view or view of life. Christian theology should be the outcome of the encounter of the Word of God with the existential experience of man and not with an ethnic system of thought.[20]

Here he clearly exhibits a rejection of the traditional Chinese culture represented by Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism. At the same time, because of his rejection of the "ethnic", "man" here is not "Man" with a capital letter, but man as individual, and it is the existential experience of the individual which

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19 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian theology and Philosophy of History*, p.93.
20 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian theology and Philosophy of History*, p.94.

encounters the Word of God.

It is indeed true that, as Liu Xiaofeng says, the ideological resources of the Chinese language "are not just concentrated in the ethnic system of thought", but "tradition" is not necessarily maintained simply through a "system of thought"; it can equally well show its great strength through the everyday psychology and way of thinking of a people. In a certain sense, "tradition" is precisely an organisation and summarising of "existential experience" in different periods, which is also imperceptibly present in contemporary "existential experience". It is certainly unacceptable wilfully to force a comparison between the Confucian, Taoist or Buddhist systems of thought and Christian theology in this way, but proponents of Sino-Christian theology, born and bred in this tradition, neither can nor should cast aside their "ethnicity", nor cast aside the influence which tradition exerts on them by various means, and "directly" face the Christ event purely in the light of their own individual existential experience. Individual existential experience will inevitably bear an ethnic stamp. In a certain sense, the legitimacy and vitality of Sino-Christian theology lies precisely in this "ethnic tradition". In this sense, the proponents of Sino-Christian theology can only turn their backs on their own cultural tradition, and face the Christ event through the medium of the Christian tradition and in the light of their own individual existential experience. This may form something of a constraint on Sino-Christian theology, but it is also a valuable strength of Sino-Christian theology.

Third is the relationship between Sino-Christian theology and the universality of Christianity.

Christianity is a religion which emphasises its universality and which is also a universal religion. The Christian God is not a national god but the god of the whole world; He is not a god who blesses a particular people to make them superior to all other nations, but one who wishes to save the entire human race. Although Christianity had a particular geographical origin, right from the start it "went out over all the world", "preaching the gospel to all nations". In this sense, Christian theology ought to make use of the cultural resources of all peoples, and should serve every member of every race.

But this is just an ideal Christian theology. One may say that such a theology has never existed. What has existed and continues to exist is a specific form of theology which makes use of the cultural resources of a particular ethnic group and serves a particular ethnic group, or, as He Guanghu describes "mother-tongue theology":

What is known as mother-tongue theology is a theology expressed through the theologian's own mother-tongue, which has as its material the existential experience and cultural resources expressed in this language, and principally serves the users of this language.

Though one might say that the historical "Greek-language theology" and "Latin-language theology" were relatively "universal", today's "mother-tongue theologies" already form quite a large family.

However, the particularity of "mother-tongue theology" has never obscured the universality of Christian theology. On the contrary, Christian theology, in the course of its spread, has generally been able to integrate successfully with local cultures, thus giving birth to "new forms" of Christian theology, while at the same time ensuring its own universality. It is in this that the great vitality of Christianity lies.

As a relatively new member in the great family of "mother-tongue theologies", the particularity of Sino-Christian theology is that it is a theology which primarily serves Chinese-speakers, with the Chinese language as its "vector" and with "the existential experience and cultural resources expressed in the Chinese language as its materials". However, it should be noted that this particularity of Sino-Christian theology equally cannot obscure the universality of Christian theology. The fact that it has the Chinese language as its vector is the fundamental characteristic that makes Sino-Christian theology Sino-Christian theology, but although Chinese is one of the most widely-spoken languages in the world, the number of non-native speakers who can use Chinese is extremely limited. If its only vector is the Chinese language, that is bound to affect the influence and currency of Sino-Christian theology. Therefore, Sino-Christian theology ought to try to use other languages apart from Chinese as vectors. Use of the existential experience and cultural resources expressed in Chinese as its materials is the basis on which Sino-Christian theology is founded, but to give due attention to the existential experience and cultural resources expressed in other languages is equally vital to the development of Sino-Christian theology. Particularly in the circumstances of globalisation, when the world has become a "global village", human existence is becoming more and more unified, and the cultural-linguistic particularity of existential experience is becoming weaker and weaker, this point is even more important. Primarily serving Chinese-speakers is the objective of Sino-Christian theology, but it should also look further a field: as a Christian theology, Sino-Christian theology should also serve the whole human race. Sino-Christian theology ought also to pay attention to the ever more urgent issues affecting the whole human race, such as environmental pollution, the crisis of natural resources, peace, cloning, etc. Sino-Christian theology should not just be talking to itself within a closed circle of Chinese-speakers, but should speak out in all form on all matters with which Christian theology should be concerned.

Fourth is the relationship between Sino-Christian theology and the organised Church.

Sino-Christian theology emphasises academic research, and advocates inter-denominational, inter-faith, and inter-doctrinal dialogue; it believes in the

encounter between the existential experience of the individual and the Word of God, so it will inevitably keep a fairly large distance from the organised Church.

However, as a result of the particular situation of the Chinese Church at present, and against the social background of the substantial growth in the number of Christians in China, many believers have become aware of Christianity not through the Church but through Sino-Christian theology, and the influence of Sino-Christian theology is all the greater among Christians of a higher educational level. This is the reason both for the wide acceptance of Sino-Christian theology, and for the anxiety of some people from the organised Church. How to ensure that its own development can be acknowledged or accepted by the organised Church and how to have an influence on the organised Church are issues worth paying attention to for the development of Sino-Christian theology.

In 1995-1996, when Sino-Christian theology was still in its infancy, a debate around the study of Sino-Christian theology took place in the pages of the Hong Kong *Christian Times*.[21] The starting-point of the debate was the fact that some Christian scholars expressed mixed feelings about the enthusiasm for an understanding of religion which was growing day by day in Chinese society and the study of Christianity which was just gathering strength. They had observed that "an interest in and desire to know more about Christianity" had appeared in contemporary Chinese society, and the response to this appeal came "not from the Church or the theological colleges in the mainland but from a group of academics teaching in universities or working in research institutes", and these scholars

were graduates of distinguished universities and had been trained or were grouped in Beijing and other centres of culture and scholarship; some had even been awarded Ph.D.s from universities in continental Europe. They are highly educated, able speakers, cultured, capable writers, and have a deep knowledge of theology, but this knowledge does not derive from the Church or from the seminary. For all sorts of different reasons, they admire Christianity, and are keen to increase understanding of Christianity among Chinese people, so they have translated many canonical works of Western theology and have written books explaining Christianity. But, because they have never had much contact with the Church, I am afraid that their understanding of the Christian faith, though correct, is not complete. They pore over works of theology, but seldom read the Bible; they engage with other academics, but have no church life; they discuss Christian theology, but distance themselves from the Christian flock; they are devoted to theology but not necessarily to God; God is an object of study for them rather than an object of prayer and worship.[22]

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21 All the papers from this debate and the discussions modifying this debate were later published as a collection by the Hong Kong Institute of Sino-Christian Studies as *Cultural Christian: Phenomenon and Argument*.

22 Lo Ping-cheung, "Zongguo Yaboluo yu Xianggang Shenxuejie zhi Jiuqi Weiji" [Chinese

Objectively speaking, the situation described here corresponds to reality, it continues largely unchanged to the present day, and those involved in Sino-Christian theology have no intention to change it. Sino-Christian theology is a field of study and not a belief; this is the original point of Sino-Christian theology. But after all, what is studied in Sino-Christian theology is Christian theology, and the many Christian believers are the main readership for Sino-Christian theology. Sino-Christian theology ought to pay more heed to the voices coming from the Chinese Church and from Chinese Christians, and should give more consideration to those issues which exercise the Chinese Church and Chinese Christians, so that their own ideas can be more readily acknowledged and accepted by the Chinese Church and Chinese Christians; this should be beneficial to the growth of Sino-Christian theology.

Sino-Christian theology is a unique phenomenon in the history of Christian theology. The scholars who work on Sino-Christian theology are mostly unconnected with the organised Church, and some of them are not even Christians. Sino-Christian theology's pulpit is not in the churches, seminaries or theological colleges, but in universities and research institutes. The audience for Sino-Christian theology is not confined to Christians, but includes anyone who is interested in Christianity. However one may regard this phenomenon, its growth and success have become incontrovertible facts.

"Apollos" and the Post-97 Crisis for the Hong Kong Theological Community], in *Cultural Christian*, pp.97-98.

The "Cultural Christians" Phenomenon in China:
A Hong Kong Discussion

Peter K. H. LEE

From the fall of 1995 to the spring of 1996 a series of articles appeared in the Hong Kong weekly newspaper Christian Times, exchanging views on the phenomenon of "cultural Christians" in the People's Republic of China. The participants included four Hong Kong theological educators, three Chinese scholars speaking on behalf of the "cultural Christians" in China, and one theological worker from Taiwan.

This article attempts to recapture the salient points at issue; it will show how the so-called "cultural Christians" phenomenon is seen through the eyes of some representatives of the Hong Kong theological world and how the spokesman for the cultural Christians explain or defend themselves. The writer of this article took part in the exchange, so that he writes with a sense of involvement, but he will try his best to be as fair as possible.

How the Controversy Got Started
The controversy was started by Dr. Lo Ping Cheung (Luo Bingxiang), then Chairman of the Department of Religion and Philosophy at the Hong Kong Baptist University. He wrote an article (in two parts) entitled "The Chinese Apollos and the 1997 Crisis of the Hong Kong Theological World".

The article began by referring to the "Macedonian call" and the religious fervor in China. The "religious fervor" is seen in the masses as well as in the intellectuals' study of religion in general and Christianity in particular. The author was impressed by this outburst of energy, especially in academic circles. He then said that this is a "Macedonian call" to the Hong Kong theological world to respond.

Dr. Lo used the expression "The Chinese Apollos" to represent those Chinese intellectuals who have developed keen interest in Christian thought, borrowing the reference in Acts 18:24-28 to Apollos, a learned Jew from Alexandria, who became an eloquent preacher on behalf of Jesus as the Messiah, but apparently with imperfect understanding. Liu Xiaofeng is a prototype "Chinese Apollos". He studied foreign languages in Sichuan University and philosophy, he was drawn to Christianity through Dostoyevsky and Christian existentialist writers. He later went to Basel University, Switzerland, to study theology and was awarded a Doctor of Theology degree. Though he received baptism somewhere along the way, he has had little connection with the

institutional church anywhere. A prolific writer, Liu then did his research and editing work under the sponsorship of the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies in Hong Kong.

Lo Ping Cheung in his article introduced other Chinese Apollos like He Guanghu, Zhuo Xinping, and Tang Yi, all of the Institute on World Religions of the China Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing, and Zhuo translated books on Christian philosophy, but none is a baptized Christian.

What is "the Macedonian call" issued by these Chinese Apollos or cultural Christians? According to Lo Ping Cheung, it is a call to the Christian theologians at a place like Hong Kong to rise up to respond to the challenge of religious-intellectual ferment in China.

But alas! the Hong Kong theological circles will find themselves in a crisis, come 1997, the year Hong Kong will revert back to China. There are four reasons for the crisis:

Firstly, the Hong Kong theological worker will lose their right to speak as theologians, because they will be no match for the Chinese Apollos due to the latter's academic output and erudition. Those Chinese who are caught us in the religious fervor will turn to the Chinese Apollos rather than the Hong Kong theological writers, if they write at all.

Secondly, the position of the Hong Kong theological spokesman is precarious. While Hong Kong is not without Christian believers who are in intellectual quest, they are unlikely to find nourishment from the Hong Kong theological institutions and Christian publishing houses; and instead they will have access to the publications put out by the Chinese cultural Christians, whose understanding of Christianity has certain impediments, however.

Thirdly, forced to the sideline, the Hong Kong theological workers will forfeit the golden opportunity of introducing Christian thought to the Chinese intelligentsia who are open to the spiritual quest, and that opportunity will be taken over by the Chinese Cultural Christians. Thus the Hong Kong theologians will lose their leadership role in the Chinese theological world.

Fourthly, the Hong Kong theological community is really ill-equipped to heed the Macedonian call from the intelligentsia in China: the theological output from Hong Kong is feeble; the theological workers mostly lack a broad cultural outlook and are unprepared for dialogue with culture, most of the theologians in Hong Kong are not fluent enough in Mandarin to speak to the Chinese intellectuals.

What can be done to meet the crisis? Dr. Lo appealed to his Hong Kong colleagues in theological work to expand their intellectual horizon beyond the institutional church, to broaden their cultural outlook, and to increase the depth of their writings.

The Hong Kong Theologians' Response

The first Hong Kong theological worker to respond to the challenge posed by Lo Ping Cheung was Leung Ka-lun (Laing Jialin), then lecturer and now president at the Alliance Bible Seminary. He wrote also a two-part article entitled "Is it a Debt We Owe?"

Dr. Leung welcomed the phenomenon of religious interest among the ranks of the Chinese intelligentsia and commended the rise of the cultural Christians. Yet he was more guarded in his estimate of the intensity of the so-called religious fervor and the numerical strength of the scholars and writers on religion. Further, he pointed out that these intellectuals are rarely steeped in the historical development of Christian thought and are likely to be attracted to certain isolated theologians or bits and pieces of theological learning.

Dr. Leung did not think that the appearance of cultural Christians is an uncommon phenomenon in history. The rise of the Chinese Apollos should not pose a threat to the more thoughtful Christians in China or Hong Kong. But he reiterated that some of the Chinese intellectuals who are interested in the study of Christian thought approach the subject totally out of context, so that they cannot really make an impact on Chinese culture. Leung Ka-lun took note of Lo Ping Cheung's appeal to the Hong Kong theological workers to broaden their cultural base and to open themselves up. But he felt that the Hong Kong theological educators really have enough in their hands in preparing people for service in their church. To ask them to assume the added responsibility of evangelizing the one billion Chinese on the Mainland is unrealistic. Besides, why should that be a debt owned by the Hong Kong theological educators?

Next, Joseph T. W. Kaung (Jiang Dahui) of the Divinity School of Chung Chi College, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, made a brief response. He was highly appreciative of the contributions of Liu Xiaofeng and the other Chinese cultural Christians through their research and translation work. But he could not see how they would pose a threat to the Hong Kong churches and seminaries. Most of the church leaders couldn't care less what these intellectuals are saying, and the Hong Kong theological spokesmen, assuming they have something to say, cannot presume to address theological issues for the whole of China.

Then I, the writer of this paper, submitted a piece (in two parts), entitled "The Self-reflection of the Hong Kong Theological Workers and the Appearance of the Chinese Apollos". The first part of my article began by rejoicing in the emergence of the Chinese Apollos. The "cultural Christians" have done considerably much by translating writings from abroad into Chinese and by writing down some thoughtful reflections, though I thought the Western "China watchers" tend to over-project their excessive enthusiasm. I was not as worried as Dr. Lo Ping Cheung about what he saw as the crisis facing the Hong Kong theological world. I shared Leung Ka-lun's concern not to add an extra burden to

the Hong Kong co-workers beyond what they could carry. Yet I felt that they should look beyond the cloistered walls of the seminary; and in recent years more and more well-trained theologians are returning to Hong Kong so that Hong Kong now has no small gathering of Christian intellectuals. I concurred with Joseph Kaung's point that the Hong Kong theologians cannot really speak for all of China.

The second part of my paper turned to encouraging my Hong Kong theological colleagues to re-orient their thinking and task, thanks to Dr. Lo Ping Cheung's warning of an imminent crisis looming in the horizon. I would rather turn such a crisis into an opportunity for creative response at a critical moment. I would not down-play the theological seminaries' responsibility to equip people for the ministry and to prepare them for evangelistic outreach. Evangelism, however, need not be confined to preaching the Gospel to individuals to save their souls or mass-evangelism American-style. It is essentially proclaiming the Good News to those who have not heard it before – and the potential audience includes the intelligentsia, a group who are Dr. Lo's primary concern. I, too, share this concern, except that I am more modest in my expectation from the Hong Kong theological co-works than he. Apart from their heavy burden with responsibilities for the Hong Kong churches, I happen to take the contextual-ization task seriously, so that I believe that the Hong Kong theologians should begin their theologizing task in the Hong Kong context. Granted, increasingly it is a Hong Kong-China context; but, nevertheless, being situated in Hong Kong, they should begin there, and then expand the horizon toward greater China. Of course, if it is authentic contextual theology, it will speak the Word of God in the given context; even then, however, the Hong Kong people should be humble and modest.

I really meant to offer a word of encouragement to my Hong Kong comrades-in-arms. I know their impediment – e.g. sectarianism, parochialism and institutionalism – but I would like to see them break out of their confine-ments, and I believed that they could, collaborating and upholding one another more than before. Supporting Dr. Lo Ping Cheung's interest in dialogue with culture and in interdisciplinary endeavors. I said that his university, the Hong Kong Baptist University, and the Chinese University of Hong Kong, have within their respective structures ample opportunities for faith-culture dialogue and cross-disciplinary studies. Moreover, the religion/theology departments of those universities can act as links between secular learning and the church/seminary. I concluded by saying that, if the Hong Kong theologians have the authentic Word of God to say, they have every right to be theological spokesmen, even if there are few star soloists, but they can sing as a chorus. Then, perhaps, a few of the cultural Christians or intellectuals for Mainland China will listen in too.

The Chinese Scholars Speaking for Themselves

Dr. Li Qiuling, Professor of Philosophy at the Renmin University of China, Beijing, who happened to be visiting Hong Kong at the time, read the discussions by the Hong Kong theological workers. Before returning to Beijing, he offered his comments, printed in a four-part article entitled "So-called 'religious Culture-Fervor' and 'Christian Culture-Fervor'".

In the first part, Dr. Li admitted that in recent years there is indeed considerable interest shown by Chinese intellectuals in the study of religious phenomena in general and in the understanding of Christian thought in particular. He said that that is a healthy phenomenon, following the collapse of the Marxist dogma which condemns religion as opium of the people. There are those of the intelligentsia who begin to realize that religion need not be opium but can be nourishment for the human soul. Li would not go so far as to say that China now witnesses a religious revival; with a good many of the intellectuals the quest is for knowledge rather than for religious faith.

In the second part of his article, Dr. Li gave a delineation of three types of scholars who might be called "cultural Christians". The first type includes those who pursue objective research on religions, including Christianity, with no religious commitments. They form the largest group, and their researches cover a wide range of topics in historical, cultural and social phenomena. The second type consists of those who, while approaching the study of religious with objectivity, show varying degrees of sympathy with Christianity, without necessarily calling themselves Christians. They form a smaller group (Dr. Li includes himself in it) than the first. The third type of scholars confesses their Christian faith. A few of these scholars have come to the Christian faith as they pursue their studies, while others have already received a theological education and then have decided to follow an academic career. The third group (of which Liu Xiaofeng is an eminent representative) is even smaller than the second. Li Qiuling questioned the suitability of the expression "cultural Christians" for all three types of religious scholars; he also feared that the term "China Apollos" has connotations which are too ambiguous.

The third part of the Li paper goes into a technical discussion of the issue involved in the academic study of religion. Dr. Li thought that religion can certainly be a valid object of scholarly study and that the scholar has no accountability to the religious authority for his/her research as long as the research is conducted in accordance with the canons of scientific study. The question of the subject of belief, that is, the believer as subject, came up. Li then quickly shifted to the Hong Kong scene where he saw the tendency on the part of some Christian believers to confine themselves to a narrow framework. He allowed for the possibility of inter-subjective communication, and he made room for the believer to critique scholarly research. However, he was wary of self-styled orthodoxy which shuts off communication or dialogue.

In the last part of the paper Li commended the indigenization/ contextualization/inculturation work that is being advocated or attempted in some circles. He seems to have suggested that in the process the persons involved in the theologizing or study or reflection can carry on meaningful dialogues. He concluded by a reference to Liu Xiaofeng's work as the editor of *Logos & Pneuma* (published in Hong Kong), which is devoted to the development of "Sino-Christian theology" as an instance of the contextualization process. By the way Li's paper echoes my concern for dialogue and interaction.

At the next turn, in chimed another Chinese scholar, Zhang Xianyong, who, having taught theology at the Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, is presently pursuing a Doctor of Theology degree at Basel University (without the endorsement of the leaders of the church in China) and teaching at Sun Yat-sen University in Guangzhou.

Mr. Zhang's paper, entitled "Response to the Chinese Apollos Problem", looks at the problem in terms of three "circles". A circle, in Zhang's use of the image, has an inner and an outer ring.

The first circle is the "sacred-secular double ring". Just as in the Acts account of Apollos, the apostles, including Paul, belonged to the inner, sacred ring, and took Apollos to be in the outer and less sacred ring, so the institutional churches in China and Hong Kong tend to look upon the Chinese Apollos as belonging to the periphery and as being less spiritual.

The second circle reveals the "Hong Kong-China divide syndrome". Zhang's reading of the Hong Kong theological world was that there are those who consider the Hong Kong churches to be the inner circle (Lo Ping Cheung and Leung Ka-lun) and the Chinese intellectuals (Christian or otherwise) on the outside periphery (although Lo and Leung differ in their strategic response to the "outsiders"). Zhang didn't see the same Hong Kong-China divide in Joseph Kaung and I, who seemed to him to maintain an "ecological balance" or call for inculturation as a step toward dialogue between Hong Kong and China.

The third circle intimates the "Han-barbarian tension". Zhang thought that some of the Hong Kong "inner circle" people still consider Liu Xiaofeng and the other Apollos to be on the fringe because the latter's contributions lie mainly in the translation of foreign works. Zhang thought that to be a misjudgment of Liu Xiaofeng, who, he maintained, has the commitment to write, and encourage others to write, Christian theology in the Han (Chinese) language for the Chinese people. If that puts Liu on the periphery, so be it, because being in such a boundary situation facilitates dialogue between the Chinese Christians (Han) and the Christians abroad (barbarians).

Sharp Hong Kong-China Tit-for-Tat
Leung Ka-lun, who was the first Hong Kong theological educator to respond, in a tempered tone, to Lo Ping Cheung's article on "Chinese Apollos", now

because more outspoken in his retort to Zhang Xianyong. Zhang's piece is clever but ambiguous at points, and Leung was impatient. In an outburst the latter reacted sharply to a remark made by someone from China that Liu Xiaofeng's showing up in Hong Kong is like entering a "no-man's land"; Leung said that he could show a long list of able theologians in Hong Kong. Leung reiterated the importance of the Christian tradition for the theological schools, which are different from research institutes carrying on research in a vacuum. He reacted against those intellectuals who look down upon the scholarly level of the theological professors and students, and accused them of "intellectual hegemony" and being out of touch with the masses. Leung was not against interdisciplinary studies but said that is easier said than done. The high-flying intellectuals may take delight in hovering from discipline to discipline but if they are Christians they should have roots in the Christian tradition.

Leung's article provoked a four-part response under the general title "Whose Christ? Which tradition?" from someone with the pseudonym "Po Fan", who is apparently from China. From the sub-titles it can be inferred that the article sets up straw-men to be knocked down: "Pride and Prejudice", "Orthodoxy and Heterodoxy" and "Which Tradition?" The whole piece is long and wordy but does not really speak to real issues and falls prey to *ad hominem* arguments. That would have been a sorry ending to a spirited exchange of views but for a thoughtful message from Taiwan.

An Analytical Resume from Taiwan
Chin Ken Pa, a theological worker from Taiwan (a Ph.D. student in National University of Taiwan graduate school of Philosophy then; now Professor in Graduate School of Religion at Chung Yuan Christian University), sent a piece entitled "Conflicts in the Hermeneutics of the Chinese theologians' Linguistic Turns".

At the outset the author noted linguistic ambiguities in the expressions "Chinese Apollos", "Cultural Christians" and "Sino-Christian theology". All these terms are associated with Liu Xiaofeng, actually the central figure in the whole controversy, who, curiously enough, never spoke a word in person in the exchanges back and forth. Chin then, Wittgenstein-style, analyzed three conflicts in linguistic usage by the Chinese theologians (Hong Kong and China):

1. Hong Kong languages. Beijing language. From the start Lo Ping Cheung called attention to the Hong Kong theologians' ineptness with the Beijing language (Mandarin), and behind that fear is the perceived superiority of the Mandarin-speaking intellectuals. Other from Hong Kong, however, have a different view of "the right to speak as theologians", fluency to speak Mandarin or not. The Beijing scholars' language is indeed of a different style, as may be seen in Po Fan's analysis of the Hong Kong theological world.

2. Churchly language vs. Scholarly language. Those who are immersed in the institutional church speak a language totally different from the scholars'. The former can hardly tolerate the latter, and vice-versa.
3 English-American language vs. Continental language. Whereas the Hong Kong theological educators have mostly received their higher degrees from universities in America and U.K., some of the Chinese scholars have been absorbed in the works of continental European and Russian writers. I might note, in parenthesis, that the European and Russians writings are less familiar than the English-language writings, and that for that reason the interpreters of the former seem to have a certain mystique.

Chin Ken Pa contended that the various languages cannot remain static and must undergo changes, or "make turns", but when the Chinese theological writers, whether in Hong Kong or China, cannot adapt themselves to the changes, they get into a jam.

Chin then devoted the second half of his presentation to the conflict between church-oriented theology and humanities-oriented theology. He used the label "radical hermeneutics" to characterize Liu Xiaofeng's theological stance. From Chin's characterization, Liu's radical hermeneutics is under the influence of Karl Barth's insistence on the absoluteness of the Word of God as the "Primal Origin" of the life of faith. Does it mean that Liu can rise above tradition and context? Chin was not clear. Yet Liu claims to have the aspiration to promote Sino-Christian theology. Can Liu square the Barthian "wholly-otherness" of God with his interest in culture? In his brief comments, Chin did not take up the question. Chin did suggest that Liu not so much extracts himself from culture as he takes an open attitude toward culture, i.e., the humanities. (Parenthetically, when I have the opportunity I would like to dialogue with Liu Xiaofeng more on the viability of inculturation or contextualization of Chinese theology from a Barthian perspective.) In contrast, Leung Ka-lun is seen by Chin Ken Pa to be a representative of church-oriented and tradition-bound theology. Actually Leung, too, pleads for going back to the original source of the Christian faith, but, nevertheless, if Chin's reading is correct, Leung frequently finds himself falling back on an apologist's position. To me, such a characterization of Leung Ka-lun is at best half-truth. From my acquaintance with him as a church historian and theological educator, he is keenly interested in examining the indisposed to interreligious dialogue and bold theological explorations. At any rate, Leung is definitely much more church-bound than Liu.

Whether or not Liu Xiaofeng and Leung Ka-lun are the prototypes of humanities-oriented theology and church-oriented theology respectively, these two theological orientations do exist in Hong Kong. I do not think that they need to be mutually exclusive; rather they should be brought into complementary interaction.

Chin Ken Pa paid me the compliment for being the most clear-headed of the Hong Kong theological spokesmen. I wish to thank him for it. Let me return my compliment that Chin's article is seminal at two points: (a) his Wittgensteinian "linguistic analysis" helps to clear up a picture that was getting murky, and (b) his invoking of Barthian thought opens up the question of a viable theology of inculturation (the question of "the freedom of culture for the Praise of God").[1]

Concluding Remarks

Looking back, in my initial response to the controversy, I probable painted too rosy a picture of the Hong Kong theological scene. On the one hand, I may have underestimated the entrenchment of the church-oriented mentality in Hong Kong (and China); on the other hand, I may have overestimated the capacity of the Chinese University of Hong Kong and the Hong Kong Baptist University to blaze trails for faith-humanities dialogue (even as some of the Western "China watchers" of the intellectual scene in China may have over-stated the vibrancy of the intellectual scene in China may have overstated the vibrancy of the religious-cultural ferment there). Lo Ping Cheung's warning on the crisis facing the Hong Kong theological community should not be lightly dismissed. Nevertheless, I repeat, I would like to see 1997 as a kairos for greater things to come. I still believe that there are enough talents in the Hong Kong theological community as well as the secular academia to act as catalysts for faith-culture dialogue and inculturation of Christianity in the Chinese soil. At the same time I am of the opinion that in the post-1997 era Hong Kong can serve as a theological interactions rather become a cul-de-sac (as Lo Ping Cheung feared). That makes me an incurable optimist, a compliment or an accusation I have received before. Ironically, Liu Xiaofeng was then located in Hong Kong, and I have heard both him and He Guanghu (another cultural Christian) saying that Hong Kong is a place conducive to theological and cultural dialogue because (a) in one place there is a concentration of talented minds, and (b) it enjoys freedom of thought. After 1997 Hong Kong will be "Hong Kong, China", meaning Hong Kong will be a part of China, and if tiny Hong Kong is really a good place for dialogue, then let the Hong Kong theological and academic communities open their doors more widely to welcome scholars and cultural Christians from the Mainland – and Taiwan too! – to come to exchange views, so all may challenge one another and learn from one another and enrich one another's faith and understanding.

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1 Cf. Robert J. Palma, *Karl Barth's Theology of Culture: the Freedom of Culture for the Praise of God* (Allision Park, PA: Pickwick, 1983).

Conceptual Differences between Hong Kong and Chinese Theologians: A Study of the "Cultural Christians" Controversy

Shun-hing CHAN

Introduction

A debate on the subject of "Cultural Christians" was sparked off in September 1995 in *Christian Times*, an independent Christian weekly published in Hong Kong, and lasted for ten months until May 1996. Eight scholars had spoken on the issue. Four of them are scholars from Hong Kong, three of them are from Mainland China, and one from Taiwan. The group of Hong Kong scholars included ecumenical as well evangelical theologians. Among the Mainland Chinese scholars, one was an academic involved in the study of Christianity, the other a theologian within the Chinese Church community and the third one a theologian not associated with the Church. The background to the debate was the rise of a number of Chinese scholars who were interested in the study of the Christian culture, as well as a group of Christians who were not formally associated with church establishments and who became Christian through reading Christian works rather than going to church. Among those scholars who actually professed to be Christians, Liu Xiaofeng was the most prominent one with the "Sino-Christian (*Hanyu*) Theology" that he advocated. The theological community in Hong Kong called these scholars who studied Christianity and Christians who were converted through reading Christian works "Cultural Christians". This is apparently a rather generalized allusion. Lo Ping-cheung (Luo Bingxiang), a Hong Kong theologian, compared these "Cultural Christians" in China to Apollos, a biblical character described in the Acts of the Apostles, and went to call on Hong Kong theologians to "play the parts of Agirppa and Priscilla to correct any inadequacies" Apollos might have. Lo's article invited response from a few Hong Kong theologians, before sparking off a rather heated debate between Mainland and Hong Kong scholars on the subject of "Cultural Christians". Peter K. H. Lee has given an elaborate account of the views of each of the scholars involved in *Ching Feng*.[1]

I believe that the "Cultural Christian" debate has been one of the most significant events in recent years for the theological community of Hong Kong, which has become a special administrative region under the People's Republic

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1   Peter K. H. Lee, "The 'Cultural Christians' Phenomenon in China: A Hong Kong Discuss- ion", *Ching Feng* Vol. 39, No 4 (December 1996), pp.307-21.

of China after its reunification with China on July 1, 1997. While the Chinese government has made a pledge that Hong Kong will remain unchanged for fifty years, increasing cultural interaction between Chinese and Hong Kong churches are inevitable. The conceptual differences between Chinese and Hong Kong theologians will have a definite impact on the development of Christianity in China as well as Hong Kong. Against such a background, the "Cultural Christian" debate serves as a reader-text for us to analyze issues arising from such differences. Although the ideas expressed by the scholars involved in the debate were not necessarily well-defined and some arguments were simply emotional, I believe that the debate was a genuine, conceptual interaction between Chinese theologians and Hong Kong theologians. An analysis of the arguments and values presented would serve to clarify misunderstandings and shed light on the possibility of future conflict or cooperation. This effort is crucial for the future development of Christian theology in both Hong Kong and China. Hence, this essay represents the reading and interpretation of the "Cultural Christian" debate by a Hong Kong theologian.

The Theological Ideas of Hong Kong Theologians Revealed in the "Cultural Christian" Debate

In the course of the debate, the Hong Kong theologians' understanding of the ideas, tasks and methodologies of Christian theology are revealed. A careful reading shows that there is diversity or even conflict of views among the Hong Kong theologians. Meanwhile, we do not fail to read some similarities in ideas between Chinese theologians and Hong Kong theologians.

1. Lo Ping-cheung

Lo Ping-cheung, Professors, Department of Religion and Philosophy, Hong Kong Baptist University, is the one who started off the debate. He expresses concerns and worries that the Cultural Christians have yet to "know more accurately about the Christian faith, because they are not closely associated with the Church. They are well-versed in theology but not the Bible; they are in close association with academics but they are hardly members of the Christian community. They have a passion for theology but not necessarily for God. They study about God but may not be praying to Him."[2] Although Lo does not explicitly mention his theological methodology, he does mention some

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2 Lo Ping-cheung, "The 'Apolloses' of the Contemporary China: Chinese 'Cultural Christians' and the Post-97 Crisis for the Hong Kong Theological Community (Part I)", *Christian Times* 419 (September 10, 1995), p.10. (Editors' note - The articles published in *Christian Times* are in Chinese, but due to the limit of space, no transliteration of the titles of the articles will be provided in this chapter.)

normative rules: the theologian should lead a pious life (reading the Bible, going to church, being part of a faith community, loving God, praying to God, etc.) apart from the normal academic life (reading academic works, associating with academics, teaching theology, etc.). Scholarship goes with piety. Lo suggests, "Hong Kong theologians should play the parts of Agrippa and Priscilla to correct any inadequacies of Apollos."[3]

Lo also proclaims what he sees as the task of Christian theology in Hong Kong: (1) "While serving the Church community is the primary task of theologians, the intellectual class who shows interest in the Christian faith should not be ignored. There are plenty of such intellectuals in China. Theologians in Hong Kong should look beyond the walls of the Church and try to reach the academic group." In this respect, "theologians at the Baptist University and the Chinese University should share the work with their counterparts who teach in independent seminaries." (2) Theologians in Hong Kong "should be engaged in more dialogues with academics of other disciplines and enrich our general knowledge in contemporary disciplines such as social science and natural science.[4]

Lo's criterion on "scholarship and piety" raises the objection of Li Qiuling, Professor, Department of Philosophy, Renmin (People's) University of China. Commenting from an academic point of view, Li maintains that "the academics in China and the theologians in Hong Kong do not have a common set of criteria. The criteria of the academic are the criteria of culture, while the criteria of the theologian are the criteria of faith… The academic community is not accountable to the Church or the theological community. The ultimate criterion in evaluating any study is whether it is scientific. The study should be based on factual evidence and be logically viable. Sometimes we may add social accountability as an additional norm, to see whether the study brings benefits to the society as a whole." However, he also maintains that this does not mean the theological community has no right to criticize the studies of the academic community. If academics have the right to discuss the faith of the theologians, then of course theologians have the right to comment on the validity of these studies. But neither party should impose its own standards on the other."[5] As a response to the subject of "scholarship and piety," Li's views are that the common criteria for theological dialogue between Hong Kong and Chinese theologians could only be criteria relating to scholarship, not these relating to piety. Li's views are later accepted by Lo, who clarifies his views by saying that

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3   Lo Ping-cheung, "The 'Apolloses' of the Contemporary China (Part I)", p.10.
4   Lo Ping-cheung, "The 'Apolloses' of the Contemporary China (Part I)", p.10.
5   Li Qiuling, "The Interaction between Theology and Culture: the Mixed Feeling of the Hong Kong Theological Community towards the Rise of the So-called 'Chinese Apolloses' Part III: The Right of the Mainland Academic Community to Study Christianity", *Christian Times* 435 (December 31, 1995), p.10.

"his 'scholarship-piety' requirement applies only to theologians who profess the faith but are not associated with the established Church," not to those scholars in Christianity in general.[6]

Lo's first plea for the cultural mission of Christian theology is related to Bo Fan's discussion of the "culture orientation" of the "Sino-Christian Theology." According to Bo Fan, "the confession of faith (I believe) is based on experience and reflections of the self, and therefore has a natural link to forms of literature and philosophy… Hence the theology of 'I believe' is necessarily a (secular) cultural theology".[7] Lo's "cultural mission" seems to echo with Bo Fan's "cultural orientation", but in fact Lo is more concerned with the evangelical mission of theology among the academics, while Bo Fan is discussing the subject matter of theology. Although both emphasize cultural mission of Christian theology among academics, their basic beliefs are quite apart.

Locally, Leung Ka-lun (Liang Jialin) is not very enthusiastic about Lo's cultural mission. "I am perfectly aware that the present 'ideological vacuum' in China, emerging as a result of the waning of the official ideology, offers a golden opportunity for Christianity to strive for a greater presence in China. Having said that, however, I believe that the task of shaping the future of Chinese and Hong Kong cultures is too immense for the Hong Kong Church and its theological community."[8] Leung's response indicates the differing views on the tasks of Christian theology in the developments in Hong Kong and China between a seminary theologian and a university theologian.

Lo's second cultural mission is also related to the basis for the "Sino-Christian Theology" proposed by Bo Fan. "The future Chinese Language Theology will be a theology with the Chinese Language (*Hanyu*), one of the secular languages in the broad sense (the 'cultural-existential

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6 Lo Ping-cheung subsequently accepted the criticism of Li Qiuling and admitted that the allusion of "Cultural Christians" should not include all Chinese scholars of Christianity generally. Three types of scholars should be differentiated: 1) scholars with no personal affiliation to Christianity; 2) scholars who do not profess to be Christians but who nevertheless show a certain degree of approval and favour; and 3) scholars who profess to be Christians but who are not associated with the established churches. Lo further pointed out that the second type should be regarded as Apollos in an early stage who has been "not yet corrected by Agrippa and Priscilla", whereas the third type would be Apollos at a later stage. Lo Ping-cheung, "Jingda Pipingzhe" (Reply to Critics), in Institute of Sino-Christian Studies (ed.), *Wenhua Jidutu: Xianxiang yu Lunzheng* [Cultural Christian: Phenomenon and Argument] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 1997), pp.202-203.

7 Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part II: Orthodoxy and Heresy", *Christian Times* 451 (April 21 1996), p.8.

8 Leung, Ka-lun, "Must We Apologize? (Part II)", *Christian Times* 422 (October 1, 1995), p.10.

context') as its resources and modern philosophy, poetry and social theories as its means of expression."[9] Both Lo and Bo Fan stress the interaction between Christian theology and Chinese culture, philosophy, natural science and social science. However, Lo believes that theologians should have knowledge in classical Chinese. Chinese culture, social science and natural science because only in this way could they engage in dialogue with scholars of other disciplines. His concerns are purely a technical problem. Bo Fan, on the other, wants to draw upon the Chinese Language, modern philosophy, poetry and social theories as the resources or means for theological construction. Lo and Bo Fan have great differences in the basic concept of the subject matter of theology and in the choice of elements in constructing theology. This difference apparently underlies the reason for the conflict between Chinese and Hong Kong theologies, and is worth further investigation.

2. Leung Ka-lun

The second Hong Kong theologian involved is Leung Ka-lun of the Alliance Theological Seminary. Coming from an evangelical tradition, Leung criticized the "Cultural Christian" of "two breakaways in methodology". First they do not follow the traditional approach of theological studies which begins with biblical hermeneutics and biblical theology, goes on the historical and systematic theologies and develops into applied or pragmatic theology. "They typically neglect biblical studies in analyzing the ideas of various theologians." Second, they tend to break away from historical contexts. The "Cultural Christians" have little regard for the religious communities or theological tradition of the theologies under study... and tend to paraphrase their ideas."[10]

In another article, Leung further explains his understanding of the task of theology by quoting Emil Brunner as follows: "The intellectual enterprise which bears the traditional title 'dogmatics' takes place within the Christian Church. It is this that distinguishes it from similar intellectual undertakings, especially within the sphere of philosophy, as that is understood... We study dogmatics as members of the Church, with consciousness that we have a commission from the Church, due to a compulsion which can only arise within the Church."[11] Here, we see Leung revealing his own approach to theology. He believes that a theological study is an integral part of dogmatics, a duty commissioned by the Church.

Zhang Xianyong (Richard X. Y. Zhang), formerly lecturer of the Nanjing Theological Seminary and currently teaching at Sun Yat-sen University, agreed

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9 Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part II: Orthodoxy and Heresy", p.8.
10 Leung, Ka-lun, "Must We Apologize? (Part I)", *Christian Times* 421 (September 24, 1995), p.10.
11 Leung, Ka-lun, "A Discussion with Zhang Xianyong on Issues relating 'Cultural Christians' (Part II)", *Christian Times* 444 (March 3, 1996), p.10.

with Leung's criticism of the two "breakaways", saying that "those within the circle [of the Church]"will have no problem agreeing with Leung's criticism.[12] Note that the "circle" here refers to the Church circle. The implication, I guess, is twofold. First, Leung's criticisms are valid as a common ground only for Chinese and Hong Kong theologians within the Church circle, but not those "Cultural Christians" outside the circle. Second, Zhang Himself is speaking from the inside of the circle. Zhang's position is crucial, especially when compared to Bo Fan's position.

Bo Fan explicitly states that he cannot accept Leung's theological ideas. He accuses Leung of "unconsciously ascertaining the priority of 'orthodoxy' or 'mainstream' theology and the position of Church dogmatics, the authority of which he does not prove (or deem any proof necessary), is more privileged than others in the study of theology."[13] Bo Fan points out that while there are certain limitations in the types of knowledge and methodology that Chinese scholars are acquainted with, their "non-ecclesiastical" nature is unlikely to change. He mocks at Leung's comments by saying: "Even if the 'mainstream' or 'orthodox' theological community could afford a supervisory role, what more can it do besides 'monitoring' the errors of these non-orthodox scholars, 'making orthodox views available' and 'refraining from pouring out excessive praise'? How do we differentiate between the 'mainstream' and the 'minority'? How do we define 'orthodoxy' against 'non-orthodoxy'? May be we need to rethink about it."[14] Bo Fan's comments correspond with Zhang's, and highlight the fundamental difference between Chinese and Hong Kong scholars in their attitude towards theological studies: some Chinese scholars reject the ecclesias- tical and dogmatic norms for theology to which Hong Kong theologians attach great importance, and actually propose to redefine such norms.

Meanwhile, there is also diversity among the views of the Chinese scholars. While Zhang looks at the issue from the inside of the church circle, and accepts the ecclesiastical and dogmatic tradition of theology, Bo Fan radically rejects such norms. This difference is worth our attention.

3. Joseph Kaung
When we compare the third speaker from the Hong Kong theological community with Lo and Leung, the situation is even more complex. Joseph T.

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12 Zhang Xianyong, "The Community within the Circle and the Community Outside: A Response to the Issue of 'Chinese Apolloses' - The Third Circle: Between the Periphery and the Centre of Chinese Culture", *Christian Times* 441 (February 11, 1996), p.11.

13 Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part I: Pride and Prejudice." *Christian Times* 450 (April 14, 1996), p.9.

14 Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part I: Pride and Prejudice", p.9.

W. Kaung (Jiang Dahui), the Divinity School of Chung Chi College, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, comes from an ecumenical (or liberal) tradition. He belongs to one of those to whom Lo's pleas to "look beyond the walls of the Church and try to reach the academic group and engage in more dialogues with academics of other disciples" and to "correct the inadequacies of Apollos" is directed. However, Kaung maintains that he welcomes the rise of "Cultural Christians" in China and proposes they should not be asked to follow the norms of the Hong Kong theological community, because any such requirements would deprive them of their characteristics. Kaung believes that "it was necessary for a scholar to keep a distance from the subject of study. As theology represents reflection on faith, doing theology should be a second order activity. A theologian studies religious faith but does not engage directly in religious activities.[15] This concept in methodology is strictly different from Lo and Leung, who emphasize the role of Church and dogmatics.

Kaung's idea on doing theology reflects heritage of Professor Philip Shen, one of the founders of the ecumenical theological tradition of Chung Chi. According to Shen, theology is the believer's purposeful reflection by reason. Such reflection can be distinguished into different orders. The first order is reflection on humanity, life and the world (ultimate realities) based on faith or the elements given or presupposed by faith (such as the Bible and traditions). The second order is reflection on faith itself and its given or presupposed elements (including the ultimate basis of faith). Theological studies may be regarded as a second order activity.[16] In other words, theological studies are not a part of dogmatics. Rather, the Church and the dogmas are the objects to which theological reflection is directed.

Kaung further points out that the theological community of Hong Kong has been dominated by British and American theologians, playing the role of a "distributor". Kaung believes that the threat of western theologians is more serious than the threat of the "Chinese Apostles", more likely to "stifle the development of the local theological community". In fact, Kaung is a proponent of the "de-colonialization" of theology, and has made this comment on the idea and task of Christian theology: "All theologies are contextual theologies, constructed by theologians living in a particular time and space in an attempt to understand, respond to and provide a context for the substance of the faith on a contemporary basis. Hong Kong Christians living in this particular time and space should also renew their efforts in theological

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15 Joseph Kaung, "Chinese Apolloses: A Crisis?", *Christian Times* 423 (October 8, 1995), p.10

16 Philip Shen, "Methodology in Theology", in Chan Shunhing ed., *Xinyangde Tiankong: Jidujiao Shenxue Daoyin* [*Invitation to Theology*] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Christian Institute, 1994), pp.119-20.

reflection in an attempt to construct a Hong Kong theology."[17] The claim that "all theologies are contextual theologies" is diametrically different from Leung's proposition that "theology is dogmatics". Rather, it is comparable to the "cultural-existential context", the basis for the Sino-Christian Theology as suggested by Bo Fan.

In Bo Fan's opinion, human beings receive the grace of God in a "cultural-existential context". The existence of a person is first rooted in a culture, not in a church. The cross exists only in the "cultural-existential context". Therefore the theology of "I believe" is necessarily "a (secular) cultural theology but not an ecclesiastical theology."[18] Although both Kaung and Bo Fan lay emphasis on the idea of context, to the broader cultural and philosophical realms in which one exists but not the particular social, political, economic and cultural contexts, as underpinned by Bo Fan's statement: "The existential and intellectual contexts of that 'one person' (Kierkegaard) render geographical division (between China and the West or between Hong Kong and Mainland China) irrelevant – essentially they are part of context of the self."[19] This is the key difference between the "Sino-Christian Theology" proposed by some scholars from Mainland China and the "Contextual Theology" proposed by ecumenical Hong Kong theologians.

4. Peter K. H. Lee

The fourth Hong Kong theologian speaking in the debate is Peter K. H. Lee (Li Jingxiong), former director of the Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and professor of theology and culture at Hong Kong Lutheran Theological Seminary. As a veteran ecumenical scholar, Lee comments on the problem of "Theological spokesmanship", that is the question of authority: "Who is the spokesman for theology?" Since what is to be spoken is the knowledge from God, so whoever is able to teach this knowledge is a spokesman for theology. There could be different classes of spokesman for theology. A genuine professor of theology is one who has made an effort rationalizing the knowledge from God and teaching theology in his or her own right or as a successor of a tradition. Others, such as priests, church leaders, Christian intellectuals and professionals and theological scholars, may also speak on theological issues as long as they are able to produce discourses which show the light of revelation in a rational manners."[20] Are the "Cultural Christians" qualified to speak on theological matters then? Lee goes onto point out that

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17 Joseph, Kaung, "The Decolonialization of Theology", in Chan Shunhing ed., *Xinyangde Tiankong: Jidujiao Shenxue Daoyin* [*Invitation to Theology*], p.270.

18 Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part II: Orthodoxy and Heresy", p.8.

19 Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part II: Orthodoxy and Heresy", p.8.

20 Peter K. H. Lee, "Reflections of Hong Kong Theologians and the Rise of Chinese Apolloses (Part I)", *Christian Times* 429 (November 12, 1995), p.10.

"the 'Cultural Christians' have yet to meet the necessary conditions for such authority to speak. There are indeed a number of outstanding 'Cultural Christians', but I do not see how they could speak comprehensively on behalf of orthodox theology. Besides, their major tasks are only translating and introducing foreign theology."[21] Here, Lee has spoken on revelation, the Christian community and orthodoxy of theology.

Lee's ideas are in significant conflict with Bo Fan's idea of the "Sino-Christian Theology". Bo Fan's concepts of the "direct confrontation with the Christ-event", "the confession of the individual", and the "denial of the orthodoxy defined by the Hong Kong theological community" are in sharp contrast to Lee. This will be dealt with further in the next section on the ideas of the Chinese Cultural Christians.

Although Lee is an ecumenical theologian by tradition, his idea on the subject matter and methodology of theology is obviously different from Kaung, another ecumenical theologian. In response to Lee's description of "a genuine professor of theology" as "one who has made an effort rationalizing the knowledge from God and teaching theology in his or her own right or as a successor of a tradition" and the right of others to speak on theology "as long as they are able to produce discourses which show the light of revelation in a rational manner", Kaung is likely to point out that rationalizing the light of revelation from God into proper discourses is reflection by reason in the first order. The work of a professor of theology should be to study these discourses, namely to engage in a second order reflection. Lee and Kaung are in apparent disagreement even as they both come from an ecumenical tradition.

Lee also comments on the evangelical and ecumenical traditions. He points out that the evangelical churches in Hong Kong are all "imported" from the West, and he also notes that "denominationalism which refuses to be open to new ideas has little future". On the ecumenical tradition, Lee names the Chung Chi Divinity School as the most open-minded among seminaries in Hong Kong. "There is a negative side to this openness: the lack of commitment. There is also a positive side: faithfulness accompanied by a broad vision. Both sides are seen at Chung Chi."[22] Lee's remark gives further evidence to the contrary of theological traditions in Hong Kong, and proves to the contrary of a view expressed in the debate to the effect that Hong Kong theologians are excluding Chinese scholars from the intellectual circle.

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21 Peter K. H. Lee, "Reflections of Hong Kong Theologians and the Rise of Chinese Apolloses (Part I)", p.10.

22 Peter Lee stopped short of further elaboration on his comment on Chung Chi Theology of "lack of commitment". Nevertheless, his comment did confirm the diversified nature of theological traditions in Hong Kong. See Peter K. H. Lee, "Reflections of Hong Kong Theologians and the Rise of Chinese Apolloses (Part II)", *Christian Times* 429 (November 12, 1995), p.10.

More importantly, Lee also expresses his views on the future task of theology in Hong Kong. Lee points out that the context of Hong Kong would be linked to the context of China after reunification in 1997. By that time, what Hong Kong theologians should be working on is neither a "Hong Kong Theology" nor a "Chinese Theology," but rather a "Hong Kong-Chinese Theology". He proposes a direction which may be called theology of "inculturation". Lee further explains "inculturation" as "a theologian inculturating and turning the gospel that he/she and the Christian community manifest into the spiritual strength for a new life, ultimately transforming the culture, the society and the people."[23] Lee's concept of inculturation is concurrent with Li Qiuling, who also proposes the "the infiltration of theology into culture and culture into theology". To put it simply, it is "the Sinification of theology, whereby theology can be expressed in natural Chinese language and discuss and resolve the problems of China. It is theology entering the mainstream culture of China and *vice versa*."[24] Here, we see a Hong Kong theologian and a Christian scholar on Christianity in China have similar expectations for the future task of theology in the context of China and Hong Kong.

The Theological Ideas of Chinese Scholars Revealed in the "Cultural Christian" Debate

In the first stage of the "Cultural Christian" debate, all those involved are theologians from Hong Kong. They are mainly concerned with how the theological community of Hong Kong should respond to the rise of "Cultural Christians" in China. However, when the Chinese scholars joined the debate, the discussion develops towards another area. The views of the Chinese scholars have not only enriched the arguments of the debate, it also allows Hong Kong theologians to look at Chinese understanding of Christianity from a closer range and to learn about their feelings for the theological community of Hong Kong.

1. Li Qiuling

The first speaker from the Mainland Chinese camp is Li Qiuling, the aforesaid professor of philosophy at the Renmin University of China. Li explains his understanding of Christianity from an academic point of view. In his opinion, "the Christian faith represents the entire process in two thousand years' history

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23 Peter K. H. Lee, "Reflections of Hong Kong Theologians and the Rise of Chinese Apolloses (Part II)", p.10.

24 Li, Qiuling, "The Interaction between Theology and Culture: the Mixed Feeling of the Hong Kong Theological Community towards the Rise of the So-called 'Chinese Apolloses'. Part IV: The Inculturation of Theology'", *Christian Times* 436 (January 7, 1996), p.11.

in which Christians from different ages experience and understand Jesus in each of their own unique cultural-historical context. It is also a process in which Christianity encounters, clashes with and amalgamates with other non-Christian philosophies. This process will continue while Christianity prevails. No sect or individual could lay claim to the correct understanding of the faith. People of each nation have the right to understand the Christian faith in their own cultural context. Every individual could rightfully have his or her own understanding shaped by a particular heritage." Li continues to express his appreciation of Christianity in more religious terms: "A Hong Kong theologian has once said that God is the God of the Chinese people as well as the God of westerners, because he loves the world and all people therein… I would rather understand the statement as underpinning the right of the Chinese people to learn about God. God will be the God of the Chinese people only when he is a God of the Chinese people's own understanding. By virtue of the same rationale, God is the God of all people, not just the Christians. And every individual, Christian or otherwise, has the right to have his own understanding of God."[25]

Putting Li's understanding of Christianity in the light of the "Cultural Christian" debate, the immediate observation is the difference between Hong Kong and Chinese scholars on certain theological ideas. While Li proclaims that "no sect or individual could lay claim to the correct understanding of the faith", Leung Ka-lun maintains that "theology is dogmatics", suggesting an obvious gap in understanding. Meanwhile, Li thinks that "the Christian faith represents the entire process in two thousand years' history in which Christians from different ages experience and understand Jesus in each of their own unique cultural-historical context", in significant correspondence to Joseph Kaung's idea of "contextual theology" and "decolonization of theology". A more profound comparison, however, presents itself between Li and Peter Lee.

For many years, Lee has been widely respected in the academic circle for his efforts in promoting the dialogue between Christianity and Chinese culture. As quoted earlier, Lee thinks that most Christian denominations [in Hong Kong] are "imported from the West", and that "denominationalism which refuses to be open to new ideas has little future". This is actually akin to Li's view that "God will be the God of the Chinese people only when he is a God of the Chinese people's own understanding". However, Lee would probably not agree with Li's proclamation that "no sect or individual could lay claim to the only correct understanding of the faith". Of course, Lee would not "lay claim to the only correct understanding of the faith", but I doubt whether he would agree that "no

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25 Li, Qiuling, "The Interaction between Theology and Culture: the Mixed Feeling of the Hong Kong Theological Community towards the Rise of the So-called 'Chinese Apolloses' - Part III: The Right of the Mainland Academic Community to Study Christianity", *Christian Times* 435 (December 31, 1995), p.10.

sect or individual" ever could, because Lee does believe that there is "orthodoxy" in matters of theology.

Li, on the other hand, is quite sensitive on the issue of orthodoxy, and is ready to speak out his mind. "The theological community itself has naturally become an object of study for the academics, so the latter is quite sensitive to what theologians have to say. However, if theologians insist that they are the orthodox people who have an exclusive right to studying the faith, and maintain a protective instinct against the 'trespass'(?) of the academics, then any resulting comments can hardly be valid ones."[26] Li is commenting on the communication problem between Hong Kong theologians and Chinese academics here, but Lee's requirement for "orthodoxy" in the theology is directed towards the "Cultural Christians".[27] I believe that Lee will probably agree with Lo Ping- cheung that the orthodoxy requirement in theology applies only to those scholars who actually confess the faith but not the scholars in general who study about Christianity. Hence the communication problem between Hong Kong theo- logians and Chinese academics here is settled. But the problem of orthodoxy between Hong Kong theologians and Chinese academic-theologians remains, and the tension breaks out in Bo Fan's response to Leung Ka-lun.[28]

2. Bo Fan

Bo Fan, *nom de plume* of Wu Bofan, Assistant Research Fellow, Institute of Social Science Documentation Institute, China Academy of Social Science, is apparently an academic-theologian who confesses to be a Christian. Now Liu Xiaofeng, obviously the figure at the centre of the controversy, never speaks out in the debate. Rather, Bo Fan's view on the "Sino-Christian Theology" largely reflects what Liu has been advocating.[29] It looks like that Bo Fan is speaking on behalf of Liu.[30]

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26 Li, Qiuling, "The Interaction between Theology and Culture: Part III", p.10.

27 See the section on Peter Lee's views.

28 Zhang Xianyong was the second Chinese scholar to have taken part in the debate. Zhang's concern was more with the theological conflict between the Hong Kong and Chinese churches. His article does not reflect much of his theological thinking, and he is thus omitted for a detailed discussion in the present chapter.

29 See Liu, Xiaofeng, "Xiandai Yujingzhong de Hanyu Jidu Shenxue" (Sino-Christian Theology in the Modern Context), *Logos & Pneuma* 2 (Spring 1995), pp.9-48.

30 The following quotation from Bo Fan is telling of the capacity which Bo Fan considers himself: "The future Sino-Christian Theology will be a theology with the Chinese language (*Hanyu*), one of the secular languages in the broad sense (the "cultural-existential context") as its resources and modern philosophy, poetry and social theories as its means of expression. It is also the study of secular (as opposed to ecclesiastical) Christian culture, namely an encyclopedic study of theology. It does not exclude but necessarily includes all schools of theology in the geographically diverse

It has already been pointed out that Lee and Bo Fan are in extreme disagreement in their concept of theology, resulting from differences in three main areas: "revelation versus direct confrontation of the Chris event", "Christian community versus individual confession", and "orthodoxy in theology versus rejection of orthodoxy defined by Hong Kong theologians". Bo Fan's views are presented in repudiation of Leung's arguments. Hence we have yet to grasp a fuller picture of what he stands for. Nevertheless, Bo Fan's article is a useful reader for any understanding of the difference in Chinese and Hong Kong theologians.

Pivotal to the Bo Fan-Leung debate is the relationship between theology and the church tradition. Leung criticizes the "Cultural Christians" of breaking away from contexts,[31] and further questions whether "(Cultural Christians) should be allowed to interpret Christianity as their discretion, having no regard for a Christian community who inherits a two thousand-year tradition?"[32] Bo Fan's answer is "For a mortal such as I (or we) who barely live up to one hundred years, why is it necessary and indeed how is it possible to inherit and embrace two thousand years of tradition? In order to "inherit" we must first choose (those elements that are beneficial).[33] Hence, "Cultural Christians" suggest the "direct confrontation with the Christ-event" and "highlighting on the importance of the words of Jesus and Paul". Bo Fan also draws support from Martin Luther's proclamation of "scripture alone", "Christ alone", "grace alone" and "faith alone".

The "direct confrontation with Christ" is closely related to Bo Fan's concept of "individual confession". Lo, Leung and Lee from Hong Kong are concurrent in their emphasis on the inseparability of theology from the Christian community and the Church. Leung lends a rather sharp criticism to the "Cultural Christians": "Can a person who never goes to church nor accept any of the ideas and patterns of behavior handed down by the traditions of Christian faith calls himself a 'Christian' just because he is attracted to one single quote of Augustine?"[34] To this query Bo Fan answers: "The meaning of the Cross (the Way, the Truth, the Life) is realized in the 'I believe' confession,

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Chinese Language world. However, any theology that rejects the modern context on the grounds of geographical differences (between China and West, the Mainland and Hong Kong and the Mainland and Taiwan, etc.) shall themselves be excluded from the modern language context." See Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part II: Orthodoxy and Heresy", p.8.

31 See the section on Leung Ka-lun.

32 Leung, Ka-lun, "A Discussion with Zhang Xianyong on Issues relating 'Cultural Christians' (Part II)", *Christian Times* 444 (March 3, 1996), p.10.

33 Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part III: Which Tradition? (2)", *Christian Times* 453 (May 5, 1996), p.8.

34 Leung Ka-lun, "A Discussion with Zhang Xianyong on Issues relating 'Cultural Christians' (Part II)", p.10.

not the 'we believe' one bound by the Church. As far as 'I' am concerned, the fundamental question is to 'be' a Christian (as opposed to 'becoming' a Christian within the church institution)."[35] He then quoted Kierkegaard: "The Christian faith could only be established in the continued relationship of the direct confrontation of the lone self with God. It cannot be established on a once-and-for-all basis by assuming certain external organization."[36]

From his concept of "individual confession" Bo Fan advances further to proclaim his understanding of Christian theology and gives an exposition of the fundamental concerns of the "Sino-Christian Theology" in response to the orthodoxy concern raised by Hong Kong theologians.

> The confession of faith (I believe) is based on the experience and reflection of oneself, and therefore has a natural link to the forms of literature and philosophy… Literature is concerned with the primary origins of the Cross (the 'cultural-existential dimension'). It has to do with the existential judgment of the individual. Philosophy means epistemology, the reflection on knowledge in the context of a particular era. It has to with the epistemological judgment of the individual. Hence the theology of 'I believe' is necessarily a (secular) cultural theology, but not an ecclesiastical theology. The modern man is not based on the authority of the Church, but rather the common confession of faith in Christ shared by each Christian.[37]

Contrary to Leung's understanding of the study of theology as inseparable from dogmatics and a mission entrusted by the Church, Bo Fan's views are also in conflict with Zhang Xianyong's position from within the Church.

Moreover, Bo Fan is doubtful about Lee's "inculturation", and, probably further to, Kaung's "contextual theology".

> Those who favour indigenized theology say that God is the God of Chinese people as well as westerners. To a large extent that is true. But the key issue is that we are the "people" in China, not any people in "China". The "God" of Christian theology (especially con temporary theology) is not the God of Isaac, Jacob and Abraham who received the grace of God in the capacity of the leader of a nation or a clan. God is the God who was persecuted, mocked and humiliated by unknowing sinners, abandoned after crying to God in desperation,

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35 Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part II: Orthodoxy and Heresy", p.8.

36 Bo Fan refuted Leung directly: "There are people who do not go to church but call themselves Christians in China (and indeed everywhere in the world), certainly there are none who "call themselves Christians but do not accept any ideas or patterns of behavior of the traditional Chinese faith, or do not even accept that special authority of the Bible." See Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part III: Which Tradition? (1)", *Christian Times* 452 (April 28, 1996), p.8. I have paraphrased the words of Leung and Bo Fan to highlight Bo Fan's stress on "individual confession". See Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part I: Pride and Prejudice", *Christian Times* 450 (April 14, 1996), p.9.

37 Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part II: Orthodoxy and Heresy", p.8.

and left dying on the Cross. God is "my God", the God with a "self". God in a context of [absolute paradox].[38]

Bo Fan's theological ideas are quite different from both the ecumenical theologians in Hong Kong and Li Qiuling's idea of the "sinolization" of theology.

Towards the end of his article, Bo Fan quoted S. N. Bulgakov, an Eastern Orthodox theologian:

Tradition is the vivid memory of the Church that contains orthodox doctrines, as its history shows. It is not a museum of archaeology or a catalogue of science, nor is it a 'resort' for faith. It is the inherent vitality of any living, organic body. It exists in its own stream of life, with all that were in its past. All that were in the past are inherent in the present. So they are the present, too… The history of the Church develops by manifesting and historically realizing the supra-historical substance. It translates the language of eternity into the historical language of human beings, and provided the substance remains unchanged, this translation reflects the characteristics of these languages and their times.[39]

The above is obviously quoted with the intention of establishing the rationale for the "Sino-Christian Theology". I guess none of the Hong Kong theologians in the debate would object to Bulgakov's discussion of church tradition and church history quoted above. I suspect that while it is not surprising that "Cultural Christians" like Bo Fan would like to benefit from the heritage of the Eastern Church, to quote from an Eastern theologian might also be a deliberate, strategic attempt in counteracting the British and American theological traditions to which most Hong Kong theologians are adhered.[40] If that be the

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38 Bo Fan's words suggested that he had some misunderstanding of the "indigenization of theology". The ideas of "claiming God's grace in the capacity of a national or clan leader" does not exist in the proposal of "indigenization of theology". See Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part II: Orthodoxy and Heresy", p.8.

39 Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part IV: Conclusion", *Christian Times* 454 (May 12, 1996), p.8.

40 Bo Fan has made the following remark on scholars in Hong Kong: "Compared to Chinese scholars, scholars in Hong Kong have a certain deficiency in the Chinese Language and knowledge in humanities, which is not likely to be overcome in the near future. Their inadequate knowledge of the languages, philosophies and cultural context of Europe as a whole will represent a major obstacle to their understanding of contemporary western theology (to which British and American theologians have made very little contribution)." See Bo Fan, "Who's Christ and Which Tradition? Part I: Pride and Prejudice", *Christian Times* 450 (April 14, 1996), p.9.If we compare the way that Bo Fan quoted Bulgakov and Leung's Brunner, we can tell that both were trying to resort to the authority of traditions.

case, it means that the debate might have extended from pure conceptual differences to ideological strife.

Conclusion

My conclusion after reading the "Cultural Christian" debate is fourfold:

1. The conceptual differences among Hong Kong theologians and among Chinese scholars are no less than those between the Hong Kong camp and the China camp. This suggests that diversity, rather than singularity, has been governing the development of theology in both the Church of Hong Kong and the Chinese academic community. Therefore I doubt the validity of comments on the debate which suggests that "Hong Kong theologians are excluding Chinese scholars from the intellectual circle"[41] or that "the language of Beijing is overwhelming the language of Hong Kong in anticipation of 1997."[42] On the other hand, we actually find Chinese scholars and Hong Kong theologians in agreement on a number of issues, such as the inculturation between Christian theology and Chinese culture and the way theology would contribute to Chinese society and culture. Despite their diversity, there are some values and vision that Chinese scholars and Hong Kong theologians do share.

2. The debate also brings out some trends of theological development in Hong Kong. Traditionally, the evangelicals place a high priority on church and dogma, while ecumenical scholars are more focused on academic studies. For example, Chung Chi Divinity School of the Chinese University of Hong Kong is frequently criticized by evangelicals as being too "liberal". More than often, Chung Chi's theology has been labeled "modernist". Even Peter K. H. Lee, himself an ecumenical scholar, describes Chung Chi's theology as "lacking commitment". Therefore, it is quite extraordinary that Lo Ping-cheung, an evangelical, should call for theologians to "look beyond the walls of the Church and try to reach the academic group" and "theologians at the Baptist University and the Chinese University" to be committed to the

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41 According to Li Qiuling, "Sino-Christian Studies" advocated by Liu Xiaofeng is "undoubtedly attracting attention". See Li, Qiuling, "The Interaction between Theology and Culture: the Mixed Feeling of the Hong Kong Theological Community towards the Rise of the So-called 'Chinese Apolloses'. Part IV: The Inculturation of Theology'", *Christian Times* 436 (January 7, 1996), p.11. Zhang Xianyong believed that Liu was "opening up an outlet beyond the fold of the Church for people inside the fold, with an intention to enhance Sino-Christian theology both inside and beyond the fold (in the tertiary sense)." See Zhang, Xianyong, "The Community within the Circle and the Community Outside: A Response to the Issue of 'Chinese Apolloses' - The Third Circle: Between the Periphery and the Centre of Chinese Culture", *Christian Times* 441 (February 11, 1996), p.11.

42 Bo Fan's comment. See section on Leung Ka-lun.

cultural group and share responsibilities with their counterpart in independent seminaries". Here, I see a trend towards professionalism in the development of theology. Social changes in Hong Kong result in a more complex social structure, which makes division of labour necessary. The challenge from "Cultural Christians " in China will only accelerate the trend.

3. Turning to China, the debate indicates that the rising group of "Cultural Christians "are generally alienated from established churches, and their theology is developing along a "non-ecclesiastical" line of thinking. I believe that theology in China will develop in two extremes in the future: The socio-cultural approach should have good prospects, given the positive responses from Chinese scholars seen in the debate.[43] The traditional, church-affiliated approach, on the other hand, would be expecting a difficult time. The development of socio-cultural theology is less than likely to benefit traditional church-affiliated theology. Here I see an opportunity for the theological institutions and diversified cultural traditions of Hong Kong to serve as a cross-regional infrastructure for theological education and the development of traditional Christian theology in China after 1997.

4. In the debate, there are issues related to "mainstream versus non-mainstream tradition" or "orthodoxy versus non-orthodoxy", and opinions suggest that such divisions need to be re-defined.[44] In addition, a critic points out that the humanistic approach to theology and ecclesiastical approach to theology are "incommensurable."[45] Despite the polemical views that sometimes exist between different theological traditions, I believe that dialogue on the conceptual level is always possible. Theology stresses not only scientific and objective criterion in ideas and methods, it is also a highly normative discipline. We can put "mainstream" and "non-mainstream" theologies on the same level and review them under scientific and objective criterion. The present paper, which is a comparative analysis of the ideas of various Chinese and Hong Kong theologians, is an example of how dialogue between different theological thoughts can be achieved. I suggest that critical discussions of different theologies could be developed further based upon the ground of descriptive-analytical findings,

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43 Chin's comment, see Chin Ken Pa, "The Language Diversion of Chinese Theology and Conflicts in Its Interpretation: The Dispute between Ecclesiastical Theology and Humanistic Theology (Part I)", *Christian Times* 455 (May 19, 1996), p.8.

44 The reviews on meta-theoretical discussion of various theologies have in fact already begun. See He, Guanghu, "Bentu Shenxue Guankui" (A Preliminary Investigation of 'Indigenous Theology'), *Logos & Pneuma* 2 (Spring 1995), pp.152-68. Kwan Shui-man, "Ping Liu Xiaofeng de Hanyu Jidu Shenxue" (A Review of Liu Xiaofeng's Sino-Christian Theology), *Logos & Pneuma* 4 (Spring 1996), pp. 220-39.

45 Chin Ken Pa, "The Language Diversion of Chinese Theology and Conflicts in Its Interpretation (Part I)", p.8.

particularly in the realm of meta-theoretical discourse. Only after comparative studies and critical reviews on theological ideas, concepts and methods, Hong Kong and Chinese theologians could possibly achieve genuine understanding and cooperation.

PART II

Theoretical Reflection

Theological Translation and Transmission between China and the West[1]

LAI Pan-chiu

Introduction

Some might suggest that Chinese Protestant theology in the past was essentially a translated theology, consisting of western theologies translated into the Chinese language, while innovations were out of the question. According to this view, the history of Chinese theology is nothing more than the history of the translation and transmission of western theologies in China. In the 1950s, Chen Zemin commented on the theological publications of "Old China" in this way:

> If we examine the theological publishing in the pre-1949 Chinese church, we find little to recommend it. Most of the publications were translations, and most selections were made by western missionaries. Most theological books edited or written by Chinese authors were compilations rather than original works, or were general reviews. Genuinely creative works were rare. At such a time there could be no genuinely Chinese church, the Chinese church could not govern or support itself, and we had little authentic spiritual experience of our own upon which to draw for self-propagation. In such a situation, poverty of theological thought was only natural, and a theology able to transcend its times was an impossibility.[2]

Chen mentions a few examples to support his judgment:

> In the first decade of this century, American theologians wrangled endlessly over the issue of fundamentalism vs. modernism, and the fray was soon introduced into the Chinese church.

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1   This paper itself has undergone a process of theological translation. It was originally written in Chinese and presented at "Übersetzubg und Rezeption: Begegnung des Christentums mit der chinesische Kultur", a conference co-organized by China-Zentrum e. V. (Sankt Augustin, Germany) and Institute of Sino-Christian Studies (Hong Kong), held in Berlin, 6-9 December 2001. An earlier English version of this paper was presented at "Faithful/Fateful Encounters: Religion and Cultural Exchanges between Asia and the West", a conference co-organized by Graduate Theological Union (Berkeley, USA) and Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (Beijing, China), held in Beijing, October 22-24, 2002. The author would like to thank the participants of these conferences for their helpful comments.

2   Chen Zemin, "Theological Construction in the Chinese Church", *Chinese Theological Review* (1991), p.57.

Before most Chinese Christians had even figured out what fundamentalism and modernism were, and what these arguments represented in America, they had already fallen into blind, narrow denominational disputes, fighting vigorously and loyally for their western teachers, and causing divisions in the young Chinese church. After the First World War, when western nations sank into poverty, bitterness and despair, the western church turned from blind optimism to pessimism and bewilderment. The "crisis theology" was immediately exported to China, and China's theologians took pride in quibbling over Kierkegaard's "sickness unto death" and the paradoxes of "dialectical theology".[3]

The examples given by Chen highlight the influence of western theology on Chinese theology. In fact, evangelical/fundamentalist Christians constitute the most influential group among the Chinese Christian community, and their basic religious beliefs are not much different from the evangelicals and fundamentalists in western countries.[4] However, it remains doubtful as to whether these examples adequately reflect the entire reality. Another important question is whether Chinese theology showed dramatic improvements after the Chinese Church had realized self-governance. Where is the watershed dividing Old China and New China? Is it the year 1949 as Chen suggests?

Considering the quantity alone, publications in the 1920s and 1930s were no less than that in the 1950s and 1960s. After 1949, there were fewer translated works in the publications of the institutional church in China, but then there were also fewer original works. If we think in terms of theological diversity, the theological publications during the 1920s and 1930s definitely demonstrate a greater degree of diversity than those of the 1950s and 1960s. The main reason behind this difference is that the issues facing Chinese theologians prior to 1949, such as interaction with traditional Chinese culture, religion and science, Christianity and revolution, etc., had all been reduced to a single question of how Chinese Christianity should accommodate herself to the new socialist system. Theological responses, especially among the Three-Self Church, were highly standardized with a view to implementing government policies and assisting in patriotic education and united front campaigns, etc.[5] This standardization

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3 Chen Zemin, "The Task of Theological Construction of the Chinese Church", pp.56-57.

4 Another form of Christianity commonly seen in the Chinese-language community is the charismatic tradition, which is more popular in rural areas and tends to be neglected in terms of theological contributions because of its emphasis on experience and practice rather than theological construction. See: Timothy Yeung Tin Yan, "Indigenous Chinese Church as an Offspring of Pneumatic Christianity: A Re-examination of the Development of Christianity in Modern China" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Chinese University of Hong Kong, July 2002 (in Chinese with an Abstract in English).

5 See Luo Guan-zong ed., *Zhongguo jidujiao sanzi aiguo yundong wenxuan 1950-1992* [Selected Essays on the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement 1950-1992] (Shanghai: Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee, 1993) and Philip L. Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self*

persisted until the Chinese government adopted the policy of reform and openness at the end of the 1970s. The revival of theological activities in Mainland China began to occur only from the 1980/90s. Meanwhile, theologians in Hong Kong and Taiwan were also actively responding to challenges arising from their respective contexts. In retrospect, therefore, there are two periods of flourishing development in Chinese theology during the 20th Century, namely the 1920/30s and the 1980/90s.

In the following discussion, I will review the development of Chinese theology in these two periods, with particular reference to the translation and transmission between China and the West. At the end of this paper, I will attempt to discuss the prospect of the relationship between Chinese and western theologies.

The Rise of Chinese Theology in the 1920/30s
In the 1920s and 1930s, the Chinese Christian community was exposed to an extensive range of theological problems amid challenges on various fronts, giving rise to a diversified development of theological literature. On the one hand, it faced the issue of Christianity and traditional Chinese culture. On the other, the ideological impact of the new cultural movement, highlighting science and democracy and the rapid social and political changes, also constituted a serious challenge to Chinese Christianity. In response to criticisms of Christianity voiced by the Anti-Christian movement in the 1920s, Chinese Christian intellectuals endeavored to prove that Christianity was not contradictory to science and that, as a progressive and revolutionary religion, Christianity was set to make positive contributions to the nation's urgent issues.[6] Meanwhile, they also attempted to establish indigenous theology in response to the criticism that Christianity was a foreign religion.

The question of how Christianity is to be related to traditional Chinese culture is not a new one. Roman Catholic missionaries first encountered the problem in the late Ming Dynasty, while Protestant missionaries continued to face it in the 19th Century. In the early 20th Century, theologians endeavored to indigenize the external forms, institutions and theology of Christianity. Theological indigenization involves the adoption of traditional Chinese philosophical concepts, especially Confucian thought and terms, in constructing theology with Chinese characteristics. As far as this approach to theology is concerned, translation of western theological literature is dispensable and in fact might sometimes be seen as redundant. Elements or characteristics of western culture in Christian

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Movement and China's United Front (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1988).

6 At that time some Chinese Christians sought to develop political theologies to illustrate the revolutionary nature of Christianity. See Yeh Jen-chang, "Geming yu Yesu: 1920-1928 Zhongguo Jiaohuide Zhengzhi Shenxue" (Revolution and Jesus: Political Theology of the Chinese Church 1920-1928), *CGST Journal* 12 (1992), pp. 19-43.

theological traditions might be regarded as nothing but a burden that must be removed. This approach assumes that the trans-cultural gospel could be adopted without translating western theological literature into Chinese.

From the 1930s, however, the rapid changes in the social and political situation in China made many Chinese theologians focus on the relevance of Christianity to contemporary political and social issues, to such an extent that the indigenous approach fell out of favor somewhat. The dominant position of indigenized theology was shaken and taken over by the contextualization approach, which focused on the relationship between theology and contemporary society. Some theologians continued to probe the question of traditional Chinese culture and indigenization while at the same time investigating contemporary social issues. Some works that appeared to investigate the relationship between Christianity and traditional Chinese culture were actually dealing with the question concerning Christianity and contemporary Chinese society.[7]

Apart from writing original works, Chinese theologians also attempted to translate western theological works to tackle the problems Christianity faced in modern China. Certain publishing houses became centers for producing original Chinese theologies and translating western works. One example is the Chinese Christian Literature Society (*Zhonghua Jidujiao Wenshe*, 1925-28), which emphasized the origination of indigenous theology and published far more original works than translations. Unfortunately, it lasted for only a very short span of time for financial and other reasons.[8] Another noteworthy institution was The Association Press of China (*Qingnian Xiehui Shuju*), founded in 1902. It was a publishing house managed by Chinese editors throughout without any interference from foreigners. It published works of famous Chinese theologians including Zhao Zichen (T. C. Chao, 1888-1979), Liu Tingfang (Timothy Tingfang Lew, 1891-1947), Xu Baoqian (P. C. Hsu, 1892-1944) and Wu Yaozong (Y. T. Wu, 1893-1979). By the end of the 1940s, it had published more than 500 monographs and pamphlets, among which only a small portion were translations and books originally written by Chinese authors.[9]

These translated works were more often than not a reflection of the concerns and orientations of contemporary Chinese theologians at that time. For example, many Chinese theologians were concerned with the accusation that religion in general and Christianity in particular was unscientific, so much so that they

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7 An illustrative example can be found in Wu Lei-chuan (= Wu Zhenchun), *Jidujiao yu Zhongguo Wenhua* [*Christianity and Chinese Culture*] (Shanghai: The Association Press of China, 1936).

8 For a more detailed account see: He Kai-li (=Herbert Ho Hoi Lap), "Zhonghua Jidujiao Wenshe yu Bense Shenxue Zhuzuo" (The Christian Literature Society and Indigenous Theological Writings), *CGST Journal* 5 (1988), pp. 5-21.

9 Yao Minquan, & Luo Weihong, *Zhongguo Jidujiao Jianshi* [*A Short History of Chinese Christianity*] (Beijing: Religious Culture, 2000), pp. 232-233.

translated some western works on this issue in response. Jian Youwen (Timothy Jen Yu-wan, 1896-1978), for example, pleaded for "a Christianized China by a Chinatized Christianity".[10] However, he also translated some materials on the subject of religion and science, and, according to his explanation, such translation was for the purpose of responding to the critique of religion based on the scientism implied in the Anti-religious movement.[11] This attempt to answer critics by translating foreign works was quite understandable and inevitable. This is because modern China has been subject to the influence of more than a few Chinese translations of foreign writings.[12] Many popular criticisms of Christianity voiced by Chinese intellectuals at that time were based on western ideologies such as the theory of evolution, materialism and scientism. We might even say that Chinese Christians at that time faced challenges from communism / socialism / nationalism / authoritarianism not unlike Christians in the modern western society. Translating western theology to respond to challenges of Christianity that originated from the West seemed to be an appropriate thing to do. At that time, there were very few Chinese Christians who could write on the issue with comparable quality.[13]

Another interesting example is Wu Yaozong, who translated into Chinese *A Common Faith* by John Dewey (1859-1932).[14] As it is widely known, Wu Yaozong was inclined to socialism and therefore could not possibly identify himself with Dewey's liberal stance. In fact, Wu criticized Dewey's thought and its capitalist ideology in the preface to the translation.[15] Wu's purpose in translating the book is clearly illustrated in the Chinese title he chose for the Chinese version. Instead of translating "a common faith" directly and literally, he named the Chinese version *Kexuede zongjiaoguan* (A Scientific View of

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10 Jian Youwen, "Shemo shi Jidujiao?" (What is Christianity?), *Shengming Yuekan* [Life Monthly Magazine] Vol. 2, Issue 2. (1921.9), pp.1-6; cf. Lin, Ronghong (Lam Wing-hung) ed., *Jindai Huaren Shenxue Wenxian* [A Source Book of Modern Chinese Theology] (Hong Kong: China Graduate School of Theology, 1986), p.52.

11 See Jian Youwen, "Foreword", in J. M. Coulter, E. G. Conkin & A. S. Wooburne, *Zongjiao yu kexue* [Religion and Science], Jian Youwen ed. & trans. (Shanghai: Chinese YMCA National Association Publication Department, 1922), p.3.

12 See Zou Zhenhuan, *Yingxiang Zhongguo Jindai Shehu de Yibaizhong Yizuo* [100 Translated Works that Influenced Modern Chinese Society] (Beijing: Zhongguo duiwai fanyi, 1996).

13 Some of the works originated in Chinese have been reprinted in Lam, Wing-hung, *A Source Book of Modern Chinese Theology*, pp. 513-555. For an analysis of the Chinese Christian responses to scientism, see Sun Shangyang, "Qimeng Huayu yu Zhongguo Jidujiao Hujiaoxue" (Enlightenment Discourse and Chinese Christian Apologetics?), *Jidujiao Wenhua Xuekan* [Journal for the Study of Christian Culture] 8 (2002), pp.47-70.

14 John Dewey, *Kexuede Zongjiaoguan* [A Scientific View of Religion], Wu Yaozong trans. (Shanghai: The Association Press of China, 1936).

15 Wu Yaozong, "Introduction", in John Dewey, *Kexue de Zongjiaoguan*, pp.14-15.

Religion). Wu says: "Dewey advocates a scientific religion, which means a religion being liberated from the mystical 'supra-naturalism'."[16] Wu further clarifies,

Our purpose of introducing this book of Dewey could be summarized as follows: firstly, because of its substantial metaphysical elements, religion can easily become superstition, a danger which could be alleviated by adopting a scientific attitude; secondly, religion in the past tended to be alienated from daily life, and a scientific view on religion, which starts from reality, can help to correct this problem.[17]

Chinese Christians at that time also faced the question of responding to social and political issues amid rapid changes. Some Chinese theologians introduced the theology of the social gospel, as they became aware of how this theology could be related to the contemporary Chinese situation. Chinese translations of *Theology for the Social Gospel* and *Social Principles of Jesus* by Walter Rauschenbusch (1861-1918), the champion of the social gospel, were published as early as 1923.[18] During more or less the same period, works of Harry Frederick Ward (1873-1966), also an advocate for the social gospel, though less prominent than Rauschenbusch in the United States, were also translated into Chinese. [19] Particularly noteworthy is the publication of Ward's *Gemingde Jidujiao* (*A Revolutionary Christianity*). Rather than a translation of a book already published in English, it consisted of a compilation and translation of Ward's speeches during his visit to China in 1925 and some other writings. Jian Youwen stated in his foreword to the book:

This is a time of revolution, which is especially true for China in transition. The crime of "anti-revolution" charged by revolutionaries or revolutionary governments is more serious than

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16 Wu Yaozong, "Introduction", in John Dewey, *Kexue de Zongjiaoguan*, p.2.
17 Wu Yaozong, "Introduction", in John Dewey, *Kexue de Zongjiaoguan*, p.14.
18 *Theology for the Social Gospel* is translated as: *Shehui Fuyin de Shenxue,* Lin Hongfei, Dai Kuanyi & Jacob Shi trans., Mao Yun-hsuan rev. (Shanghai: Christian Literature Society, 1923). *Social Principles of Jesus* is translated as: *Yesu di Shehui Yuanli*, Zhang Shizhang trans. (Shanghai: Christian Literature Society, 1923). Zhao Zichen wrote in the preface to the Chinese translation of *Theology for the Social Gospel*: "As Christianity grows in China, the social gospel is also being preached throughout the nation. In recent years, cultural movements at home have been expressing interest in understanding Christianity and intentions to reform the society radically. At this moment, the translation of *Theology for the Social Gospel* by my friend Lin Hong-fei is indeed a laudable act of 'feeding the hungry and giving water to the thirsty'." See Zhao's preface to the Chinese translation of Rauschenbusch's *Theology for the Social Gospel*, p.3.
19 For example: Huade (Harry Ward), *Jindai Shijiezhong Xinyangde Xiaoneng* [Function of Faith in the Modern World], Yuan Fanglai trans. (Shanghai: The Association Press of China, 1934).

the crime of being Marxist charged by reactionaries and imperialists. The first and foremost reason for non-Christians' opposition to Christianity is the latter's "anti-revolutionary" nature. Thus it should indeed be appropriate and timely to publish a book on the revolutionary nature of Christianity in this era of revolution.[20]

Following Ward, Jian Youwen attempted to emphasize that the ethos of Christianity was purely ethical, social and revolutionary. After introducing Ward's views, Jian went on to say:

If all members of Chinese Christianity continue to proceed in this direction, then critics of Christianity could no longer charge Christianity as "anti-revolutionary". Positively speaking, Christianity might even play a role in the great movement of social reform in the nation's renaissance. By that time, people may talk about religion as the stimulant of the people rather than religion as the opium of the people. And the life of Christianity will last forever in tandem with the Republic of China."[21]

Liu Tingfang, who explicitly acknowledged his indebtedness to Ward, also endeavored to argue that it could meet the needs of the Chinese context.[22]

These translations of western theology by Chinese theologians reflected the Christian responses to the issues derived from the modern Chinese context. The translation of the theology of the social gospel was criticized by certain evangelical/fundamentalist Chinese theologians, giving rise to the contention between the theologies of liberal theology/social gospel on the one hand and fundamentalist/evangelical theologies on the other. However, the dispute between liberal and fundamentalist Christians was not only due to the introduction of western theology, but was also shaped by the Chinese context.

The responses of Chinese theologians to these issues did not stop short of translation but while they attempted to do their own theology, they were not entirely immune from western influence of some sort. This can be seen in the theological development of Zhao Zichen, arguably the most famous Chinese theologian at that time.[23] Zhao's *Jidujiao Zhexue* (Christian Philosophy) was

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20 Jian Youwen, "Foreword", in Harry Ward, *Gemingde Jidujiao* [A Revolutionary Christianity], Jian Youwen trans. (Shanghai: Zhonghua Jidu jiao wen she, 1926), p.1.

21 See Jian, "Foreword", in Ward, *Gemingde Jidujiao*, p.7.

22 See Wu Chang-shing, "Idea and Practice of Religious Education and Social Change in China: A Study of Timothy Tingfang Lew (1891-1947)", unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Chinese University of Hong Kong, June 2001 (in Chinese with English Abstract). For Liu Tingfang's translation and introduction of Ward's theology, see Liu Tingfang, "Jidujiaode shehui fuyin" (The Christian Social Gospel), *Ta Kung Po* (Dec 14, 1933), p.14.

23 For the influence of western theology and philosophy on Zhao, see Winfried Glüer, *Christliche Theologie in China: T. C. Chao, 1918-1956*. (Gütersloher, 1979), Chapter Three. Chinese version: *ZhaoZichen de shenxue sixiang*, Deng Xiaoming trans. (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council, 1998).

basically a response to challenges made against the Christian faith by contemporary Chinese intellectuals from the perspective of scientism, especially scientific positivism. Although the book was written in the form of a dialogue and many of the sources of its arguments were not well documented, it was quite apparent that he had made extensive use of western theologies. Zhao acknowledged particularly his indebtedness to Borden Parker Bowne, William James and Henri Bergson, among others.[24] Some years later, Zhao made some critical reflections on his previous works after he had been exposed to and apparently influenced by Karl Barth's work. Apart from writing what was probably the first Chinese monograph on Karl Barth,[25] many other later works by Zhao, such as *Jidujiao de Lunli* (*Ethics of Christianity*), were also influenced by Barthian thought, highlighting God-centered ethics, God's transcendence, Christian ethics as being distinct from other types of ethical thought, the Word of God as being distinct from other cultures without confusion or compromise, etc.[26] However, it is noteworthy that the evolution of Zhao's thought was not only due to the influence of Barth, but was also derived from his experience in prison during the Japanese invasion of China.[27]

The Revival of Chinese Theology in the 1980/90s

From 1949, theologians in Hong Kong and Taiwan parted company with their counterparts in Mainland China in their approach toward theological construction. However, a revival of Chinese theology emerged almost simultaneously in the Mainland, Hong Kong and Taiwan during the period between the 1980s and 1990s. This revival can be seen clearly from both the quality and quantity of theological journals founded during this period.[28] While the revival in Mainland

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24 Zhao, "Preface", *Jidujiao Zhexue* [Christian Philosophy] (Suzhou: Zhonghua Jidujiao wenshe, 1925), p.5.

25 The book was recently reprinted as a chapter in: Andres Tang & Lai Pan-chiu eds., *Bate yu Hanyu shenxue* [Karl Barth and Sino-Christian Theology] (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma, 2008), pp.3-40.

26 Zhao, *Jidujiaode Lunli* [Christian Ethics] (Shanghai: The Association Press of China, 1948), especially pp.3-5. See further: Zi Zhu, "The Transformation of a Chinese Theologian: T. C. Chaos Journey from Humanism to Theocentrism", *Chinese Theological Review* 1991, pp.77-102.

27 Wu Liming (Ng Lee-ming), *Jidujiao yu Zhongguo Shehui Bianqian* [*Christianity and Social Change in China*] (Hong Kong: Christian Literature Council, 1981), pp.47-55.

28 Since the latter half of the 1970s, numerous academic journals (including multi-authored books in lieu of journals) focusing on the study of Christianity published mainly in the Chinese language have emerged. Notable examples include: *Jidujiao Wenhua Pinglun* (*Christian Culture Review*, 1990-), *Zongjiao Wenhua* (Religion & Culture, 1995-), *Jidu Zhongjiao Janjiu* (*Study of Christianity*, 1999-) and *Jidujiao Wenhua Xuekan* (Journal for the Study of Christian Culture, 1999-) in Mainland China; also: *Theology and Life*, 1977), *CGST Journal* (1986-), *Logos & Pneuma* (1994-), *Jian Dao: A Journal of Bible &*

China appeared to be more dramatic, the revival in Hong Kong and Taiwan was more gradual.

The Chinese churches in Hong Kong and Taiwan in the 1950/60s were basically still pre-occupied with indigenous theology and, probably because of the efforts and influence of contemporary Neo-Confucianism, this approach to theological indigenization enjoyed some support until recent years. However, generally speaking, because of the rise of the awareness of the local identity, the dominant position of indigenous theology has gradually been replaced by contextual theology since the 1970s. Indigenous theology has even been subject to severe criticism in recent years.[29] The contextual theologies proposed by theologians in Hong Kong and Taiwan have been inspired by the Asian theological movement to a significant extent. Unlike indigenous theology, contextual theology emphasizes theological reflections and construction in the here-and-now socio-cultural context in close association with the fight for equality or liberation by the local people.[30] For example, Homeland Theology and Chut-hau-thi (*Chu-tou-tian*) Theology in Taiwan emphasize the Taiwanese identity and the self-determination of the people. This type of theology often assumes the irrelevancy between Asian realities and western theologies and highlights the need for Asian theology to be independent of western theology in order to develop a theology that meets local needs. According to this approach to theology, western theological literature could only serve as an ambiguous "other" for the purpose of comparison and critique instead of adoption.

The development of theology in Hong Kong followed a slightly different trend from that in Taiwan, given differences in the political and social contexts of the two places.[31] In the 1980s, issues surrounding the return of Hong Kong to Chinese sovereignty gave rise to contextual theology related to the reunification, among which the theology of reconciliation, proposed by Yang Mugu (Arnold M. K. Yeung, 1945-2002), is worth special attention. Yang abandoned the indigenous approach and turned to contextual theology instead, although he was highly critical of Asian theologies that were based largely on Latin American liberation theology. His theology of reconciliation differed from them both in its motif and

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Theology (1994-) and *Hill Road* (1996-) in Hong Kong and *Taiwan Journal of Theology* (1979-) in Taiwan.

29 For more recent critical reflections of indigenous theology by Chinese theologians, see Daniel Yeung ed., *Hanyu Shenxue Chuyi* [Preliminary Studies on Chinese Theology] (Hong Kong: Institute for Sin-Christian Studies, 2000). The methodological approach of indigenous theology in China is basically similar to the "translation model" described by Stephen B. Bevans. For criticism of this model see Stephen B. Stephens, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1992), pp.30-46, esp.35-37.

30 This model is similar to the "praxis model" suggested by Stephen B. Bevans. See Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology*, pp.63-80.

31 See Carver T. Yu, "Xianggang Shenxue Fazhan Sishinian" (Theological Developments in Hong Kong - The Last 40 Years), *CGST Journal* 25 (1998), pp.101-129.

methodology. Similar to most Asian theologies, Yang integrated contextual analysis with biblical studies. However, he parted company with most of the Asian theologies by massively citing western theological works, ranging from classical theologians such as Ireneaus, Tertullian and Augustine to modern ones including Friedrich Schleiermacher, Albrecht Ritschl, Karl Barth, Frederick D. Maurice and Reinhold Niebuhr.[32]

The political reforms in Mainland China, starting from the very end of the 1970s, created a relatively more liberal environment for theological constructions. By the 1980s, while theologians within the institutional church were actively engaged in theological construction, theological activities outside the Church were also thriving with dazzling variety. Many intellectuals, notably Liu Xiaofeng, attempted to translate works of western philosophies/theologies and introduce them to Chinese readers, and some among them were focused on the study, translation and construction of Christian theology. Their approach to theology was different from both the dominant models within the institutional church and the indigenous approach still popular in the theological communities in Hong Kong and Taiwan. Their theological endeavors even sparked off a controversy involving theologians from Mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan.[33]

Since the 1980s, theology produced by the institutional church in China has been focused on the affirmation of humanity, the present world and human history. Chen Zemin, in one of his papers, summarizes the concerns and highlights of contemporary Chinese theology as follows. In terms of the doctrine of God, *agape* is emphasized as the essential nature, rather than just one of the attributes, of God, expressed in His work of creation, providence, redemption and sanctification. The immanence of God is also stressed, affirming that all good things come from God and therefore Christians should learn to appreciate all good things including those outside the Church, because they too are borne from God's love.[34] In Christology, the tenor is on the notion of the "Cosmic Christ". The doctrines of incarnation and reconciliation should be interpreted in the light of the Cosmic Christ. The overall emphasis lies in the doctrine that Christ is God incarnate and that human beings may seek redemption and renewal in him. The vicarious and exemplary death of Christ perfectly manifested the love of God. The corresponding pneumatology is basically consistent with the doctrine of the Cosmic Christ, affirming that the Holy Spirit, the spirit of Almighty God, is in all and through all in human history. Rather than being limited to the visible Church only,

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32 Arnold Yeung (Yang Mugu), *Fuhe Shenxue yu Jiaohui Gengxin* [Theology of Reconciliation and Church Renewal] (Hong Kong: The Seed, 1987).

33 See Institute of Sino-Christian Studies ed., *Wenhua Jidutu: Xianxiang yu Lunzheng* [*Cultural Christian: Phenomenon and Argument*] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 1997).

34 Chen Zemin, "Christ and Culture in China: A Sino-American Dialogue", *Chinese Theological Review* 8 (1993), p.85.

it is a universal life-giving spirit.[35] As to the theory on human nature, the emphasis is on the doctrine of the image of God rather than original sin. It upholds that the image of God, despite being corrupted in the fall, has not been totally lost in humanity. Concerning Christian living, glorifying God and serving fellow human beings is to be upheld as the guiding principle; and devotional life should be integrated with Christian love and justice. The doctrines of *sola fides* and *sola gratia* are important, but the danger of upholding faith at the expense of works should also be avoided.[36] It is apparent that this theology is designed for the institutional church in Mainland China in response to its socio-political environment, in an attempt to assert God's work for all humanity beyond the Church, explaining the value of non-Christians and groups other than the Church (not least the Communist government and its members). It also calls on Christians to take part actively in social development.

Central to this theological discourse is the concept of the Cosmic Christ, an idea to which Ding Guangxu (Bishop K. H. Ting) attaches special importance.[37] Ding has mentioned more than once the Cosmic Christ as the central concept of Chinese theology, and his view has been echoed by more than a few Christian intellectuals.[38] According to his article "The Cosmic Christ" (*Yuzhou de Jidu*), the concept of the Cosmic Christ asserts the unfolding of historical events as part of the process of Christ's creation and redemption, which is in continuity with creation. Christ has redeemed not only Christians, but also all humanity and the entire universe. In Ding's words, "Christ is guiding the entire creation towards the goal of unity of all in God. Within this redemptive work of Christ, all human movements fighting for progress, liberation, democracy and universal love are bonded together."[39] Chinese Christians will come to appreciate that the lordship, care and providence of Christ extend over the entire universe with love as their essence. These concepts will help Christians understand the "truth, goodness and beauty outside the Church," especially the honorable virtues of certain Communist officials.[40]

The concept of the Cosmic Christ is indeed based on Biblical foundations, and Ding also points out the specific Chinese context in which this concept originates.[41] However, it should be noted that this concept is in a number of ways similar to foreign theological schools cited by Ding. In his article "The Cosmic

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35 Chen, "Christ and Culture in China: A Sino-American Dialogue", pp.85-86.

36 Chen, "Christ and Culture in China: A Sino-American Dialogue", pp.86-87.

37 Ding Guangxun, "Yuzhou de Jidu" (The Cosmic Christ), in Chen Zemin, ed., *Jinling Shenxue Wenxuan: 1952-1992* [Jinling Collection of Theological Essays: 1952-1992] (Nanjing: Jinling Xiehe Shenxueyuan, 1992), pp.22-31.

38 Ding Guangxun, "Preface", *Jinling Shenxue Wenxuan*, p.4.

39 Ding Guangxun, "Yuzhoude Jidu", p.27.

40 Ding Guangxun, "Yuzhoude Jidu", pp.22-25.

41 Ding Guangxun, "Yuzhoude Jidu", p.22.

Christ," Ding quotes Alfred Norton Whitehead's *Process and Reality,* which rejects the idea of God as a Caesar-like ruler, unsympathetic moralist or emotionless prime mover.[42] On closer scrutiny of Ding's interpretations in "The Cosmic Christ", views of Whitehead can readily be rediscovered. For example, Ding says that God should be defined in the light of Christ's love. God is not a tyrant but a loving person who sympathizes and identifies with human sufferings.[43]

In fact, Ding has written specific articles to introduce the tenets of liberation theology, the theology of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin and process theology and has affirmed their values.[44] Ding basically appreciates these theologies and his exposition of the concept of the Cosmic Christ bears close resemblance to these theologies. For example, Ding is especially concerned with the Cosmic Christ in de Chardin's thought and the latter's attempt to integrate creation, redemption and sanctification into a continuum. This is not to say that Ding adopted these theologies without reservation, for he has also made critical reflections on these ideas in the context of the Chinese Church. For example, he points out that China has already been liberated, so for her the more important issue is reconciliation, not liberation.[45]

Since the 1980s, *Nanjing Theological Review* (*Jinling Shenxuezhi*) has been publishing articles that introduce foreign theologies mainly through translation. Although some of them were devoted to the translation of non-western theologies,[46] the bulk of them have remained focused on western theologians such as Paul Tillich, John Macquarrie,[47] Reinhold Niebuhr,[48] Karl Rahner,[49] Rudolf

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42 Ding Guangxun, "Yuzhoude Jidu", p.29; also Ding Guangxun, "Zhongguo Jidutu Zhenyang Kandai Shengjing" (How Chinese Christians treat the Bible), *Jinling Shenxue Wenxuan*, p.10.

43 Ding Guangxun, "Yuzhoude Jidu", pp.28-29.

44 K. H. Ting, "Inspirations from Liberation Theology, de Chardin's Theology and Process Theology", *Chinese Theological Review* 2 (1986), pp.46-70.

45 K. H. Ting, "Inspirations from Liberation Theology, de Chardin's Theology and Process Theology," pp.52, 68-70. For a similar but more in-depth critique of Liberation Theology, see Huang Guangyao, "Jiefang Shenxue Duhougan" (After reading *Liberation Theology*), *Nanjing Theological Review* [Jinling Shenxuezhi] (New Series), 3 (1985.12), pp.50-54.

46 E.g. Muwen, "Feizhou Shenxue" (African Theology), *Nanjing Theological Review* (New Series) 5 (1986.12), pp.73-74; also, Zhang Jinglong, "Jieshao Jiwei Yazhou Shenxuejia" (Introducing several Asian theologians) (Parts I & II), *Nanjing Theological Review* (New Series), 13 (1991.3) pp. 21-31; 14-15; (1991.9) pp.81-86.

47 Zhang Jinglong, "Tilixi Maikaorui lun Rende Cunzai" (Paul Tillich and John Macquarrie on human existence), *Nanjing Theological Review* (New Series) 9(1988.11), pp.26-33, 41.

48 Zhang Jinglong, "Ranhou Niboer Qirenji Sixiang Yibi" (A glimpse at Reinhold Niebuhr: the man and his thought), *Nanjing Theological Review* (New Series) 10(1989.6), pp.27-43.

49 Shi Yongshang, "Yinming Jidutu - Rannuo de Chaozai shenxue" (The anonymous Christian - Karl Rahner's Transcendent Theology), *Nanjing Theological Review* (New

Bultmann,[50] Martin Buber[51] and Søren Kierkegaard,[52] etc. While some of these translations were done in accordance with the governing principle of the institutional church,[53] the majority of them were apparently not. These alternative theological discourses broke, deliberately or not, the monopoly of the theological discourse approved by the official church.[54] An even more significant work among these was Liu's article entitled "shangdi jiushi shangdi - jinian kaer bate shishi ershi zhounian" (Let God be God — commemorating the 20th anniversary of the death of Karl Barth), formerly published in a magazine called *Dushu Zazhi* (*Reading Books Magazine*) under the pseudonym of Mo-Mo. While the title of the article is about Karl Barth's theology, the following passage from this article seems to suggest that the article has its own contemporary political implications:

The practices of deifying secular authorities, idolizing historical politicians and mystifying secular regimes are not only western, but are also eastern. They are not only to be found in the past. They could still be found today… Issues pondered by Karl Barth are not just concerned with certain times or certain people; they are concerned with all times and all people… If Chinese are first and foremost human beings, then these issues are of course concerned with Chinese people, too.[55]

The political implications, or rather explications, of this passage are too apparent to miss. As such, Chinese theologians, whether those within the institutional church or those who fall under the category of "cultural Christians", do not fail to relate their theologies with concerns for the contemporary Chinese context while drawing inspiration from various western theological traditions. The approach to

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Series) 19 (1992.12), pp.53-58.

50 Chen Yilu, "Buteman ji qi Feishenhuahua" (Rudolf Bultmann and his demythologization), *Nanjing Theological Review* (New Series) 16 (1992.6), pp.35-39.

51 Zhang Xianyong (Richard Zhang), "Yiwei Duihuazhe de Jiaozong - Jinian Madding Bubo Shishi Ershiwu Zhounian" (In the steps of a dialogue maker – in commemoration of the 25th anniversary of the death of Martin Buber), *Nanjing Theological Review* (New Series) 13 (1991.3), pp. 47-55.

52 Chen,Yilu, "Nage Dandu de Geren: Qikeguo" (That Lonely Individual: Søren Kierkegaard), *Nanjing Theological Review* (New Series) 14-15 (1991.9), pp. 86-91,28.

53 E.g. Qiao Siluowo (Joe Slavo), "Shehuizhuyi he Zongjia Jiazhiguan shang you Gongtongdian" (There are common features in socialism and religious values) Ding Guangxun trans., *Nanjing Theological Review* (New Series) 20 (1994.6), pp.22-25.

54 For details see Ye Jinghua (Francis Yip), *Xunzhen Qiuquan: Zhongguo Shenxue yu Zhengjiao Chujing Chutan* [Seeking the Truth and Keeping the Integrity: A Preliminary Study of Chinese Theology and Church-State Context] (Hong Kong: CCSCRC, 1997), pp.133f.

55 Mo-mo, "Shangdi Jiushi Shangdi - jinian kaer bate shishi ershi zhounian" (God is God — Commemorating the 20th Anniversary of the Death of Karl Barth), *Nanjing Theological Review* (New Series), 10 (1989.6), pp. 43-47.

constructing Chinese theology adopted by Liu Xiaofeng and many other cultural Christians, though significantly different from Chinese Christians in the 1920/30s, especially with regard to their assessment of indigenous theology, is quite similar in their dual-emphasis on original theological construction and translation of western theology.

The brief review above shows that the development of Chinese theology has been closely related to the translation and transmission of western theological literature. Indeed, translation has played a positive role in contributing to the development of Chinese theology. The two most active periods of Chinese theological innovations coincide with massive translations of foreign theological works as well as rich productions of original Chinese theologies. The construction of original Chinese theology and the translation of western theology should thus be seen as complementary rather than mutually exclusive.

Chinese theology to date has not been based solely on the translation of western theology. Generally speaking, Chinese theologians are neither indiscriminate towards nor prejudiced against western theology. Most of them tend to select, translate and adopt western theology by taking off from their personal situation, reflecting upon issues in the contemporary Chinese situation and identifying applicable resources in western theology. With these resources to hand, Chinese theologians have also attempted to construct theology with their own Chinese cultural resources and religious experience to respond to challenges from traditional culture as well as from the contemporary social context.

Prospect of Bilateral Translation and Transmission

In the past, the relationship between Chinese and western theologies was one-sided or unilateral, involving the translation of western theologies into Chinese but not vice versa. Chinese theology has yet to make any visible impact on western theology, as in the case of liberation theology in Latin America. It is true that some western language periodicals are now regularly publishing translations of Chinese theology. [56] They, however, are largely aimed at introducing the present situation or history of Chinese Christianity, rather than seeking resources for enriching or improving western theology. The foremost criterion for selection is concerned mainly with whether the theological work can reflect the Chinese situation rather than its inherent theological merits. Eventually, there is translation, but not significant transmission. At present, there are no grounds to reprove such a situation, but, admittedly, it leaves a lot to be desired.

Ecumenism or the communion of saints should be realized in the exchange of

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56 For example *Chinese Theological Review* published in the United States, *China Study Journal* in the United Kingdom, and the book series published by Evangelisches Missionwerk in Deutschland u. China InfoStelle in Germany.

theological reflections rather than upheld as a mystical doctrine. The ecumenical spirit is manifested in mutual and two-way communication rather than unilateral translation or sole dependence on one party. It is my dream that in the future Christians from all corners of the world can have theological dialogue and exchange on equal footings with one another, including the case that western theologians may find inspiration from the Chinese theological writings. Perhaps it might sound overly complacent as well as impractical to make such a proposal in the presence of some of the most brilliant western theologians. Nonetheless, I am convinced that my dream for the future of Chinese theology is not totally utopian. There are several reasons for my dream - if not hope.

First of all, because of the distinctive characteristics of Chinese culture, it is quite possible for Chinese theologians to develop markedly different theologies from the West, which might furnish new insights into traditional issues. With regard to the linguistic aspect, John McIntyre's study of recent process Christology suggests that even those who reject the substantialist approach to thinking are ready to accept the authority, principle or spirit of the Chalcedonian definition, even if they have problems with its wording. This reflects the far-reaching impact of Chalcedon Christology, which might have to do with the structure of western languages, especially the substantialist bias in Indo-European languages.[57] According to the famous Sinologist Jacques Gernet, the Chinese language is very distinctive for its syntax and thus way of thinking, which has no such bias.[58] This may create difficulties in translation, but it also gives rise to the possibility of re-interpreting the traditional doctrine in a novel way. Take Chalcedonian Christology, for example, again, one may tend to render humanity and divinity mutually exclusive, if adopting the framework of Aristotelian logic. But in the Chinese language and way of thinking, there is no reason why humanity and divinity might not be considered two complementary models characterizing Jesus Christ.[59] Another interesting case is about the sexist language in western

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57 John McIntyre, *The Shape of Christology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 19982), p.336.

58 According to Gernet, "Of all the languages in the world, Chinese has the peculiar, distinctive feature of possessing no grammatical categories systematically differentiated by morphology: there appears to be nothing to distinguish a verb from an adjective, an adverb from a complement, a subject from an attribute. The fact is that, in Chinese, these categories only exist by implicit and arbitrary reference to other languages which do possess them. Furthermore, there was no word to denote existence in Chinese, nothing to convey the concept of being or essence, which in Greek is so conveniently expressed by the noun *ousia* or the neuter *to on*. Consequently, the notion of being, in the sense of an eternal and constant reality, above and beyond that which is phenomenal, was perhaps more difficult to conceive for a Chinese." See Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures*, Janet Loyd trans. (Cambridge: Cambridge U. P., 1986), pp.238-247, esp. p.241.

59 For details see Lai Pan-chiu, "A Mahayana Reading of Chalcedon Christology: A Chinese Response to John Keenan", *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24 (2004), pp.209-228.

theology. While many contemporary western theologians attempt to overcome the sexist bias in the Christian doctrine of God, some pre-modern Chinese theologians, notably Yang Tinyun (1562-1627), had already employed a non-sexist term *da-fu-mu* (Great-Parent; more literally: Great-Father-Mother) to refer to God. [60] With regard to the philosophical aspect, the Chinese emphasis on harmony, especially that with nature, may also contribute to the development of ecological theology worldwide. [61]

Secondly, there are Chinese theologians who have the ability to interpret the significance of Chinese culture for Christian theology to western theologians. Since the 1990s, there has been a growing number of Chinese scholars from Hong Kong, Taiwan and the Mainland teaching theology in domestic or overseas institutions after earning doctoral degrees from famous western universities. They are both well-versed in Chinese culture and western theology and sometimes publish their theological writings in western languages. Although these are not numerous in volume, they are rightfully an integral part of western theology. [62] Unlike the indigenous or contextual theologians in the previous generation, they do not entirely disregard western theology as irrelevant. Rather, they attempt to reflect critically on western theologies and to relate them creatively to the contemporary Chinese context. [63] Even when they seek to engage in dialogue with contemporary Neo-Confucians, they do so by citing western theologians rather than quoting directly from the Bible, as did indigenous theologians in the past. [64] In other words, Chinese theologians of the new generation have both the ecumenical vision and local concern as well as the language capabilities and theological training to engage in disciplined academic exchanges with western theologians. The rise of contemporary Chinese theologians reflects the maturing

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60 For details see Nicholas Standaert, *Yang Tingyun, Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988).

61 For details see Pan-chiu, Lai, "Christian Ecological Theology in Dialogue with Confucianism", *Ching Feng* vol.43, nos.3-4 (Sept.-Dec. 1998), pp.309-344.

62 To name a few of them: Pan-chiu, Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions: A Study of Paul Tillich's Thought* (Kampen: Kok Pharos, 1994); Siu-kwong, Tang, *God's History in the Theology of Jürgen Moltmann* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1996); Wing-kong, Lo, *Das Werk des Menschen und die Gnade Gottes in Karl Barths Sakrammentstheologie* (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1994); Benedict Kwok Hung-biu, *Von der historisch zur trinitätsthelogisch begründeten Christologie Wolfhart Pannenberg* (Ammersbek bei Hamburg: Verlag an der Lottbek, 1997).

63 Lai Pan-chiu, Benedict Kwok & Kung Lap-yan, Kebu, penengbo, houhuoshi yu dandai huaren chujing [Cobb, Pannenberg, Hauerwas and Contemporary Chinese Context] (Hong Kong: Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1999).

64 For example: Keith Ka-fu Chan, "Karl Barth's Christological Anthropology and Christian-Confucian Dialogue", *Ching Feng* 42/1-2 (March-June 1999), pp.1-33; Kin-ming Au, "Chu Hsi and Paul Tillich: A Comparison of their Views of Human Condition", *Ching Feng* 41 (Sep-Dec 1998), pp.363-384.

of Chinese theologians. Their relationship with western theology is neither one of dumb infantile reliance, nor of rebellious adolescent independence and isolation. Rather they seek to establish a relationship of mutual respect and inter-dependence in partnership.

Thirdly, there is growing concern among western theologians that expressions in Indo-European languages are not requisite and a small number of western theologians have adopted a more open attitude to other religions and cultures. For example, in recent discussions on ecological theology, Jürgen Moltmann, while ultimately resorting to the Judeo-Christian tradition for resources, at least admits that Chinese Taoism has its own ecological wisdom worthy of attention and appreciation by Christian theologians, and he himself is definitely inspired.[65] When the Chinese translation of his *God in Creation: An Ecological Doctrine of Creation* was published, he visited Hong Kong and I had the chance to ask him in person his views on Chinese theologians using resources in Taoist philosophy for the development of a Christian ecological theology. His response indicates that he is basically open to or even supportive of the idea. In the English-speaking theological community, Robert Neville and John Berthrong, leading figures of Boston Confucianism, combine Christian and Confucian traditions in their theological works. This more or less shows that western theologians are capable of appreciating the significance of Chinese philosophy for Christian theology.[66] In other words, it is not entirely inconceivable that western theology might draw inspiration from Chinese theology, an "emerging" member of ecumenical theology, just as liberation theology in Latin America could have an impact on western theology.

Concluding Remarks

In order to make their encounter not just faithful but also fruitful, both Chinese and western theologians may need to have not just a local concern but also a global vision. Chinese theologians should be ready to interpret the significance of Chinese culture for theological development in the West. Similarly, western theologians should also pay more attention to developments in Chinese theology, adopting input from Chinese resources with openness rather than just translating them. My challenge to my Chinese colleagues is: "Don't just ask what western theology can do for you; ask also what you can do for western theology." My urge to my western friends is: "Don't just ask what you can do for Chinese theology; ask also what Chinese theology can do for you, and what together we can do for the ecumenicity of the Christian tradition."

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65 See Moltmann, "Preface to the Chinese Translation", *Chuangzaode Shangdi* [*Gott in der Schöpfung*] (Hong Kong: Institute for Sino-Christian Studies, 1999), pp.xvii-xix.

66 See Robert Cummings Neville, *Boston Confucianism* (Albany: SUNY, 2000); *Behind the Mask of God* (Albany: SUNY, 1991); *The Tao and the Daimon* (Albany: SUNY, 1982); and John H. Berthrong, *Concerning Creativity: A Comparison of Chu Hsi, Whitehead and Neville* (Albany: SUNY, 1998).

The Value of Theology in Humanities:
Possible Approaches to Sino-Christian Theology

YANG Huilin
(Translated by Faith Leong)

Speaking from the perspective of a non-believer, the legitimacy of Christianity in China's context remains an unresolved issue. One key issue in the study of Christianity is whether – in the introduction, delineation and presentation of its theological thinking, its history of propagation and its tangible social-cultural influence on China – Christianity would lose its significance apart from any religious confession, pre-existing religious bearing and it being a representation of a foreign culture. In other words, does Christianity still hold any value apart from the zeal of faith and zeal of evangelisation while being discussed in a completely secular discourse context removed from its cultural medium?

To answer this question, it may be necessary to draw upon three categories of discussion on the significance of Christianity in humanities, namely to explore theological hermeneutics through "reason"; to search for the meaning of theological ethics through the "will"; and to develop the hopes of humanity expressed in theological aesthetics though "affection".

This choice is not because "reason", "will" and "affection" represent three basic dimensions of humanities, nor because one aims to arrive at a synthesis of truth, goodness and beauty using the Christian value system. It is simply that these three theological approaches address the following issues. Underlying a so-called theological hermeneutics is a confession of one's limits of understanding, reasoning and truth. It calls for a renewed probe into the question of the verification of meaning. Theological ethics strives to practice claims of goodness even as one realizes the partial, relative and contradictory nature of human values. Theological aesthetic goes beyond its enculturation objective and its assessment of beauty into a conversation with human's ultimate experience and self-redemption. Basic to all three approaches is the "interpretation" of meaning. Furthermore, confidence in theological hermeneutics is a prerequisite to prevent a recurrence of "ideological distortion".[1]

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1 Paul Ricoeur, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p.63.

The Theological Dimension of "Hermeneutics"

The term "hermeneutics" is believed to originate from the messenger Hermes in Greek mythology. Hermes does not send messages between two equal entities. Instead, lord god sends him to speak a divine message to the public. This seems to hint at the special relationship between hermeneutics and the "divine word". Theological hermeneutics originating from biblical hermeneutics of Judaism and early Christianity holds the same view: the Bible is considered a divine text, and the task of an exegete is to illuminate the will of God for humanity in the Bible. Thus, the term "hermeneutics" inherently presupposes a theological dimension.

However, to understand "interpretation" in this light, one encounters a basic dilemma. On the one hand, the mystery in the divine word needs to be interpreted. On the other hand, interpretation necessarily involves "misreading". In fact, the underlying problem of hermeneutics, which we now face, already manifested in that kind of ancient mythology and theological discourse context. It may be possible to solve the above difficulties in interpreting human speech through many expedient methods, but further questions remain in expedient methods to interpret "divine speech".[2] Thus, it is in the theological dimension that hermeneutics is pushed towards an ultimate resolution.

If one traces the history of hermeneutics to early biblical hermeneutics, one notices two main tendencies.

In Judaism, the literatures of rabbinic schools, Qumran community and Philo of Alexandra reveal four methods of early hermeneutic activity: literalist interpretation, Midrashic interpretation, Pesher interpretation (a form of ancient Syriac biblical commentary)[3] and allegorical interpretation.[4] Many Christian exegetes see the four methods implying multiple ways of interpretation. Although these four methods were all employed in Christian biblical hermeneutics of the Medieval Ages from Clement, Origen, through to the "multiple senses" of Thomas Aquinas, the allegorical tradition remains the most popular.[5]

Similarly, Augustine does not approve of literalistic or historical interpretations. Rather, the thrust of biblical hermeneutics Augustine represents is understood as based on Plato's dualism, namely, "the ontological priority of the

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2 For views on "divine speech" and "human speech", see Karl Barth, *The Word of God and the Word of Man,* Douglas Horton trans. (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1928).

3 Pontificia Commissio Biblica, *Jiaohuinei de Shengjing Quanshi* (*The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*) Xian Jiayi trans. (Hong Kong: Studium Biblicum Franciscanum, 1995), p.32.

4 Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance* (London: Macmillan, 1991), pp.16-17.

5 Cf. my *Zhuiwen Shangdi: Xinyang yu Lixing de Biannan* (*Argue with God: Debate of Faith and Reason*) (Beijing: Beijing Education, 1999), pp. 9-14,190-193.

unchangeable eternal to the changeable and material".[6] From this stems a basic hermeneutical principle:

What is of primary importance is not so much our knowledge of the material sign that enables us to interpret the eternal reality, but rather it is our knowledge of the eternal reality that enables us to interpret the material sign… The central problem of hermeneutics is much more basic. It is the problem of understanding the transcendent referent.[7]

Moreover, there are seven stages in understanding the "transcendent referent": "the fear of God", "piety", "charity", "fortitude", "mercy", "purification" and "wisdom".[8]

We thus see that the issues of hermeneutics belong inherently to issues of faith.

Post-modern times reveal further difficulties to this kind of hermeneutics based on the ontology of "revelation". This results in a need to re-interpret it. Yet the hermeneutics based on "proof" as an epistemology emphasis, though supported by the Reformation and appears more connected to modern thinking, is also challenged by the epistemology of experientialism[9] and also requires re-interpretation. It was Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834), who recast the theological dimension of hermeneutics, made prominent by hermeneutical activity, into a hermeneutical theory of greater universal significance. As such, the possible contributions of theological hermeneutics to humanities become more influential in secular scholarship.

The "hermeneutical theory" of Schleiermacher stemming from his "Pietistic theology" is commonly categorised under "historical hermeneutics".[10] Whether this is an apt categorization shall not be discussed here. The fact is, Schleiermacher is called "the father of modern hermeneutics" because his theory of hermeneutics is not restricted to exegesis but applies broadly to universal human interpretation. As a result, hermeneutics is redefined as an "art of interpretation".[11] In other words, not only are divine texts interpreted, all objects that require interpretation, even the act of interpretation itself, are believed to consist inevitably of a series of interpretation and misreading.

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6 Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology: Task and Method", in Francis Schüssler Fiorenza & John P. Galvin eds., *Systematic Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1991), volume I, p.13.
7 Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology", pp.13-14.
8 Augustine, *On Christian Doctrine*, book 2.7.9-11, Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology", p.14.
9 Cf. my *Zhuiwen Shangdi*, pp.175-178.
10 Miikka Ruokanen, *Hermeneutics as an Ecumenical Method in the Theology of Gerhard Ebeling* (Helsinki: Luther-Agricola Society, 1982), p.24.
11 Schleiermacher, *Hermeneutics: The Handwritten Manuscripts*, Heinz Kimmerle ed., James Duke and Jack Forstman trans. (Missoula: Scholar, 1977).

He first identifies two basic dimensions of the interpretative process that are close to Kant's interpretative method: the subjective / psychological and objective / grammatical dimensions. The former seeks to take hold of an object entirely; the latter finds "the particular sense of a certain discourse in the language… with the help of the language". [12] Later Western researchers strengthen further the modern hermeneutical implications of Schleiermacher's distinction:

> Schleiermacher considered this linguistic nature of human communication in more detail. All understanding presupposes language; in language we think and through language we communicate. There is no understanding without language, and therefore hermeneutics and rhetoric, however distinct, cannot be separated… As every text-production is the result of a particular or personal application of conventional linguistic rules, every act of text-reception is based on an individual application of conventional modes of understanding texts… He sees text as an individual universal where a network of individually applied conventions and rules work together in order to create a new and meaningful whole.[13]

An interpretive activity determined by the two above dimensions necessarily involves two basic hermeneutical issues: first, the openness of meaning; and second, the circular nature of interpretation.

Schleiermacher makes a rather advanced "interpretation" of the openness of meaning in his manuscripts on interpretation: the essence of interpretation lies in "the historical and divinatory, objective and subjective reconstruction of a given statement". [14] To humans who search for meaning through interpretative activities, this kind of reconstruction implies an ever closing up, but not an eventual grasp, on the interpreted object; this means that "meaning" is not the meaning itself, but merely an interpreted meaning.

Corresponding to Schleiermacher's dimensions of the "interpretive process", the "historical/objective" factor in a "reconstruction of meaning" are none other than the extension of the "objective/grammatical dimension" that place emphasis on "regularity" in the generation of meaning. While the "divinatory/subjective" factor stems from his "subjective/psychological dimension", which emphasizes "selectivity" in the generation of meaning. This latter category is clearly more significant because it describes "the necessarily courageous risk taken by an interpreter who approaches a text… that no approach will ever exhaust the individuality of the text".

12 Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader: Texts of the German Tradition from Enlightenment to the Present* (London: Blackwell, 1986), p.94. Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, pp.45-6.
13 Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, pp.45-6.
14 Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, p.46.

Understanding is a never-ending task and challenge… On the one hand that divination must not be understood as an individualistic escape from given semantic facts, and on the other hand that no (objective) knowledge of the text's linguistic composition can ever replace the interpreter's obligation to grasp the text's overall sense, although such a grasp will at best lead only to an approximate reconstruction.[15]

The analysis of the "hermeneutical circle" is an ancient business.[16] Firstly, one requires a certain kind of pre-understanding to enter a text. Without pre-understanding and questions, there will not be understanding and answers, and thus no meaning can be attained. Secondly, one requires the parts to understand the whole, and it is through the understanding of the whole, that one can accurately understand the parts. Consequently, Schleiermacher points out two interrelated methods, namely, the "divinatory" and the "comparative", which function simultaneously in this cycle. In his concrete analysis, the "divinatory" and the "comparative" modes are representations and extensions of the two above dimensions. Some researchers simply distinguish two methods: the former as a divinatory sense of the "text"; and the latter as a discernment and understanding of its context and its grammatical dimension.[17] Though Schleiermacher's "textual comparison" is understood also to deal with a later issue of "intertextuality", his emphasis is on the following aspect:

[T]he explanation of words and contents is not in itself interpretation but provides only aspects of interpretation, and hermeneutics only begins with the determination of the sense, though with the help of these aspects.[18]

Following this line of argument, psychological divination becomes the ultimate determinative factor to grapple with meaning in a hermeneutical circle.

From the description above, we see Schleiermacher promoting an "interpretation" that derives from "biblical interpretation" as a universal kind of interpretative activity. He first demarcates the complementary subjective and objective dimensions. He next replaces meaning itself with "reconstructed meaning". Subsequently, he takes charge of the "reconstructed meaning" by "divination" of the interpreter, and to some extent guide understanding within a hermeneutical circle through the "sensitivity" of "divination". In the process, the Kantian objective of "the bonding of the object and subject" is clearly reflected.

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15 For the two above citations, see Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, p.47.
16 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, Garrett Barden and John Cumming trans. (New York: Crossroad, 1975), p.154. Bultmann also mentions Aristotle's views on the "hermeneutic spiral" and "pre-understanding". See Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity* (Westport: Greenwood, 1975), p.111.
17 Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological* Hermeneutics, p.48.
18 Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, p.48 n.188 and p.103.

Along this line of logic, he sets a far-reaching goal for "understanding" and "interpretation", which is to "understand the text… better than its author did".[19]

When such thoughts of Schleiermacher pertain specifically to literature and text, one sees the direct effect of Schleiermacher contribution to "Athenaeum" and his influence on the early theories of Romanticism that is espoused by Schlegel brothers and others. Of which, one proposition is:

> Romantic poetry is progressive… still in the state of becoming… never be perfected. It can be exhausted by no theory… It alone is infinite, just as it alone is free…[20]

This statement in fact does not exceed Kant and Heidegger's definition on the "infinite nature" and "freedom" of aesthetics. It also indirectly encompasses Foucault's idea of "the disappearance or death of the author",[21] Gadamer and Jauss's "horizon of expectation" and the "fusion of horizons",[22] Iser's "indeterminacy" and "gaps or blanks",[23] Hirsch's debate on "meaning" and "significance",[24] Dufrenne's concept that "an author's original meaning is but a determinable X",[25] and so on. In a restricted sense of text and literature, these are but emanations of German classical aesthetics, and do not represent the import of modern day hermeneutics. A more basic reading of the significance of Schleiermacher's theory lies in relating his idea of interpretation back to his religious perspective. When the same principles of hermeneutics are applied on theological interpretation, theological interpretation has to relinquish its privileged status. This magnifies the revolutionary implications of modern hermeneutics and the value of humanities.

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19 Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, p.83; Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, p.47.

20 Friedrich Schlegel, *Lucinde and the Fragments*, Peter Firchow trans. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), p.175.

21 Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?", in David Lodge and Nigel Wood eds., *Modern Criticism and Theory* (New York: Pearson Education, 2000), p.175.

22 Hans Robert Jauss, *Towards an Aesthetic of Reception* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), p.20. Peter V. Zima, *The Philosophy of Modern Literary Theory* (London: Athlone, 1999), pp.58-59. Karl Mannheim (1853-1947) is considered the first in the fields of philosophy and cultural sociology to invite discussions on "the horizon of expectation" in terms of describing the historical context of interpreting texts and literature in real contexts. (The "horizon of expectation" supports the "sum total of values, norms, and interests" of a certain social group's worldview.) See Peter V. Zima, *The Philosophy of Modern Literary Theory*, pp.59-61 and p.220, n. 7.

23 Wolfgang Iser, "The Reading Process: a Phenomenological Approach" in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, pp.190-93.

24 E. D. Hirsch, Jr., "Faulty Perspectives" in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, p.230.

25 Mikel Dufrenne, *Meixue yu Zhexue (Esthétique et philosophie)*; Sun Fei trans. (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue, 1985), p.65.

Though Schleiermacher did not specifically engage in the study of theological interpretation, he maintained,

Incidentally, the question arises whether on account of the Holy Spirit the Scriptures must be treated in a special way. This question cannot be answered by a dogmatic decision about inspiration, because such a decision itself depends on interpretation.[26]

Similarly, in the *Brief Outline of Theology as a Field of Study* published in 1810, he set forth that theological interpretation should be in accordance with the principles of universal hermeneutics.[27] Worthy of note, though he denies the special privileges of theological interpretation, he nevertheless does not speak more against it. This clearly has to do with his pietistic religious attitude. This is to say, his suspicion of the "authority of biblical hermeneutics" and "authoritative biblical hermeneutics" in the church tradition may have been redirected against the act of human understanding that is limited by the logic of language itself. This is inline with his description in *A Dialogue on the Celebration of Christmas*, "To me all forms have become stiff, and all discoursing too tedious and cold."[28]

If one can use Schleiermacher's perspective of religion to make up for "indeterminacy" and "gaps", we may say that Schleiermacher desires to desert the restriction of speech logic and open up an alternative way: namely to relinquish theological meaning and share the experience and feel of beauty. After a few gentlemen, who are keen thinkers and debaters but who lacked artistry and feelings,[29] offered their great discourses, Schleiermacher conveyed his ideal through a character who had been silent until then—an ideal that perhaps can be called "theological hermeneutics":

Ladies… would have sung to you, with all piety of your discourses dwelling in them far more inwardly; or how charmingly, from hearts full of love and joy, they might have chatted with you, saying what would have otherwise pleased and enlivened you in a better way than they can have been by these solemn speeches of yours!... The unspeakable subject demands and even produces in me an unspeakable joy…[30]

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26 Kurt Mueller-Vollmer, *The Hermeneutics Reader*, p.80; Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, p.49.

27 F. D. E. Schleiermacher, *Shilaimahe: Zongjiao yu Jingqian* [Schleiermacher: Religion and Feeling] (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council, 1991), p.10 (Here after cited as: Shleiermacher, *Religion and Feeling*, p.10); also, Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, p.49.

28 Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve: A Dialogue on the Celebration of Christmas,* W. Hastie trans.; (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1890.) p.73; Schleiermacher, *Religion and Feeling*, p.516.

29 Cf. Schleiermacher, *Religion and Feeling*, pp.465-478.

30 Schleiermacher, *Christmas Eve*, p.73; Schleiermacher, *Religion and Feeling*, p.516.

In his works *On Religion* and *The Christian Faith*, Schleiermacher speaks constantly of religion in terms of "a pious feeling" and "a feeling of absolute dependence"[31] et cetera to explicate the essence of religion, and "poetic" and "passion"[32] to describe the contents of the Bible, so much so N. Z. Zia (Xie Fuya) points out the synonymous meanings of "religion" and "piety" in the German language.[33] In a similar way, "religious" and "pious" are quite similar in English. Even though this experiential-expressive model is later criticised by George Lindbeck,[34] it has already left a deep impact on contemporary Christian thinkers, such as "Tillich, Bultmann, Macquarrie, Kaufman of Protestantism…, as well as Bernard Lonergan,… Hans Küng, David Tracy, etc., who all support the experiential-expressive perspective to religion".[35]

With regard to the interpretative limits of linguistic-logic, one sees the exasperation of the language medium in face of the absolute "holy word" as Schleiermacher's "universal principles of hermeneutics" is applied onto the field of theological interpretation.

In face of such a unique interpretative object that does not allow differing meanings, the concept of the "fusion of horizons" in the poetic romanticism and literary hermeneutics becomes ineffective. Theological hermeneutics needs to make a fundamental choice between the definitive meaning of the "divine word" and the logic that underlies an interpretive activity. Schleiermacher's turn towards the experience of feelings is an attempt to escape the "bonds of language".

Schleiermacher, speaking of interpretation in terms of subjective selection, meaning reconstruction and intuitive feeling, erodes the truth perspective of traditional churches. He breaks new ground for modern hermeneutics, but he himself wanders off this path to allow the fulfilment of the "divine word" through pious feelings. He may likely have realised that the pursuit of interpretation this way leads ultimately to ever-receding meaning. He thus uses feeling and poetic experience as a point of departure, carrying considerable shade of romanticism, but at the same time differentiates from it. Romanticism does not concern with the certainty of meaning. It instead advocates poetic expression and the indeterminacy of meaning in the reading process. Schleiermacher, however, makes "interpretation" appeal to a universal religious experience, in order to prevent "interpretation" from destroying the foundations

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31 Schleiermacher, *Religion and Feeling*, p.59, 309.
32 Schleiermacher, *Religion and Feeling*, pp.55-56.
33 Xie Fuya, "Introduction", in Schleiermacher, *Religion and Feeling*, p.11.
34 George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (London: SPCK, 1984), pp.30-42.
35 Jiang Pisheng (Kang Phee Seng), "Duihua, Zhenli yu Zongjiao Yuyan" (Dialogue, Truth and Religious Language) in *Jidujiao Wenhua Xuekan* (*Journal for the Study of Christian Culture*) vol. 1 (Beijing: Dongfong, April 1999), p.115 and ftn.1.

of faith. From this, we again see that "hermeneutics" escapes real malice in the theological dimension, and the difficulty that theological hermeneutics poses cannot be explained in the same way as can literature and texts.

Consequently, another problem arises. Even if theological hermeneutics breaks away from the authority of the church and the bonds of language, and practice a new kind of religious experience, can there be an identical and universal "religious experience"? How would one then distinguish such an experience? Here lies the brunt of George Lindbeck's criticism of the "experiential-expressive" model.[36] Logically, a universal "religious experience" is similar to Kant's "common sense" based on the "free play of our cognitive powers".[37] It can be assumed, but cannot be proven. In terms of theological significance, Schleiermacher's "piety" seems to return to Augustine's seven steps of "understanding the transcendent referent". In this, "real understanding" becomes "spiritual" and "moral purification".[38]

Yet there has to be a way to explain theology, even if the explanation is one based on religious faith.

The Nature of "Theological Hermeneutics"

Theology is practically an interpretation of the Bible, creeds, religious traditions and experiences.[39] At a basic level, all theological schools of thought embody the nature of hermeneutics. Christian theology after Schleiermacher can generally be classified in terms of George Lindbeck's "experiential-expressive" and "cultural-linguistic" distinction. The difference between the two models lies in the difference between "experience" and "language".

The former is akin to "piety" in Schleiermacher's thinking. Religious experience is seen as the basic component of religious faith. Creeds are but the linguistic expression of this "experience". Accordingly, the equivalence of religions derives from the universality of experience (a different explanation is of course necessary for the "linguistic" model).[40] One natural implication is a theology that inherits Gadamer's language of hermeneutics. The "radical plurality of language" exposes the "radical ambiguity of history".[41] The interpretation of the nature of theology following the "experiential-expressive" model may become a radical one. Tracy forthrightly uses "hermeneutics" to define "theology" in a manner akin to Gadamer, who expresses that

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36 Jiang Pisheng, "Dialgoue, Truth and Religious Language", pp.115-116.
37 Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*, Werner S. Pluhar trans. (Indianapolis & Cambridge: Hackett, 1987), pp.87-90.
38 Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology", pp.13-14.
39 Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology", p.43.
40 Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology", p.43.
41 See David Tracy, *Plurality and Ambiguity: Hermeneutics, Religion, Hope* (London: SCM, 1987), chs. 3 and 4.

interpretative reading is a participation in history.[42] Tracy defines "systematic theology primarily as hermeneutical and proposes that the task of Christian systematic theology is the interpretive retrieval of the meaning and truth claims of the Christian classic"[43] Correspondingly, Ott applies the "holistic nature of interpretation" to the interpretation of the Bible, its theological content and contemporary missions. He states similarly that the "essence of theology is hermeneutics", but he qualifies that the central component of theology is made up of these three aspects. These aspects form a "theological hermeneutical circle", and render the "hermeneutical circle" a "detailed interpretation" of these three "consecutive circles".[44] The double meaning of "circle" and "circularity" was also a foremost question Paul Tillich dealt with in *Systematic Theology*. What Ott appropriated was mainly his "methodological consequence",[45] namely, the interdependency of every aspect of theological interpretation. So, Ott actually recourses to a position of faith and confirms the "meaning-content experienced in religious faith" through the "experiential nature of thinking" and the "objectification tendency of speech".[46]

The latter "cultural-linguistic" model carries with it a similar affinity to the nature of hermeneutics. As its proponent George Lindbeck suggests, the general significance of linguistic symbols and the explanation of dogma lie not in the "external word" but in "heavily ritualized" and "comprehensive interpretive schemes". "Religion… comprises a vocabulary of discursive and non-discursive symbols together with a distinctive logic or grammar in terms of which this vocabulary can be meaningfully deployed", which in turn also "molds" or "shapes" religious experience.[47] In comparison with the former "experiential-expressive" model, Lindbeck "internalizes" the external categories of language and creed into religion itself. In terms of Schleiermacher's "hermeneutics", this "internalization" in effect severs the connection between text and world, and text and the interpretative process.[48] This is comparable to Karl Barth's interpretative paradigm of "*sola Scriptura*" or "*solus Christus*".[49]

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42 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Zhenli yu Fangfa* (*Wahrheit und Methode*), Hong Handing trans. (Shanghai: Shanghai Yiwen, 1992), p.210.

43 David Tracy, *The Analogical Imagination* (New York: Crossroad, 1981), pp.99-153; Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Systematic Theology* vol. I, pp.45-46.

44 Heinrich Ott, "Shenme shi Xitong Shenxue" (What is Systematic Theology?), in Liu, Xiaofeng ed., *Heidegger and Theology* (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 1998), pp.197-202; original: "Was ist systematische Theologie?", in *Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche*, Beiheft 2 (1961), pp.19-46.

45 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Digswell Place: James Nisbet, 1968), p.14.

46 Ott, "What is Systematic Theology?", pp. 229-230.

47 George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*, pp.32-34.

48 "The greatest contribution...of Lindbeck should be in his affirmation of the religious tradition and his steadfast belief in the self-instructing nature of tradition… However, he reverts religion back into a linguistic-symbolic system, and as such promotes religious

Karl Barth emphasizes, "Word ought to be exposed in the words". He suggests that Bible is to be read as an "enigma" of "substance" and not an "enigma" of "document".[50] Therefore, to a certain extent, there is also an "internalization" and "construction" of "language". However, Barth does not view such method as "exclusive" to the Christian faith. For example in his introduction to the second edition of the commentary on Romans, he posits clearly, "My 'Biblicist' method… is applicable also to the study of Lao-Tse and Geothe."[51] To illustrate the correspondence of Barth's paradigm and Lindbeck's "cultural-linguistic model", and to understand Barth's pursuit of "real substance" in interpretation, which is not done in a "closed" perspective of interpretation, we analyze his three separate introductions the Romans commentary in 1918, 1921 and 1922. In the course of a short four-year period, there appears subtle changes to what he means by "interpreted meaning".

In the introduction of the first edition, he defines the acts of interpretation within the "doctrine of Inspiration". He almost cites Mannheim's view on the subject of "fusion of horizons" verbatim: "The understanding of history is an uninterrupted conversation between the wisdom of yesterday and the wisdom of to-morrow."[52] Three years later in an introduction to the second edition, Barth continues to engage in "conversation" between two "horizons of expectations". Barth expresses, "… till I have almost forgotten that I am not its author; till I know the author so well that I allow him to speak in my name and am even able to speak in his name myself." He is concerned that "the Word ought to be exposed in the words" and to this aim he labours greatly.[53] A year later in an introduction to the third edition, the original "conversation" is re-explained as the interpreter allowing the author's voice to be heard, "The question is whether or no [*sic*] he is to place himself in a relation to his author of utter loyalty. Is he to read him, determined to follow him to the very last word."[54] Compared to Foucault's "the author-function will disappear", "What difference does it make

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truth as merely a truth within an inner coherent system (like the truth of mathematical symbols), and does not tell us what objective reality is." Jiang Pisheng, "Dialgoue, Truth and Religious Language", p.125.

49 Daniel D. Williams, *Jindai Shenxue Sichao (What Present-day Theologians are Thinking?*); Zhou Tianhe trans. (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council, 1990), p.43. Barth himself simply expresses, "The attitude that I have adopted towards the text has been called 'Biblicist'." Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, Edwyn C. Hoskyns trans. (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), p.11.

50 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.8.

51 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.12.

52 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.1. For Mannheim's concept of "fusion of horizons", see n.22 above.

53 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.8.

54 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.17.

who is speaking?", and other like sayings,[55] Barth recedes in an entirely opposite direction from "conversation" to the "text" and then to the "author".

Bearing this in mind, the "ontological" tendency of Lindbeck's view of "language" and the "substantial" tendency of Barth's view of "language" show us two possible divergences of the "cultural-linguistic model". First, when language is removed from "experiential expression", its significance does not necessarily remain adequate within its "systematic inner coherence" (for instance, Barth's starting point). Second, when a linguistic system involves dialogue partners, then the pursuit of "substance" will tilt the dialogue towards the side of equilibrium (for instance, Barth's terminus). Actually, such a result is inevitable in Lindbeck's "system" because when religious language is seen as a "ritualistic interpretive scheme", the self-unifying nature of the system becomes the legitimate basis for symbolic truth. Outside Lindbeck's system, one observes the applicability of Barth's words, "The more successfully the good and the right assume concrete form, the more they become evil and wrong— *summum jus*, *summa injuria*… Is there anywhere legality which is not fundamentally illegal?" [56] Barth's later concern is not with "human interpretation", "misreading" and the "reconstruction of meaning" that Schleiermacher was concern with, but the self-revelation of God's word because "the testimony of the Bible… and the autonomy of our own world of thought is an impossible hermeneutical programme"[57], that "revelation is not a predicate of history, but history is a predicate of revelation".[58] Consequently, Barth's hermeneutics is seen as "a hermeneutics of revelation and not a hermeneutics of signification".[59] Interestingly, Barth, like Schleiermacher, also uses "intuitive certainty" to elucidate "genuine understanding and interpretation".[60] We notice that while Schleiermacher frees "interpretation" from the chains of "language" and practices it in religious experience, Karl Barth similarly uses a "word event"[61] to break away from the captivity of language. While the extreme case of hermeneutical language ultimately would posit that "there is nothing outside the

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55 Michel Foucault, "What is an Author?" in *Modern Criticism and Theory*, pp.186-87.

56 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the* Romans, p.479.

57 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, G. W. Bromiley and T. F. Torrance eds. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1965-1975), 2:721; Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological* Hermeneutics, p.132.

58 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:58; Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, p.129.

59 Eberhard Jüngel, *Gottes Sein ist im Werden: Verantwortliche Rede vom Sein Gottes bei Karl Barth* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1976), p.27. Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological* Hermeneutics, pp.135-36.

60 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.7.

61 Miikka Ruokanen, *Hermeneutics as an Ecumenical Method in the Theology of Gerhard Ebeling*, pp.199-200.

text",[62] Barth asserts using a contrary (or analogous) logic that, apart from faith, interpretation has no sure footing.[63] He occasionally takes interest in irrefutable rhetorical sentences:

> Is there any way of penetrating the heart of a document – of any document! – except on the assumption that its spirit will speak to our spirit through the actual written words?
> I answer by asking quite simply whether, if the Epistle is to be treated seriously at all, it is reasonable to approach it with any other assumption than that God is God.[64]

Though these rhetorical assertions may not necessarily withstand further threshing, Barth makes his point: "belief" acts as a precursor to "interpretation".

Pursuing further the "experiential-expressive" and "cultural-linguistic" paths, one perhaps reaches a paradox. On the one hand, if one does not, like Schleiermacher, break away from the restriction of language and disrupt linguistic interpretative activity, and simply to hold onto a yet proven "universal religious experience"; nor does one first subject thinking to experience and then later weed out "oddities" to fulfill its universal nature[65] (like Ott), one would perhaps not be able to escape the subversion of meaning (as Tracy hints). On the other hand, if one assumes Ott's way of reducing religion to "a system of self-contained symbols", one may have to take Karl Barth's alternative of changing the object of "interpretation" – an alternative which would require religious faith to maintain meaning.

Apart from regressing into religious experience and faith itself, would theological hermeneutics be able to face the challenges of modern hermeneutics? In other words, how could theological hermeneutics ultimately provide a solution to the pursuit of meaning amidst the tension present in the "language" medium? In what sense can theological hermeneutics find its solution to the problem of theological meaning? In any case, since the "divine word" is "expressed in human language" one must "accept the various limitations of this language", and can thus "exploit the ambiguity in language in an extreme manner".[66]

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62 "There is no outside-text… beyond and behind what one believes can be circumscribed as Rousseau's text, there has never been anything but writing." Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology* Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak trans. (Baltimore and London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1974), pp.158-59.

63 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, 2:506-512; Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics*, p.131.

64 Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.11, 18.

65 Ott maintains the way "to overcome metaphysics in the field of theology" is "to explicate all thoughts as basically objective in essence and then separate the oddities in religion from these thoughts". Ott, "What is Systematic Theology?", p.229.

66 Pontificia Commissio Biblica, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, p.ix.

In fact, this question already received attention in theological hermeneutics during the time of Karl Barth. Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and Paul Tillich were major representatives discussing the question. The hermeneutical thoughts of Tracy, Ott, Lindbeck, Eberling and others also attempted to explicate the problem in their time. Perhaps, what we need is to find a thread and a paradigm different from that of philosophical or theological hermeneutics. From there, we may understand the unique possibilities of theology afresh.

We need to take note that Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and Paul Tillich developed their theology in relation to the doubt and lost of faith in Christian philosophy, caused by the unprecedented disaster of the Second World War. On the one hand, this situation might have resulted ultimately in the effacement of the traditional "meaning"; on the other hand, the "protection of meaning" became a basic problem. Karl Barth's later explanation of "*solus Christus*" had nothing in common with these considerations of reality of his contemporaries. Although Barth employed a more rigid model, yet his absolute renouncement of the "analogy of being",[67] and the assertion of various propositions such as "let God be God" and "the Wholly Other",[68]

certainly did not act so as "to secure the existence of a godhead… but to emphasise the radical difference between the divine essence, the Godness of God, and all ungodly essences".[69]

His strong rejection of the Nazi position had a casual relation with this theological attitude. Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and Tillich (and also Schleiermacher) differ from him in that they do not "get out of the circle (of understanding) but… come into it".[70]

C. The "Hermeneutical Circle" and the Identification of Meaning

Heidegger wants to go into the hermeneutical circle "in the right way" because "this circle of understanding is not an orbit in which any random kind of knowledge may move; it is the expression of the existential *fore-structure* of the Dasein itself. It is not to be reduced to the level of a vicious circle… In this

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67 About Barth's strong renouncement of the analogy of being between God and man and that of creation, relationship and operation, etc., see article by Heinrich Ott, "Cong Shenxue yu Zhexue de Xiangyu de Beijing Kan Haideger Sixiang de Jiben Tezheng" (Der Weg Martin Heideggers und der Weg der Theologie), in Liu Xiaofeng ed., *Heidegger and Theology*, p.180.

68 Cf. Liu, Xiaofeng, *Zouxiang Shizijiasheng de Zhen* (*Towards the Truth of the Cross*) (Shanghai: Sanlian, 1995), pp.48-62.

69 Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance*, p.134.

70 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time,* John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson trans. (London: SCM, 1962), p.195.

circle is hidden a positive possibility of the most primordial kind of knowing."[71] Gadamer is motivated by a "positive possibility". He believes "that this circle possesses an ontologically positive significance". Concerning the reading that follows a "vicious circle", Gadamer observes only the nature of "arbitrariness" and "fancies", but he does not touch on Heidegger's corresponding category of "popular conceptions".[72] In Heidegger's view, if "arbitrariness" determines a certain "pre-understanding", or if "pre-understanding" is confused with "popular conceptions", then the "hermeneutical circle" becomes a "vicious circle". One has to enter the hermeneutical circle "in the right way" to realize the "positive possibility" of interpretation. The right way is to understand that "our first, last, and constant task is never to allow our fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception to be presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions".[73] Having precluded "arbitrary fancies" and "popular conceptions" which result in a vicious hermeneutical circle, and having scrutinized the "the existential *fore-structure* of Dasein itself", the resulting kind of "pre-understanding" is what Karl-Otto Apel calls the "*logos* of hermeneutics".[74] The "fore-structure" in the "hermeneutical circle" expressed here clearly refers to a substantive determinacy of "Being". Gadamer, perhaps having focussed too much on the "horizon of expectation" and "fusion", did not study "limited Being" (whether in a religious or irreligious sense),[75] and thus did not work with the problem of "popular conceptions". Later conceptions of literary and textual "interpretation" further misunderstood Gadamer's interpolation, and conveniently dwelt on language's "plurality of meaning", the "allusive nature of expression", "multiplicity of meaning" and the "reasonable conflicting nature of interpretation". These ideas missed the original intent that the constant goal of hermeneutics is to seek meaning. They also disregarded the "power structure" of language's ability to impart feelings of shock and sadness.[76] They may even

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71 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.195. See Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp.235-36; Miikka Ruokanen, *Hermeneutics as an Ecumenical Method in the Theology of Gerhard Ebeling*, p.135.

72 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp.236-39.

73 Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.195; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp.235-36.

74 Miikka Ruokanen, *Hermeneutics as an Ecumenical Method in the Theology of Gerhard Ebeling*, p.135. Miikka Ruokanen believes that the "hermeneutical *logos*" refers to a linguistic criterion in which pre-understanding forms the act of interpretation, though this may be questionable.

75 Pi Luo, "Haidegeer he Guanyu Youxianxing de Sixiang" (Heidegger and Finite Thinking), Chen Xiuzhai trans., in Liu Xiaofeng ed., *Heidegger and Theology*, pp.109, 129, 132-133, 136.

76 Foucault: "My problem is essentially the definition of the implicit systems in which we find ourselves prisoners; what I would like to grasp is the system of limits and exclusion which we practice without knowing it; I would like to make the cultural unconscious apparent." See Michel Foucault, *Rituals of Exclusion*. Cited from Judith Butler,

bring about an absolute break down of "reading activity". This kind of "interpretation" actually becomes a "popular conception", which results in a "vicious circle".

Entering the "hermeneutical circle" does not mean replacing "meaning" with "interpretation". Paul Tillich discusses the "theological circle" in relation to this.[77] He admits there remains "an *a priori* of experience and valuation" in theological hermeneutics and that "this is a circle which no religious philosopher can escape". This restriction caused by *a priori* and circularity in theological hermeneutics makes one aware that it is not viable to recognize theology as an empirical-inductive science (experiential theology), a metaphysical-deductive science (conceptual theology), nor even a composite of the two. The reason follows:

> If an inductive approach is employed, one must ask… what characteristic of reality or experience is the empirical basis of this theology. Whatever the answer may be, an *a priori* of experience and valuation is implied. The same is true of a deductive approach, as developed in classical idealism. The ultimate principles in idealist theology… like all metaphysical ultimates… are religious ultimates at the same time.

Like Heidegger, Tillich immediately points out, speaking of the circularity of the interpretive *a priori* of "Being": "It is by no means a vicious one. Every understanding of spiritual things (*Geisteswissenschaft*) is circular."[78] Tillich's affirmation of the "hermeneutical circle" results in his perspective towards history that resembles Gadamer's "effective history":[79]

> Tradition… does not report "naked facts," which itself is a questionable concept; but it does bring to mind significant events through a symbolic transformation of the facts… (But) in these forms of tradition it is virtually impossible to separate the historical occurrence from

  "Subjection, Resistance, Resignification", in Walter Brogan & James Risser eds., *American Continental Philosophy* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2000), p.336.

77 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol.1 (Digswell Place: James Nisbet, 1968), pp.11-14.

78 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, pp.12-14.

79 Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.351. *Truth and Method* was published in 1960. Tillich's *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, which discussed a similar question, was published in 1963 after Gadamer's volume; whilst Bultmann already spoke on the difference between *Historie* (or Historicity) and *Geschichte* (or Historicality) latest January and February 1955 at The University of Edinburgh. The contents of his speech were later included in *The Presence of Eternity*. In relation, Bultmann proposed the concept of "existential encounter with history" earlier in 1954. Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity* (Westport: Greenwood, 1975), pp.1-11, p.119. See also Alister E. McGrath ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought,* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), p.60.

its symbolic interpretation… All history-writing is dependent both on actual occurrences and on their reception by a concrete historical consciousness. There is no history without factual occurrences, and there is no history without the reception and interpretation of factual occurrences by historical consciousness.[80]

In a short span of about more than ten lines or so, Tillich employs five times the idea of "entering the theological circle". He naturally does not put emphasis on the "expectation" of "the Being". This kind of "entering" involves "concrete commitment", "theological self-interpretation" and a ceasing to speak of oneself "as a scientific theologian in the ordinary sense of 'scientific'".[81] His only concern is, "Every theologian is committed *and* alienated; he is always in faith *and* in doubt…"[82] Thus, his analysis of the "theological circle" is like Heidegger's "hermeneutical circle" whose "expectation of horizon" does not expand infinitely. He regulates "Being" through the lens of existential significance.

The various approaches of "non-religious interpretation of Christianity or Christian faith",[83] the "demythologization" of the biblical message[84] and three kinds of "correlations" between man and God[85] are, respectively, how Bonhoeffer, Bultmann and Tillich choose to "enter" the "hermeneutical circle".

Bonhoeffer explains the "non-religious interpretation" as the result of being "driven back to the beginnings of… understanding" due to the difficult situation of reality.[86] This difficult situation even resulted in his imprisonment and execution, but it also brought about two areas of advancement in his theological thought over and above the common theological interpretation: first, the question of the "form" and "essence" of religious faith; second, the secular religion of the "presence of God" and the "significance" of the "eternal absence".[87] These two aspects form the basic directions of a "non-religious interpretation".

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80 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology vol. 3*, pp.321-22.
81 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology vol. 3*, pp.12-13.
82 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology vol. 3*, p.13.
83 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, Eberhard Bethge ed. (London: Macmillan, 1972), pp.344, 285-86.
84 Bultmann, *Jesus Christ and Methodology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958), p.18. Werner G. Jeanrond, *Theological Hermeneutics: Development and Significance*, p.142.
85 Tillich, *Systematic Theology vol.1*, pp.84-85.
86 Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, p.299.
87 About "meaning as an eternal absence", see Emmanuel Levinas, *Essays van Emmanuel Levinas* (Baarn: Ten Have, 1984), p.46. Derrida alternatively points out, "What opens meaning and language is writing as the disappearance of natural presence". "Writing" is "the represented in its pure state, without the represented". It is "constitutive… of

The unique circumstances of German Christians after the Nazi came into power showed Bonhoeffer that the institutional church and traditional faith could not engage and respond to suffering in reality. He, thus, believes that one has to "speak of God in a non-religious way" in order to escape from the religious perspective of "popular conceptions":

Religious people speak of God when human knowledge (perhaps simply because they are too lazy to think) has come to an end, or when human resources fail – in fact it is always the *dues ex machina* that they bring on to the scene, either for the apparent solution of insoluble problems, or as strength in human failure.

The religious ideals with "form" removed and "essence" remaining should then "speak of God not on the boundaries but at the centre, not in weaknesses but in strength".[88]

To understand Christianity in terms of its "essence", it necessarily means a continuous interpretation of religious experience and the object of faith, to which Schleiermacher and Barth regress. To Bonhoeffer, this is what it means to "enter the hermeneutical circle", and yet at the same time to explicate meaning from that "circle"; Bonhoeffer employs the concept of the "absence of God" to the interpretive relationship formed between "meaning" and the "interpreter".

The purported "absence of God" closely relates to the "the world's coming of age". A world that has not yet come of age seems to have God everywhere. When believers speak of God in a common way, their "horizon of expectation" is often directed actually at a kind of god who is expectantly listening to pleas for help. This "horizon of expectation" fuses with the "historical Christianity" and leads to the marginalization of God. Thus according to Bonhoeffer, "The world that has come of age is more godless, and perhaps for that every reason nearer to God, than the world before its coming of age."[89] The "absence of God" in a "world that has come of age" – this proposition renders instantaneously ineffective existing religious experience and modes of religious faith. In this sense, the only possible way of explanation is,

The God who is with us is the God who forsakes us… The God who lets us live in the world without the working hypothesis of God is the God before whom we stand continually. Before God and with God we live without God.[90]

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speech, of signified meaning" and constituted "presence", "paradoxically, by being added to it". Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, pp.159, 312-313.

88 Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, pp.281-82.
89 Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, p.362.
90 Bonhoeffer, *Letters & Papers from Prison*, p.360.

This "world without the working hypothesis of God" cannot but remind us of Heidegger, who decided that the "first, last, and constant task" in interpretation is to do away with "fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception… presented to us by fancies and popular conceptions". [91] Bonhoeffer's "non-religious interpretation" of Christianity seems to hint that with the exclusion of religious "pre-understanding" made up of "popular conceptions", one would attain the "primordial kind of knowing" that is "hidden" in the "hermeneutical circle".

Bultmann's "demythologization" is considered as a kind of existential interpretation of the Bible. He first raises the issue in "The Problem of Hermeneutics" and "Is Exegesis without Presuppositions[92] Possible?": "Since the Scriptures are about God's revelation, how then do humans have a pre-understanding of God's revelation?"[93] Besides, "If… every interpretation is guided by a pre-understanding, the question arises whether it is possible to gain objective historical knowledge at all?"[94] These two questions carry and yet undo each other. The answer to the former question cannot be found in biblical "myths", since to interpret the biblical revelation, one has to explain the existence of human beings; as a result, the inquiry of God is embodied within the inquiry of the meaning of life. Consequently, "demythologization", which turns the question of "revelation" to "human self-understanding"[95] is faced with the latter question of how one is to avoid the "relativity" that comes about due to a different "pre-understanding"? This is the main topic of Bultmann's *The Presence of Eternity*.

Since the "interpretation of the revelation of the Bible" now means the "interpretation of the existence of human beings", Bultmann construes the "meaning of history" using the "present moment" and suggests, among other important propositions, that "meaning in history lies always in the present"[96] and "every moment is the *now* of responsibility, of decision".[97] Accordingly, he posits, "Genuine historical knowledge demands a very personal aliveness of the understanding subject… Only the historian who is excited by his participation in history,… will… be able to understand history. In this sense the most subjective

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91 Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, p.195; Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp.235-36.

92 Bultmann uses "presupposition" here and not "pre-understanding", but elsewhere he calls "a particular understanding" of a matter which "is presupposed… a *pre-understanding*". Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.113. As such, the two terms will be used interchangeably.

93 Rudolf Bultmann, "The Problem of Hermeneutics" and "Is Exegesis without Presuppositions Possible?", in *New Testament Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, Shubert M. Ogden ed. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984). See Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Systematic Theology", p.15, n. 33.

94 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.115.

95 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.149.

96 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.155.

97 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.143.

interpretation of history is at the same time the most objective."[98] It is not impossible to read these propositions as concordant to Gadamer's "effective history". However, Gadamer believes that Bultmann's "existential interpret-ation" only "interpreted Heidegger's concept of the inauthenticity of There-being in a theological way."[99] Bultmann would in turn have difficulty agreeing with his successor because he enters into this kind of "pre-understanding" exactly to prevent the "disappearance of truth".[100] He constantly emphasizes that "all science" require "freedom from presuppositions, for an unprejudiced approach" to happen.[101] In contrast to Bonhoeffer, Bultmann's issue is no longer ridding "pre-understanding" of "popular conceptions"; but how to "enter the hermeneutical circle" and at the same time surmount the limitations of "pre-understanding".

According to Bultmann's discussion, "pre-understanding" includes two different levels: first, the distinct "perspective or viewpoint" of the interpreter; second, the interpreter's "existential encounter with history".[102] The former identified level simply "destroyed… the conception of the relation between historian and history as the relation between subject and object" and demonstrates that "the historian cannot see history from a neutral stand-point outside history".[103] Yet the latter's emphasis on "encounter" does not merely reflect the "fusion of horizons" of Gadamer and others; instead, its main point is to interpret "existential" "self-knowledge" as "the knowledge of one's situation and of the problems, the tasks, and the possibilities which are contained within it",[104] as well as the "distress", "repentance", "doubt" and "despair"[105] that humanity cannot overcome. It follows that "pre-understanding" is not necessary to understand history "in its empirical course but as the sphere of life within which the human being moves, within which human life gains and develops its possibilities".[106] It renders all human "works of culture, in social and political orders as well as in philosophy, religion, world-views… and in art and poetry" the manifestations of history, of which the common essence is humanity's "virtue of the soul", which is the "objectifications of the soul". In this way, "the distance between the interpreted object and the interpreting subject vanishes".[107]

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98 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.122.
99 For Gadamer's critique of Bultmann, see Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp.475-77.
100 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.148.
101 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.122.
102 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.117.
103 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.143.
104 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.144-145.
105 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.148.
106 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.114.
107 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.124.

Of special note, even though Bultmann may put forward like Kant and Schleiermacher that "the interpreter shares in general human nature",[108] his "existential encounter" refers not to "common sense" or "universality of experience" but to common problems in the existential context.

Paul Tillich's perspective of theological hermeneutics mentioned earlier responds directly to Heidegger's "entering into the hermeneutical circle"; yet it presents more similarities to Bonhoeffer and Bultmann's thoughts. As reflected, "Tillich was from the beginning intent on relating theological thought to non-theological reflection and seemingly non-religious spheres of culture", and his "method of correlation" promotes "an 'answering' theology responding to the questions raised by the situation of its time".[109] So, not only are "the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and the God of the philosophers… the same God", it allows one to escape "the ontological anxiety of the void of absolute meaninglessness" and to draw out the possibility of "correlation".[110]

Like Bonhoeffer and Bultmann, Tillich affirms the relation between "religious symbols and that which is symbolized by them" and "concepts denoting the human and those denoting the divine".[111] In so doing, he promotes the plurality of "method" and not the plurality of "meaning". The use of "plurality of meaning" to construe the "hermeneutical activity", and conversely enriching the "plurality of meaning" through further "hermeneutical activity", we see the 20th century moving increasingly away from the tragic import of the "war of the gods", but what remain of hermeneutics are simply cursory sentiments of the literati. To the contrary, a plurality of "method" demonstrates the necessity of "meaning". It warns against the subversion of "meaning" by "interpretation", and protects "meaning" in a modern context that tends towards skepticism. This is an important caveat for related studies in humanities.

Additionally, the thread constituted by Tillich, Bonhoeffer and Bultmann illustrates the following: theological interpretation has to enter the "hermeneutical circle" and the modern discourse context. To merely take recourse in religious experience or religious faith itself is questionable at least in terms of logic. Neither can it face up to the challenges of modern hermeneutics. Perhaps, it is only through entry into the hermeneutical circle that theological interpretation is resurrected. As Tillich expresses, one "can elicit an understanding of the significance of the Christian faith even from those who stand entirely outside it".[112]

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108 Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, p.124.
109 McGrath ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, p.638.
110 McGrath ed., *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Modern Christian Thought*, p.640.
111 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology vol. 1*, p.84.
112 Daniel D. Williams, *What Present-Day Theologians are Thinking* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1952),p. 71.

Conclusion

In the 20th century, we indeed see the marginalization of the position of Christianity in the area of secular life; yet in various thoughts of humanities involving "value judgments", theological perspective assumes an increasingly prominent and irreplaceable significance because the pursuit of "value" in secular arena leads eventually to relativity of all "values". Through the deconstruction of "grand narrative" brought about by post-modern criticisms, Christian theology receives more room for exploration. To a certain extent, this room reveals a similar deep structure of humanities and theology.

The attempt to introduce a perspective of theological hermeneutics for the study of humanities rests not only on the fact that theological hermeneutics is the source of activities in textual interpretation; more fundamentally, the absence of theological hermeneutics leaves the questions of "power discourse", "openness of text" and other basic hermeneutical problems unsettled. Through standard hermeneutical analysis, we are aware that our "pre-understanding" determines our interpretative activity; that a "definite meaning" is but a certain result of a "truth structure". We are also aware that the "openness of text" and "over-interpretation" lead ultimately to the dissolution of meaning. The extreme application of reception theory and reader-response criticism renders any communication impossible, since "a thousand readers, a thousand Hamlets" becomes the accepted norm of reading. In terms of philosophical hermeneutics, this interpretation simply subverts the "myth of history and language", but it is hardly helpful in re-constructing meaning.

In theology, the particular nature of hermeneutics and object of interpretation requires one to maintain the tension between "truth" and "method", and to work with the erosion of definite meaning that arises from a varying discourse context. One needs to find an anchorage so as not to escape into "blanks"; one necessarily affirms the realness of the "enigma", while acknowledging the limitations of human beings, of language and of interpretation itself. This, ought to be the character of humanities.

Sino-Christian Theology:
The Unfolding of "Dao" in the Chinese Language Context

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(Translated by Fredrik Fällman)

This article discusses the reform of Sino-Christian theology [1] from the characteristics of language. First I want to establish my view of language:

1) Language cannot separate itself from the forms of life; language is itself a form of life. As there are many forms of life, there is also a manifold of languages. If one wants to understand a language, one must integrate with the corresponding form of life.

2) The language that is integrated with our form of life is the only language that we can understand. The language of science, the language of philosophy, the language of theology, mathematics and even the formalized artificial languages in the end have their foundation in the everyday language interrelated with our everyday life.

3) Language is not only a means for our description of the world and for explaining ourselves, but is also the frame for our understanding of the world and for organising our thoughts.

My question is then: if the above view of language is correct, what kind of proposal for constructing Sino-Christian theology can we then draw forth from it?

My conclusion is: language itself is actually "*dao*". The Holy Word (*shengyan*) lives in the human word (*renyan*), and the Holy Spirit lives in the lives of human beings. There is no such Holy Word or Holy Spirit that is separated from our life. Even if there were, it could still not use our language to express itself, and we would not understand it. What is not related to our life is totally meaningless to us. God cares for people, "*dao*" (the Word) is with God, and it is also in our lives. If we want to understand the Holy Word we must integrate it into our lives. Because of the diverse forms of life, we should develop a Sino-Christian theology that conforms with the characteristics of the Chinese language and with the Chinese context; applying to it a narrative blending of the history of the Chinese, their reality and hopes, expounding and promoting Sino-Christian theology. "*Dao*" and "the Holy Spirit" are not only

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1   I have chosen to use the term "Sino-Christian theology" throughout this article for the Chinese term "*hanyu shenxue*". There are other possible renderings, such as "Sino-theology" or more literally "theology in Chinese language", but Sino-Christian theology is in line with the terminology used at the Institute for Sino-Christian Studies at Tao Fong Shan in Hong Kong. - *Transl. note.*

unfolding in the lives of Hebrews and Greek, but also in the context integrated with Chinese lives.

Starting from Translation

In the past linguists often considered language as a tool for describing the world. The world is all the events that have happened, and we use language to describe them. Language is a picture of facts. In contemporary linguistic philosophy, this view of language is seen as one-sided, since language naturally does not only describe the world, but is also the medium for our interchange of thoughts. In his latter philosophy, Wittgenstein criticised his own early view and theory of language as picture, which proves that language is not only of descriptive use but also for orders, apologies, greetings and a number of other uses. Wittgenstein also demonstrated that the use of language is connected with its rules, and that the rules of language are formed in and abided by in language activities. Language activities are one part of the form of life, and only if we take part in language activity and its related form of life can we really learn the rules of a language and understand that kind of language.

Contemporary language philosophers have also taken this kind of viewpoint a step further: when we are using a language, abiding by specified language rules, language does not merely describe things, but is also organising the thoughts we want to express. So-called objective facts are actually facts that we have systematically bestowed with meaning through the concept and structure of language. Because of the diverse forms of life and languages, even if it is "the same" fact, through explanations in different languages it can also produce differences in understanding among people.

The question is then: if the view of language presented above is correct, what consequences will it have on theology? A crucial issue is: with the Bible being translated into different languages, will it produce different understandings of the Bible from people?

Some theologians promote a Bible translation and understanding that is separated from the translation and understanding of other texts, since the Bible was written with the aid of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit will help the believers to achieve a common interpretation and understanding, and the translation of "The Septuagint" is one example of that. I believe that the Holy Spirit can help us, but I do not believe that the Holy Spirit's help to us is like magic. From my own experience of reading the Bible, the Holy Spirit's help for a person to understand appears in the natural process when man integrates his own life experiences and very seriously reads the Bible, reflects upon its meaning and teachings, looks ahead and lets it guide his own behaviour. I think that we as ordinary persons should use the common sense bestowed on man to talk about this issue. Actually, there has never been any Bible translation with an identical content. The translation of "The Septuagint" is simply a myth. Even the

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Bible itself has been compiled out of a historical process, and actually there has been no final conclusion on what texts are part of canon or are not part of canon. There are for example seven more books in the Catholic Bible than in the Protestant. I do not understand Hebrew, but when comparing an English translation of the Hebrew Bible used by Jews with an English translation of the Christian Old Testament, I find rather many differences. There are even some translations of names that involve key issues of doctrine. Martin Luther's translation to German and the German Bible translation in modern language have differences, and the reason for this is the change of the language. The Bible translation made by the Jewish theologians Franz Rosenzweig and Martin Buber have differences with Martin Luther's Bible, but these are not only because of language changes, but also because of the question of theological understanding.

Chinese Bible translation is even more diversified. Until today there have been over one hundred translations that we have evidence for, including to classical Chinese (*wenyan*), vernacular (*baihua*) and several dialects. There are two peculiarities worth noting about the process of these translations: (1) they were first translated by foreigners, before the Chinese translated themselves; (2) the classical Chinese version was popular before the vernacular version became popular.

First, almost only foreign missionaries did the translation work. Chinese were at most allowed to make some language polishing. From Robert Morrison's first Chinese translation (started in 1807, published in full in Malacca in 1823) to "The Mandarin Union Version" in 1919, as far as we know, they were translated by foreigners according to their understanding of the original text, and of Chinese. This situation did not change until the last decades. Presently Chinese themselves undertake most of the new translations of the Bible. The development of the Chinese language and of biblical archaeology has made biblical scholars feel the strong necessity for a new translation of the Bible, and now it is only Chinese Bible scholars themselves who are qualified for this work. Among foreign scholars today, it is very rare to find someone who is simultaneously fluent in Chinese, Hebrew and Greek. Among Chinese scholars the level of foreign languages is normally higher than the Chinese level of foreign scholars. This is a historical leap. Lu Chen-chung (Lü Zhenzhong) made a start being the first individual Chinese to translate the whole Bible. In 1946 he translated *The New Testament* and in 1970 *The Old Testament*. With the translation of *Today's Chinese Bible* by Moses Hsu (Xu Mushi), Chow Lien Hwa (Zhou Lianhua), I-Jin Loh (Luo Weiren) and others, a new breakthrough was made. They completed *The New Testament* in 1975 and *The Old Testament* in 1979. The style is graceful and smooth, and it has become used and loved among ordinary readers of modern Chinese. The work with *The New Chinese Version*, based on and revised from the Union Version, was undertaken by Paul Yung (Rong Baoluo) and more than 30 Chinese Bible scholars. In 1976 they

published *The New Testament*, and in 1992 the whole *Old Testament* was finished. The whole new Bible translation came out also in 1992. The changes in that version are not many, but they are crucial at many points.

The efforts of Western missionaries to translate the Bible into Chinese cannot be said to have been careless. They used three styles to translate the Bible, High Wenli, Easy Wenli and Mandarin (vernacular). The most popular in the beginning, "The Two Ma Translations" (Robert Morrison's translation and Joshua Marshman's translation), were written in Classical Chinese (High Wenli), e.g.: Morrison translated John 1:1 as "In the beginning there was the Word and this Word was with God. And the Word was God." Marshman translated it as "At first there was the Word. God was with the Word. The Word was God."[2] To adapt to the common reader's language habits the Western missionaries afterwards used both Easy Wenli and vernacular to translate the Bible. *The Union Version of the Bible*, one of the great achievements of their work should, according to the original plan, have had translations in three styles, High Wenli, Easy Wenli and Mandarin (vernacular). Thus comes the saying "only one Bible, but three translations" (*shengjing weiyi, yibenze san*). Later the High and Easy Wenli translations were merged to a "Wenli Union Version" (*wenli hehe yiben*). It was finalised and published together with the "Mandarin Version" in 1919. At that very moment the May Fourth movement was promoting the vernacular, and on one hand the "Mandarin Union Version" (*guanhua hehe yiben*) added fuel to the flames for the development of the vernacular. On the other hand the firm establishment of the position of the vernacular also made the "Mandarin Union Version" come to the fore among the many Bible translations. After 1979 it has been re-printed many times in Shanghai and Nanjing. An edition with horizontal lines and simplified characters was printed 1989 in Nanjing, and until 1994 it was printed in over 10 million copies.

Just as Chinese Buddhist Studies started with the translation of Buddhist scriptures, Chinese theology followed the translation of the Bible and Western theological works. When Buddhism entered China, translation work was primarily done by monks from India and the Western Regions[3]. Only later it became a primary task for Chinese to perform. Kumārajīva (344-413), Paramārtha (499-569) and Xuanzang (602-664) are known as the three great Buddhist translators. Xuanzang was comparatively late, and it is difficult to say if he surpassed the other two in either number or quality of translation, but Xuanzang started the Consciousness-only school[4] in China. The other two did

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2   These are my translations from classical Chinese. Morrison's original Chinese text was "*dang shi yi you yan er qi yan xie shen。you qi yan wei shen*", and Marshman's *"yuan shi wei yan。shen tong yan。yan ji shen"* - *Transl. note.*

3   "Western Regions" is a translation of "*Xiyu*", referring to Central Asia. - *Transl. note.*

4   This school is also known as the Dharma-character (*fa xiang*) school and is closely related to the Yogācāra school. - *Transl. note.*

not start any Buddhist school of thought in China. If you should look for a reason, I believe that while Xuanzang brought in the mentality of his Chinese mother tongue when translating Sanskrit texts, the former two transformed the understanding of Buddhist scriptures from their mother tongue Sanskrit into Chinese. Translation should be faithful to the original text, but it must also be an analytical, constructive and creative work. Xuanzang's Buddhist translations, with the inside information of a native Chinese speaker's mind, were bound to merge more and easier into Chinese culture and the experiences of Chinese life. In this way, Buddhist schools with Chinese characteristics were more easily formed. This is actually a fact. When Xuanzang interpreted and translated the ten great treatises of the Conciousness-only school, and created the *Treatise on the Theory of Consciousness-only* (*Vijñaptimātratāsiddhi*), he brought in his own understanding of China and with that established the Consciousness-only school.

The development of Buddhism in China can be divided into three stages: (1) mission, (2) determination of teachings (*panjiao*), (3) establishment. Buddhist mission in China was a process of a foreign culture rooting in China, step by step being understood by the Chinese. It originated with monks from India and the Western Regions spreading the teaching and translating the scriptures. Gradually Chinese monks took a greater part and finally the main role.

Following the translation of different kinds of Buddhist scriptures into Chinese, different Buddhist schools of Indian origin set their foot in China. The Chinese noted their differences and started to inquire what scriptures were more accurate or appropriate, what schools were more orthodox or outstanding. On the premise that all Buddhist scriptures should be acknowledged as Buddhist teachings, they perhaps also wanted to list and arrange the many scriptures and distinguish which were of more or lesser urgency for their study and practice. According to *Tang Biographies of Eminent Monks* (*Tang Gao Seng Zhuan*) the Tang Taizong Emperor asked the recluse Sun Simiao: "Which is the greatest of Buddhist sutras?" Sun answered: "The *Avatamsaka Sutra* is most respected among the many sutras." The Emperor asked again: "Is it not preposterous that the 600 volumes of the *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* that Master Xuanzang translated cannot be compared with the 60 volumes of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*?" Sun answered: "*Avatamsaka Sutra* expounds the karmic causation of all things boundlessly in the phenomenal world and is equally mild and unfettered as the supreme treasure scriptures. It includes all the doctrines of Buddhism, and regardless of which doctrine it can evolve thousands of needle sharp scriptures. However, *Mahāprajñāpāramitāsūtra* is but one doctrine in the world of the *Avatamsaka Sutra*." After the Tang Taizong Emperor heard Sun Simiao's words he consequently believed in and held on to the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. It does not matter if the Taizong Emperor really heard these words from Sun Simiao, since it shows us the doubtless determination of teachings (*panjiao*) by the disciples of

the *Avatamsaka Sutra*. To determine teachings is not just to listen to what other people say, but also to show one's own resolution. One's resolution should come from one's own life experience and understanding of the Buddhist scriptures. Chinese people's own determination of scriptures decided what Indian Buddhist schools should be admitted and carried forward in China. Not all Buddhist schools that entered China could take root and develop, but merely a few were disseminated.

Following the progressive merging of Buddhism into Chinese people's life, the Chinese also started to recognize the essence of Buddhism directly from their own human experience. At this time, the form of expression of thought was not to quote from authoritative and ancient works, but to start directly from one's life experiences and to use one's own language to expound Buddhist theory. It was only at this time one can really talk about the birth of Chinese Buddhist studies. *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* (*liu zu tan jīng*) emerged under such circumstances. In Buddhism, to make a "sutra" from a text expounding the most basic position and view in human life, and to add proof and further expounding to this basic standpoint and view is called "*abhidharma*". Prior to the *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* there were only "*abhidharma*" Buddhist works written by Chinese, no "sutras". The naming of *The Platform Sutra of the Sixth Patriarch* clearly shows the Chinese awareness that their Buddhist Studies has a unique origin.

I believe that Christianity in China also developed similarly to Buddhism, with the three stages of mission, determination of teachings and establishment. At present it is still in the mission and determination of teachings stage, and has not yet entered the establishment stage. We cannot yet strictly talk of any Chinese theology. Naturally there are differences between these two missions. When Buddhism entered China, China had a great wide open mind, and often took the initiative of inviting monks from India or the Western regions to come to China and do mission. When Christianity entered China in modern times it followed in the company of invading powers. The majority attitude to Buddhism at the time of entering was based on successively positive preconditions, but the authority holders and the cultural sphere in modern China had an essentially refusal attitude towards Christianity. There was a fear that Christianity would cause turmoil in the state system and with popular feelings. This mentality is perhaps related to the decreasing self-confidence of one's own national power and ability to digest foreign culture. With the strengthening of Chinese national power in recent years, Chinese scholars have also adopted an increasingly open attitude towards foreign culture.

We have previously discussed how translation into Chinese of the Bible was primarily done by Western missionaries, but how this task of Bible translation is now taken over by Chinese. What must be added is, that Westerners also did the translation and introduction of Western theology, and

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even the ideological trends and social concepts of Western philosophy, for example socialism, was first translated and introduced by Western missionaries. To prove this fact you only have to skip through the pages of *Review of the Times* (*Wanguo Gongbao*). It is said that Kang Youwei was enlightened about New Learning from the occasional reading of *Review of the Times* and other journals published by Western missionaries that he could find on the Fourth Avenue[5] in Shanghai. This was before he went to Beijing to take the civil service exam. The energy with which Chinese scholars now translate Western theological and philosophical works is quite comparable to the fervour with which Buddhist scripture was translated in the Tang dynasty. The Western theological and philosophical works that you can find in Chinese bookstores is not second to what is displayed on the shelves in European and American bookstores. This is because China is now translating and publishing these kinds of works from antiquity until present all at once, while in the Western bookstores one can only find the currently most popular books. Chinese Buddhism takes pride in that the Buddhist canon in Chinese translation is more complete than the original texts kept in India. With such a continued development, the Christian theological book series in China will be more and more complete, and there will emerge a Christian canon in the same manner as with the Buddhist canon.

In the Chinese mainland, scholars of Christianity and theologians have just entered the stage of determination of teachings. Some like existentialist theology, and translate and introduce more Western existentialist theology; others like post-modernist theology and then translate and introduce post-modernist theology; yet others like neo-orthodox theology and evangelical theology and translate and promote more of neo-orthodox and evangelical theology. They also argue between them, and criticize their opponents for being too conservative, too liberal or even go so far as to claim that they deviate from Christianity.

However, this determination of teachings is somewhat distant from establishing one's own theology, since it is still criticizing theology established by others. Only when Chinese Christian scholars realise that the theological doctrine already existing in the West is not enough to answer the questions that Chinese face themselves, that it is not enough to explain the life experiences of Chinese people, and make efforts to establish their own system of theological narratives and concepts, only then can Chinese theology in its true sense appear. Only when the needs of one's own life and one's search for the ultimate meaning is satisfied. Naturally, Chinese theology must not only be limited to answer the specific questions of China, but Chinese theology should also answer the new questions of the whole world and of the whole of humanity. For Chinese theology to be Chinese, it must primarily depend on what Chinese

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5 *Si malu* or Fourth Avenue was the premier book selling district in Shanghai, and still is today. The road is now known as Fuzhou Road. - *Transl. note.*

people can experience in their lives, to look from their own angle and use their own language to express the basic questions of human life and of the world, and to believe that this expression accords with the "*dao*" that is with God.

Human Word and Divine Word

The beginning of the Gospel of John says: "In the beginning was the Word [*dao*], and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1) What is this *dao*? *Dao* is word, it is language. Some people say that *dao* is not our word, but God's word. I want to say that *dao* is God's word, but it is also our word. God's word is embodied in our word, and God's spirit lives in our word, and it is only us that often do not hear or see it. This is what the Gospel of John is telling us, "The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him." We don't know that light, that life and that *dao*, but that doesn't indicate that light, life and *dao* are not in this world. In Christianity God, *dao* (word), spirit and life are united. Jesus said to his disciples: "The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life." (John 6:63)

We live in the world and we also live in language. Language is with us, and in our life and through our language we comprehend God's *dao*. Our life depends on two kinds of language, one kind is the language of genes expressing biological life, and the other is language in the form of the sound and script expressing cultural life. Genes decide our biological life, and the genetic code innately decides whether what grows out of the embryo should be a human or a dog, male or female, a healthy person or a handicapped person. Genes also decide whether if one should have the ability to understand and use the language of sound and script. What differentiates humans from other animals is that human life is not merely decided by the genetic code, but also by the human ability to study and create culture through the language of sound and script. In this respect humans are rather free and can accept any kind of culture, adopt any form of living, and receive any kind of knowledge and technical training, forming any kind of cultural life for a human being. Listening to Jesus shapes the cultural life of a Christian. Listening to Buddha shapes the cultural life of a Buddhist, and listening to Confucius shapes the cultural life of a Confucian believer. Whether a person becomes a worker, a farmer, a soldier, a teacher, a doctor, an engineer or something else is related to what specialised technical training he receives. A person can choose a life with strict adherence to moral rules, or he can choose an unrestrained life. All these patterns of morality, religion and knowledge are cultural forms learnt and inherited through language.

The language of the genetic code coexists with natural biological life, as well as the human language of sound and script coexists with human cultural life, and this is of course good. But what relation does this have with the *dao* that coexists with God? It seems that the former is a natural phenomenon and the

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latter is a human phenomenon, and thus they are not the word of God. I will not argue here if the world is a natural existence or a creation by God. I approve of Kant's view, that to deal with this issue we go beyond the limits of human reason. What I want to point out is that once we accept that God created the world, just like the Bible says, "Then God said… And it was so." the genetic discoveries of modern science coincidentally even stronger confirm the Bible story of God creating the world. We can say that the language of the genetic code originates from God's word. We can also say that as big as the laws ruling the celestial bodies, and as small as the laws ruling the atom, in the end it all comes from God's word. The scientists of the Renaissance believed that the language of nature was God's beauty written in mathematical language, and glowing with enthusiasm they consequently sought to express the laws of nature in mathematical formula. Thereby one could even better appreciate God's perfection. However, the unity of the laws of nature and the continuity of the genetic evolution of all living things is not logically sufficient to prove God's existence, but it does greatly increase the belief in this: the *dao* unfolding in the world, pervading all things and making nature comply with laws and causes the continuous evolution of all living things.

Some people argue that conformity with laws cannot confirm that God exists, and that only miracles can confirm the existence of God. I believe that from a logical point of view, neither laws nor miracles are enough to confirm the existence of God. The world is so big that we can never fully verify that all phenomena in nature comply with the laws. Even if the phenomena of nature would all comply with the laws, we could claim that natural phenomena are originally like this. This is the standpoint of naturalism. On the other hand, we could of course also claim that natural phenomena are chaotic by nature, and that God gave them order, made them follow laws. In nature we can see both uniform and chaotic conditions at the same time, but we believe that natural phenomena in the final analysis are ordered. This is a basic belief of modern natural science. We insist on this standpoint: whenever we can confirm the relation between the chaotic states of various physical phenomena, we can find its laws. No matter how complicated they are, the outcome is in principle similar to the planets revolving around the Sun, some seemingly not adhering to the laws (set by universal gravity), but after finding new planets influencing them the validity of the laws are confirmed even further. What we see is often common phenomena, but occasionally we see unusual ones that are enough to make us surprised and call them miraculous. But isn't finding the factors behind the abnormity of miraculous natural phenomena merely evidence that they in fact do adhere to the laws of nature? As miracles are natural phenomena and inherently follow rules, we can use natural phenomena to change existing natural conditions, but we cannot change the laws of nature as such. This is the only thing that humans are not able to do.

Some people believe that God's greatness shows in his creation of a united, orderly and regulated world. Others believe that God's greatness shows in his ability to perform miracles. The former argue that except for that the united, orderly and regulated world is a miracle itself, there can be no other miracles altering the laws of nature. The latter argue that God is omnipotent, and that he created the world by his own will, and that he can also change his creation by his own will. This is a big debate in theology, and I have read many articles where Western philosophers discuss this topic. However, the impression I get is that so far there has been no conclusion on a theoretical ground determining which is right or wrong. Maybe there will not be one in the future either, since this issue cannot be answered merely based on logical deduction.

Nevertheless, this issue relates to the human attitude to life. When a person has a certain faith, it is not because this faith has been fully verified by theory or empirically, but because he himself has had an experience, has inherited a living practice or what he has gained knowledge of has made him inclined to have this faith. On a similar note, a person who has grown up with modern natural science education has difficulty in believing that the laws of nature can be changed since what he has learnt, and his life experiences, has given him more evidence and reason to prove that the laws of nature do not change. A person who has not received modern natural science education or one who is without higher education will perhaps more easily support the idea that the laws of nature can change by miracle.

In China today, the attitude to miracles is a watershed between Church Christians and scholars of Christianity, or Church Christians and "Cultural Christians". I have made a rough poll in the universities and in the Academy of Social Sciences in Shanghai, and found that over 90% of scholars do not believe that miracles going against the laws of nature exist. However, over 80% of Church Christians believe that such miracles exist. I estimate that the situation is similar over the whole Chinese mainland. Scholars of Christianity often have a supportive and sympathetic attitude to Christian culture, but hold a sceptical view on the Bible and other texts with descriptions of miracles. There are scholars who see Church believers' faith in miracles as superstition, and want to enlighten them and "deconstruct myths". Most scholars keep an academically neutral attitude, and declare that they do research for its own sake, and do not want to take part in or interfere with church activities. The attitude of Church Christians is the opposite. Among them there are some who think that it is positive for scholars in universities to do research on Christian culture, and that this is positive for the development of Christianity. Some even believe that this is a path to Christian faith, and because of this put the laurel of "Cultural Christian" on their heads. Others have a negative attitude towards this kind of "academic research", and argue that this research is only superficial and does not reach the core. They argue that it does not enter Christian life, that they are

way off mark, even harmful, since they may substitute essential things for superficial ones and lead Christianity astray.

In articles discussing Cultural Christians, I have seen that theologians from Hong Kong and Macao describe the characteristic difference between mainland scholars studying Christianity and Church believers as of reading the Bible or not, or going to church services or not. I believe that this distinction is superficial. In reality, it is not so that mainland scholars studying Christianity don't read the Bible, and they do have different understandings on the miracle stories in the Bible. It is not so that they don't go to church; they even have various views on the meaning of prayer. When it comes to the issue of miracles, it has already become a significant issue in the Sino-theological context.

Living in Dao and Unfolding Dao

The death of Jesus on the cross and his resurrection is the greatest miracle. If you don't believe in this miracle can you still call yourself a Christian? Is theology that doesn't recognise the cross event still Christian theology? Can Sino-Christian theology avoid the cross event? Are we as scholars studying Christianity qualified to talk about Christian theology? To talk about Sino-Christian culture still seems excusable, but isn't to talk about Sino-Christian theology to meddle in others' affairs?

Those who have studied Christian theology know that it includes revealed theology as well as philosophical theology. Miracles are one form of God's revelation. In the Old Testament we can see that God reveals himself through extraordinary images in nature and through events happening between people. God uses these images and events as a pretext to show himself as the Creator of all things under Heaven and Earth, as the ruler of human destiny, and also to admonish the people of Israel: if they obey the commandments and abide by the covenant they shall be bestowed love and favours; if they do not obey the commandments and do not abide by the covenant they will suffer calamities. In the New Testament we can see that Jesus while preaching also performed many miracles, made blind to see, lame to walk, lepers to heal, deaf to hear and dead to resurrect. Finally, he takes revelation to its peak by showing the greatest miracle, dying on the cross and rising again from the dead.

By means of the discourse of philosophy, philosophical theology talks about God's existence, relations between God and people, the unity of the world, the goal and meaning of human existence, the possibility of and the road to salvation. To my knowledge, philosophical theology will always feel a weakness and a lack in ability and plausibility when trying to explain the cross event of Jesus Christ out of human common sense, experience and rationality. In the Middle Ages philosophy was seen as the handmaid of theology, and philosophical theology had no independent position. Revealed truth was seen as higher than rational truth, and philosophical theology must explain Christian

doctrine stipulated by the Church only under the condition of confirming the cross event as revealed truth. In modern times reason was elevated to the highest position. When reason could take its own initiative and face the biblical narrative it certainly attacked Christianity on a great scale. This was the effect of the modern Enlightenment. Using functionalistic theory to illustrate the function of religion in society will only dispel the social function of religion. As soon as the believers accept the theory of functionalism they would clear out their religious belief, and thus religion will loose its foundation of faith that can have a social function. Using the theory of psychological comfort to explain the gentle mentality of religious believers will make them fall back into despair and depression. Opium has an anaesthetizing use, and when an opium smoker knows this it will still have the anaesthetizing effect. Religion is opium, but as soon as a believer believes that religion is opium, religion looses it anaesthetizing effect. For most pious Christians the cross event of Jesus is a concretely existing event, and this event has lead to the concrete change that has occurred in their lives. Any functionalistic or psychological method of explaining religious phenomena will weaken their feeling of reality, and will have a deconstructive effect on religion.

Karl Barth has paid much attention to this point. According to Barth's view, revelation is God's self-representation and the Holy Word is the activity of God's self-representation. The Holy Word is Logos and is objectively factual; it is the foundation of Christian faith. When Barth explains revelation he always puts the Holy Word (Logos) first, and firstly clarifies the objective factuality of revelation. Only later does he discuss subjective possibilities of revelation. He argues that on the objective foundation of the self-represented Holy Word, separated from God, people cannot subjectively understand God's revelation. Barth writes:

God is thought and known when in His own freedom God makes Himself apprehensible… God is always the One who has made Himself known to man in his own revelation, and not the one man thinks out for himself and describes as God. There is a perfectly clear division there already, epistemologically, between the true God and the false gods. Knowledge of God is not a possibility which is open for discussion. God is the essence of all reality, of that reality which reveals itself to us. Knowledge of god takes place where there is actual experience that God speaks, that He so represents Himself to man that he cannot fail to see and hear Him, where, in a situation which he has not brought about, in which he becomes incomprehensible to himself, man sees himself faced with the fact that he lives with God and God with him, because so it has pleased God. Knowledge of God takes place where divine revelation takes place, illumination of man by God, transmission of human knowledge, instruction of man by this incomparable Teacher [Jesus].[6]

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6   English translation from Karl Barth, *Dogmatics in Outline*, G. T. Thomson trans. (London: Harper and Row, 1959), pp.23-24; German original text in Karl Barth,

Barth's neo-orthodox theology starts directly from revelation, and avoids the predicaments of modernist theology based on human reason and this-worldliness, when discussing revealed truth. However, Barth's neo-orthodoxy gives people the feeling that it is too far removed from peoples' lives: this village pastor, remote from the people, is just chattering and we don't understand what he is saying. The cross event of Jesus is a true event, and so are also peoples' awareness of the meaning of existence developed in daily life, the yearning for the transcendent, and the thorough change in approach to life, turning from individually self-centred to centre on transcending reality. These two kinds of real events are complementary, if one leaves the former on cannot know the former and vice versa. In nature and in peoples' lives all kinds of events occur. Looking at these events as the inevitability of nature is very common. Looking at them in a specific situation, in a specific context of peoples' encounters, they can have a peculiar effect and make people aware of the meaning of existence. Every event, with regard to its unfolding of *dao*, can be seen as a latent event of God's actions and revelation. Among individuals and groups there are certain specific events to serve as tools of holy actions and they stand out in a highly special manner; these events are miracles. Miracles are not meant to break the laws of nature, but to be symbols or signs of a thorough and fundamentally important transformation. Just as any other event they can be seen as natural events, and they can be explained with the laws of nature after an investigation of the natural relation between cause and effect. Even so, for the individuals and groups who accept the embedded meaning, they convey God's grace, which is an extraordinary real event.

Contemporary Christian theologian John Macquarrie has called understanding "the symbol of existence". He explains as follows about the story of Moses leading the people of Israel out of Egypt, walking on dry land in the sea with the water forming walls on their sides:

The example chosen is the crossing of the Red Sea by the people of Israel, a miracle that impressed itself so deeply upon the mind of the people that they always looked back to it as God's great providential act on their behalf and indeed as the very foundation of their existence as a community. As is well known, the account[7] as we now have it is put together form various sources. Scholars differ over the details of how these sources are to be disentangled, but the broad outlines are clear enough. According to the older version, we can visualize an incident which can be understood as perfectly "natural" in the sense that it does not involve any happenings that would contradict our ordinary experience of natural

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Dogmatik im Grundriss (Zürich: EVZ, 1947), pp.26-27. Chinese translation in Bate (Barth), *Jiaoyixue Gangyao*, Hu Zanyun trans. (Hong Kong: Jidujiao Fuqiao, 1963), p.24. - *Transl. note.*

7   Exodus 14:5-31. - *Transl. note.*

phenomena. In this account, the Israelites were already encamped by the shore, and the Egyptians were in pursuit. The combination of a strong wind with a low tide enabled the Israelites to get across. The Egyptians tried to follow, but their chariots got stuck in the sand and they were caught by the incoming tide. The later version transforms the story into a "supernatural" event by introducing magical elements. Moses stretches his rod over the sea, the waters divide and stand like walls on both sides. The Israelites go through, and the Egyptians foolishly attempt to follow and are overwhelmed by the water as it falls back down upon them.[8]

Through analysis of the origins of the Bible, and with methods of explaining myths, Rudolf Bultmann and other contemporary Bible scholars have done away with the elements of sorcery and myth that was squeezed into the Bible. If the views of these Bible scholars are correct then we cannot understand God's performance of miracles as breaking the laws of nature. The laws of nature cannot be broken, and natural phenomena are subject to inevitable objective restrictions. Analyses of the Bible should adhere to science, not to sorcery. God is a transcendent existence, and the cross event of Jesus is a transcendent event. If Jesus' death on the cross and his resurrection is understood as breaking the laws of nature, then it is still a non-transcendental and naturalistic understanding of a transcendent event. To understand the transcendent reality one must rely on transcendent experience. This kind of experience happens in our lives, and appears in our hearts. To discover miracles, one has to be good at seeing the peculiar in the common, the great in the ordinary, and to see meaning and value in the spontaneous. Of course, it is not easy to experience events with a hidden transcendent meaning in our common circumstances, but in certain times of crisis the implied transcendent meaning is more easily revealed and grasped, like when the people of Israel were pursued by the Egyptian army, and were in the moment of life and death.

If people believe in God only for the sake of personal gain and luck, then they could just as well not believe in God but in "the Grand Immortals", since it is said that the immortals can make sorcery and miracles. The essence of Christianity is not to achieve personal benefits from God, but to change oneself: changing from self-centred to centre on the transcendent, making one's individual life enter eternal life. Paul says: "But if Christ is in you, though the body is dead because of sin, the Spirit is life because of righteousness." (Romans 8:10)

A few hundred years after Indian Buddhism had entered China, and thousands of Buddhist scriptures had been translated, the Indian monks could still not clearly explain where Buddha actually was or where the Western

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8 English original from John Macquarrie, *Principles of Christian Theology* (London: SCM, 2003) pp.250-251. Chinese translation by He Guanghu, *Jidujiao Shenxue Yuanli* (Hong Kong: Logos and Pneuma, 2005) p.330. - *Transl. note.*

Paradise actually was. Only when Chinese Buddhism arose was this issue given an answer that was clear and could withstand examination. Du Shun, the founder of the Huayan School (*Avatamsaka*), wrote the following *gāthā* (verse) to a monk who sought to find the miracle of Buddha's divine manifestation everywhere but never found anything: "Travelling everywhere, always on the run, rituals on Mount Wutai, only *Mañjuśrī* is there, but *Amithāba* is everywhere". That Buddha is in our hearts, and that the Western Paradise is in our hearts, has become common knowledge in Chinese Buddhism. If Chinese Buddhism has some characteristics or has made some contributions, I believe that this is an important one. A few hundred years after Christianity entered China, and merged with Chinese culture and lifestyle, Chinese people rather easily accepted some of its common views and thoughts in its diverse expression in the Chinese context. One day will come when you can ask what characteristics Sino-Christian theology has, and what contribution it has made to the whole of Christian theology, and I believe that it might be these two sentences: We live in the body of Jesus, and Jesus lives in our hearts. In philosophical language: We live in *dao*, and *dao* unfolds in the world and in our hearts. [9]

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9   The sub-headings of this paper are added by the editors.

The Paradigm Shift: From Chinese Theology to Sino-Christian Theology – A Case Study on Liu Xiaofeng

CHIN Ken-Pa

Christianity as a Barbarous "Foreigner"

"For Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are called, Jews and Greeks alike, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength." (I Corinthians 1: 22-25) If St. Paul had known, besides Jews and Greeks, the existence of the Chinese, the paragraph might have been reformulated as such:

> For Jews demand signs, Greeks look for wisdom, and the *Chinese honor morality*, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews, foolishness to Gentiles, and *savagery to the Chinese*, but to those who are called, Jews, Greeks and the *Chinese* alike, Christ the power of God, the wisdom of God, and the nobleness of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, the weakness of God is stronger than human strength, and *the savagery of God is nobler than human civilization*.

Though it was first introduced into Chinese context one and a half century ago, Christianity has not successfully settled down in Chinese culture and still remains a "foreign religion" (*yang jiao*). It is intolerable for the Chinese that this Western religion rejects any forms of adaptation: "indigenization", "Sini-fication", "contextualization", "inculturation", or "integration". This criticism towards Christianity attempts to show how barbarous this foreign religion is. It states that the very savagery (invasion, colonization, hegemony, and pride) of Christianity consists in its lack of "morality" or virtues respected by the Chinese, such as tolerance, amity, accommodation and receptiveness. Especially during the times characterized by post-colonialism, "de-westerncentrism", tolerance, pluralism, and dialogue, the criticism against this "foreign religion" which rejects to be acculturated and contextualized seems more reasonable and acceptable. In another word, for the Chinese, a "foreign religion" should have accepted Chinese moral regulation without qualification, and the main reason that the mission of Christianity in China has not been as successful as Buddhism consists in the very fact that it remains a "foreign religion".

However, under powerful nationalist discourse, the attempts to domesticate Christianity into a Chinese religion have never ceased. Nevertheless, few people take it seriously whether these attempts conflict with the Christ crucified event,

and some even take it for granted that there is no conflict in being a Chinese and a Christian at the same time.

In fact, if one takes this "foreigner" seriously and respects it as a foreigner, there is no necessity at all to give up its image and identity as a foreigner. Those who attempt to inculturate it into Chinese context care little about its otherness and even try to dissimulate its authentic identity for the sake of evangelization. Or rather, they probably do not really understand the otherness of this foreigner as a foreigner.

Unlike all sorts of "Chinese theology" or "contextual theology", "Sino-Christian theology", however, defends the foolishness, weakness, and savagery of this foreigner, and thus makes itself a stumbling block of the current Chinese academia, rightly blocking our way and letting Chinese thought oppose and reject it. But, as is written in the Bible,

> God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nothing things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence. (I Corinthians 1: 27-29)

Defending the faith of being a "foreigner", Sino-Christian theology is in line with the theology of the Cross. Instead of starting from Christology and the doctrine of Creation, Sino-Christian theology starts from "the truth of the Cross", which is foolishness to the peoples but the power of God. Nevertheless, some so-called Chinese "theologians" want to correct the foolishness, the stumbling block and the humiliation in order to make it conformable to the expectation of the Confucian "*Ren*", the Taoist "Tao", and the Buddhist "perfection". Isn't their ambition a kind of pride in thinking that they possess the God-like wisdom?

In modern Chinese thought, Christianity as a foreigner has long been expected to be transformed into something native to China, but Sino-Christian theology defends this crucified "foreigner", even though it stands for foolishness, stumbling block and humiliation.

Liu Zong-zhou, a renowned Neo-Confuciansim, said, "The propagation of the Western religion in China is the enemy of the Way." (*xifang zhi jiao xingyu zhongguo，dao zhi zei ye*) In contrast, Liu Xiaofeng, a Sino-Christian theology speaker responds, "I am the enemy of the Way".[1] This statement with a clear-cut stance spells out the radical significance of Sino-Christian theology in Chinese context: as the enemy of "China".[2]

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1 Liu Xiaofeng, *Hanyu Shenxue yu Lishi Zhexue* [*The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 2000), p.96.

2 Liu Xiaofeng's works on Sino-Christian theology cited in this materials: *The Sino-Christian Theology and the Philosophy of History*, *Zhengjiu Yu Xiaoyao* [Salvation

The "De-Heresy History" of the Divine Dynasty

Chinese culture, which is of long-standing, self-sufficient, and exclusive, treats all foreign cultures with a superior air, assimilating and making them serve China. Compared with the Chinese "Divine Dynasty", all other cultures are nothing but heresies or barbaric, namely, "Yi". Coming from foreign countries, Christianity is certainly "Yi", whose doctrines are without exception heresy. So an anti-Christian compilation appeared during the last years of the Ming Dynasty was titled as *Shengchao Poxieji* (*The Sacred Dynasty's Collection of Writings Exposing Heterodoxy*). It was said that there was a "*Si Yi Guan*" (four-*Yi* building) between the cities of Yi and Luo, in the west of which there were "four-*Yi*" lanes, namely "*Gui Zheng*" (submission to the righteous), "*Gui De*" (submission to the virtuous), "*Mu Hua*" (admiration for cultivation), and "*Mu Yi*" (admiration for justice). For the Divine Dynasty, the fundamental difference between Chinese culture and foreign cultures, Hua (China) and Yi, is the distinction between civilization and savagery. Therefore, Western learning is simple and not worth of attention. In another word, all cultures other than Chinese culture are Yi, whose destiny is either "submission", "admiration", or "returning to the virtuous life".[3]

In past history, whether it is contextualization or adaptation theory, Christianity should seek the recognition of heterogeneous cultures. Those critics believe that Christianity has not adapted well to Chinese context. For some theologians and believers, the reason that Christianity remains a minority in the Chinese context lies exactly in the lack of recognition from the Chinese culture. Because of its status as a foreigner, and also because of the number of believers, contextualization or inculturation seems a necessary condition for the reception of Christianity by the Chinese academia. Christianity should realize its identity as "*Yi*"; it must take off the dress of "*Yi*" and put on Chinese clothing instead, which is supposed to be the only appropriate one. Many critiques refer the failure of *Jing-jiao* (literally the luminous religion; pejoratively called Chinese Nestorianism) to its over-compromising attitude towards the classical Chinese culture, whose power was under-estimated. Facing up to the hegemony of Chinese culture, *Jian-jiao* had to take the strategy of "emphasizing and elaborating the similarity while disguising and ignoring the difference". The destiny of *Jian-jiao* could not but being "the first crucified Chinese Christianity".

The powerful exclusive discourse of the Divine Dynasty forces Christianity to justify itself with a gesture of moralization in its process of Sinification, which works out a compromised "Chinese theology" in the name of humility. The pursuit of moralization becomes a burden to Chinese theology, and it also

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and the Unfettered] (Shanghai: Sanlian, revised edition 2001), *Zouxiang Shizijiashang de Zhenli* (*Towards the Truth on the Cross*; Hong Kong, Sanlian, 1990).

3   Zhou Zhenfu, *Luoyang Jialanji Jiao She Jin Yi* [A New Translation of *Luoyang Jialanji*] (Beijing: Xueyuan, 2001).

obscures the core value or the fundamental value of Christian faith. Such an endeavor not only degrades the theoretical depth it should have, but also distorts the practice with the negative result of "hypocrisy" and "the mean person".

From Xie Fu-ya to Lin Zhi-ping, cultural integration had always been the subject of indigenization. Lin believes that Western missionaries should not impose their cultural symbols on the Chinese. But following this same logic, another question would emerge: "Could an 'indigenous Christianity' be imposed on the Confucians, and would they accept it without any objection at all?" Would the Chinese accept such kind of Christianity—having only ideas without symbols—designed specifically for them?

Another approach of indigenization, the representative figures of which were Jian Youwen, Zhao Zichen (T. C. Chao) and Wu Yaozong, took a "denomination ecumenical movement" as its theme. The aim of "denomination ecumenical movement" is to "save China". This approach was finally developed into "three-self patriotic movement" (Self-support, Self-govern, Self-propagate) by Wu, who reduced Christianity merely to the "gospel of love alone" for the sake of revolution, i.e. lowering its status as a *salvific faith* down to a governing instrument to serve the nationalist movement. The rise of theological indigenization, whose focus has always been the "similarities and differences" between Christianity and traditional Chinese thought, is to make Christianity settle down in Chinese context. However, does such kind of "comparison" have a promising future?

As Hans Küng pointed out, "A contextual Chinese Christian theology does not need to refer primarily to the classical authors. Rather what is an analysis of the complexity if the present for the sake of survival in the future."[4] "The question of indigenization" is not a question of actuality (modernity). Moreover, taking Christianity and Chinese thought as the static objects of archaeology is to ignore the real context of modern Chinese. In my opinion, it is only a presupposition rather than a conclusion that the spread of Christianity in Chinese context depends on Confucianism or the reconciliation with it.

The question of modernity was carried out in Chinese thought in the forms of cultural nationalism (Confucianism, the quintessence of Chinese culture) and state nationalism (KMT or the Communist Party), emphasizing their national characteristics via the opposition of "China vs. West", of "modernity vs. tradition". The real impasse of Christian faith in Chinese context is nationalism. Interestingly enough, the response of Chinese Christianity to nationalism is carried out in a nationalist manner, the result of which could be nothing but intensifying and justifying nationalism. Chinese nationalism can accept science as "applied techniques" but resists Christianity for its spiritual nature. For cultural nationalists, Chinese culture is superior to Western culture; for state

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4 Julia Ching & Hans Küng, *Chirstianity and Chinese Religions*, English translation of Hans Küng's chapters by Peter Beyer (Lonodn: SCM, 1989), p.254.

nationalists, Christianity is nothing but an instrument of the infiltration of Western imperialism.

Nationalist discourse is dominant institutionally, intellectually and spiritually in Chinese world. Christianity, as a kind of "spirit", should also submit to nationalism. Theological indigenization actually means modifying Christianity from "the inside" of nationalism. Hence, nationalism not only keeps Christianity outside, but also tries to dominate or transform it from the inside. The effort to solve this *aporia* by means of indigenization which is essentially driven by nationalist impetus is to "set the nationalist spear against its shield".[5]

Sino-Christian Theology as the "Enemy of Tao"

In fact, in order to be recognized by the Chinese academia, Christianity has accommodated itself to Chinese context with several garments, e.g. "*Huaren*" theology, "*Zhongguo*" theology, "*Huaxia*" theology, "*Zhonghua*" theology (all these names literally mean "Chinese theology"), contextual theology, indigenous theology, acculturative theology and integrative theology, etc. Their method is to reconcile, communicate and integrate Christianity with Chinese thought.

All the above theological approaches seek to find common ground between Christianity and Chinese culture. The commonality here means not only the affirmation of the resemblance (abolishing difference) but also the recognition of Christianity by Chinese culture. In other words, Christianity has to reconcile itself with Chinese culture to be accepted in Chinese society; this means that it should first recognize the superiority of Chinese culture in the political and cultural sense. Therefore, the various forms of Chinese theology are in their essence different types of *Sinicized* theology, reconciling Christianity with Chinese culture. On the one hand, it keeps the independent status of Christianity; on the other hand, it tries to show that there is no essential conflict between Christianity and Chinese culture.

As Wu Lei-chuan points out, "not only should Christianity play a role in the future of China, the future of the national revival of China, but it should play an eminent role with its special contributions. Christianity should take its respon-sibility for the state and the nation, especially in such hard times as ours."[6] Therefore, in order to get the recognition of its identity, Christianity was eager to dilute its foreign features and identify itself as Chinese Christianity,[7] namely standing in the Chinese nationalist position, defending the interests of China and adopting the revival of the nation as its task. Even the kerygmatic work of the

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5   Huang Ruicheng, "Minzu Zhuyi Yu Zhongguo Jidujiao De Xiandaixing" (Nationalism and the Modernity of Chinese Christianity), in *Logos & Pneuma* 15 (2001), pp. 83-114.

6   Wu Lei-chuan, *Jidujiao Yu Zhongguo Wenhua* [Christianity and Chinese Culture] (Shanghai: Qingnian Xiehui, 1940), p.150.

7   Likewise, Mao Zedong also accepted Marxism through indigenizing it as "Chinese characteristic socialism."

evangelicals was driven by a strong nationalist feeling. For them, "Christian-ization of China" and "Sinification of Christianity" were indeed different sides of the same coin. For the Chinese, believing in Christ had an additional value, namely saving China. As Zhao Zichen overtly admits, "the spiritual heritage of Chinese culture can make contribution to Christianity in its manner of presenting religion."[8] The so-called "spiritual heritage" here indicates the ethical orientation of Chinese culture.

The driving force of the aforementioned theological trends is a kind of nationalist feeling than the apology for faith; or rather, they at best try to persuade Chinese cultural circles to accept Christianity as a "legitimate religion" (the "three-self patriotic" movement) by giving it a national identity or a political apology for Christianity. And thus, being patriotic becomes the legitimate license of Christianity. It also means that Christianity becomes one of the branches of "Chinese religions". In order to get a legitimate identity in Chinese cultural context, Chinese Christian theology has to participate in the construction of the national cultural enterprise. Behind the aforementioned theological trends is the attempt to revive national culture. Therefore, consi-dering the question of recognition, Chinese Christianity necessarily excludes the otherness of Christian theology. The condition for "seeking for commonality" is that Christianity has first to deny its differences with Chinese culture. Recently, such kind of "Chinese theology" emerges again in the name of "religious dialogue" and the "comparative study of religions".[9]

Besides the nationalist feeling, there is also a "will to identify" in "Chinese theology" for missionary purposes. Some people believe that Christianity should be Sinicized in the light of the Confucian-Taoist idea, such as "*yuzhou ji wuxin, wuxin ji yuzhou*" (The cosmos is my heart and my heart is the cosmic), to be acceptable to the Chinese. There is an assumption that the Chinese reject Christianity due to cultural differences. Sinification thus becomes the necessary method to dispel the misgivings of the receivers. Likewise, it can also be justified in the name of missionary work, for Sinification can dispel Chinese's resistance of the Gospel. Moreover, it is also said that the differences and the conflicts between Chinese and Western cultures are merely a kind of misunder-standing. Christianity and Confucianism can even be translated into one another,

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8 Zhao Zichen, "Jidujiao Yu Zhongguo Wenhua" (Christianity and Chinese Culture), in Zhang Xiping and Zhuo Xinping eds., *Bense Zhi Tan* [Explorations of Indigenization] (Beijing: Zhongguo Guangbo Dianshi, 1999), p.1.

9 I once criticized that comparative religions or religious dialogue was indeed detrimental and distorted to the essence of religion, for it essentially weakened the requirement and the function of differentiation of "religion". See: Chin Ken Pa, *Xinyang de (Bu) Kenagxing* [*The (Im)possibility of Faith*] (Hong Kong: Wenzi Shiwu, 2004), Chapter 4. See also Giovanni Filoramo, "Religious Pluralism and Crises of Identity", *Diogenes* 199 (2003).

because they essentially sprung from the same origin. The work of Chinese theology, therefore, is to build the unification or harmonization of Christian doctrines with Chinese thought. Only in this way can the Gospel flourish and bear fruits in the soil of Chinese culture.

In view of the success of Buddhism in China, some scholars believe that the very reason for Chinese rejection of Christianity lies in the fact that it has not integrated itself with Confucianism and Daoism as Buddhism did. And this is the model for foreign religions to follow. In order to be a truly Chinese religion, Christianity has to follow the example of Buddhism. In another word, the efforts to interpret Christianity in terms of Buddhism-Taoism (e.g. *Jing-jiao* of the Tang dynasty) and Confucianism (Catholicism of the Ming-Ching period) are actually strategies to advocate the legitimacy of Christianity in Chinese context.

The emergence of the term "Sino-Christian theology" and the rise of the Sino-Christian theology movement should be understood against such background as the negation of the aforementioned theological approaches. Although it is a kind of "impossibility", Sino-Christian theology is the deconstruction of Chinese thought in response to the Word of God. According to Liu Xiaofeng, the possibility of Sino-Christian theology lies in it impossibility or the deconstruction of the original metaphoric order of Chinese sustained by the idea of "*Tian Tao*" (the way of heaven'). Sino-Christian theology must deconstruct Chinese thought in order to understand the Word of God, which is actually the act of Chinese thought to understand God.[10] As an *impractical* theology in accordance with the Cross, Sino-Christian theology grounds itself on the deconstructive act marked by the position of "defending the differences".

The revolutionary significance of Sino-Christian theology should be properly grasped from the perspective of "paradigm shift".[11] In some sense, the old paradigm focusing on the relationship between "Christianity and Chinese culture" has come to its end, or it becomes outdated in that it has not kept up with the pace of contemporary thought. With a careful scrutiny, "Chinese theology" working on the relationship between "Christianity and Chinese culture" seems more and more inappropriate in that it puts the wrong question from the very beginning. Chinese Christianity has not even grasped "theology" properly. The main concern of Liu Xiaofeng's *Hanyu shenxue yu lishi zhexue* [*The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*] is the "philosophy of history"; in other words, its focus is the "possibility of Sino-Christian theology

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10 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.88

11 Shi Yuan-kang once discussed the topic of "paradigm shift" in Chinese culture, but it was a pity that he did not go further enough in exploring the content of the paradigm shift. But this topic is an appropriate point of view to understand the context from which Sino-Christian theology arises. See: Shi Yuan-kang, *Cong Zhonggui wen hua dao xian dai xing: dian fan zhuan yi?* [From Chinese Culture to Modernity: Paradigm Shift?] (Beijing: Sanlian, 2000).

in the context of modernity".[12] Only in this way can one grasp theology in its right perspective; only in this way can the proposal of "Sino-Christian theology" be an integral part of Chinese thought, and can even further enter into the context of Western thought.

Therefore, Sino-Christian theology is not another name for "Chinese theology", nor is it the same way of thinking as contextualization, indigenization, inculturation, or "communication and transformation". The basic themes of Sino-Christian theology are as follow:

I. Faith is not the instrument of nationalism.
II. Faith should not be degraded to the instrument of morality.
III. Sino-Christian theology should go out of the dualistic metaphysical framework of "Chinese culture as substance and Western learning for application".
IV. Sino-Christian theology should ground itself on the existentialism of individual faith.
V. The issues of modernity are the contextual theses (*problematique*) of Sino-Christian theology.

Regarding the relationship between "Sino-Christian theology and the philosophy of history in the context of modernity", Liu Xiaofeng says:

> How can a developing Sino-Christian theology make the progress demanded by the historical moment without rethinking itself from the perspective of modernity?… Doesn't the proposal of "indigenous theology" rise from the horizon of Christianity-China relationship that is characteristic of the Chinese academia in the "May-Fourth days"? If Sino-Christian theology, without proceeding from its authentic situation and changing the misinterpretation of Christian theology in Chinese academia, still confines itself to such kind of problematic understanding, it can hardly harvest significant fruits in the future. [13]

It is clear that the "paradigm shift" in itself is a response to the change of horizon. The outdated paradigm makes the discourse of Christian theology the instrument of the revival of nationhood, and turns Christian theology into a "Chinese" theology according to the meta-narrative or grand-discourse of the nation. Every paradigm has its own language game. The old paradigm contains the discourses such as "ethnocentrisms", "respect for ethics", and "Chinese culture as substance and Western learning for application"(Substantially Chinese, Practically Western, *zhongti xiyong*). As a new paradigm, Sino-Christian theology goes out of the framework of nationalist discourse by emphasizing the "existentialism of individual faith", "modernity", and "the forming of the divine Word in Chinese", so that it may serve as a useful resource to resolve the current spiritual *aporia* not only for Chinese people but all mankind.

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12 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.3.
13 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.4

Sino-Christian theology refuses to identify itself with Chinese culture. One could find the reasons for such rejection in Liu Xiaofeng's *Zhengjiu Yu Xiaoyao* (Delivering and Dallying) and *Zou xiang shi zi jia shang de zhen li* (Towards the Truth on the Cross). According to Liu, Chinese culture gives more weight on secular values and lacks the critical thinking from the perspective of absolute divine values, and thus it has no real query rising from individual existence. The Sino-Christian theology proposed by Liu affirms "the existential dimension of individual faith" and "the absoluteness of divine values" to resist any thinking that conflicts with it. Therefore, the enemies of Sino-Christian theology include not only Chinese thought, but also those Western thoughts that go against "the existential dimension of individual faith" and "the absoluteness of divine values". But Chinese cultural tradition has not taken this question seriously. In his *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History,* Liu expresses his critique and retrospection on this subject with greater clarity.

Liu asserts that "Through the Chinese interpretation of a history of thought that is heterogeneous to itself, Sino-Christian theology will bring about a break or transformation in its own tradition and will suffer in itself the tension of the conflict."[14] As a radical hermeneutics that transforms Chinese language thoroughly, Sino-Christian theology defends the "foreigner" and the "Other". In the context of modernity, the slogan "the propagation of the Western religion in China is the enemy of the Way" seems more significant. The Western religion not only needs to preserve its identity as a foreign enemy but should also intensify this identity. Nevertheless, it is more an interferer (the enemy/thief of the Way) than a foreigner, whose task is to keep disturbing (stealing) China.

In other words, Sino-Christian theology, as a revolutionary paradigm, no longer confines itself to the framework of "Chinese culture as substance and Western learning for application" or the dualistic thought pattern of "substance/application", nor does it emphasize the ethical expectation that Christianity should serve the nationalist discourse. In addition, taking the split of modernity as its problematique, Sino-Christian theology tries to break through the primordial context of Chinese thought by the discourse of individual faith, and thus makes the theology in Chinese an integrative part of ecumenical theology.

The "Oneness of Substance/Application" (*ti-yong bu-er*) and the Spiritual Condition of the Chinese

The introduction of "Western learning" into China did not meet any strong resistance. China may be totally westernized and embraces Western science and democracy without rejecting Confucianism. But why was Christianity rejected as a "foreign religion", and why was Christianity alone considered having nothing to do with "Western learning"? The real problem lies in that modern

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14 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.72.

China, on the one hand, is open to the "Western Enlightenment"; and on the other hand, Chinese academia tries to filter all the "foreign spirits" by its traditional ontological model.

In his *Quan Xue Pian* (*Guidance to Study*), Zhang Zhidong (1837-1909) points out that Chinese learning, referring to a "submissive ethics" with "*Sangang Wulun*" (three cardinal guides and five constant virtues), was a kind of immanent learning with heart-body as its subject matter, while Western learning was a kind of external study of the material world, which could be adopted according to the need of different situations insofar as Chinese learning remain the unchangeable substance. In order to avoid the theoretical difficulty caused by the dualistic division of the "Chinese/Western" substance, some attempt to resolve the incompatibility between the "Chinese substance" (*zhong ti*) and "Western application" (*xi yong*) by emphasizing "the Chinese origin of Western learning" or by showing that there were already many traces of Western learning in ancient Chinese thought. In this way, the thought pattern of "Chinese culture as substance and Western learning for application" becomes coherent and perfect. Lately, Li Zehou, a contemporary philosopher, proposes a new model called "Western substance with Chinese application", which refers to modern science and technology and its application into Chinese situation. Although his using of Western learning to correct Chinese learning has nothing to do with "wholesale Westernization of China", his project is still confined to the framework of "the superiority of Chinese culture" (*zhongxue weiyou*) and "the oneness of substance and application" (*tiyong buer*). He is essentially a Chinese traditionalist with a Marxist background.

While facing Christian theology, the first thing for Chinese scholars is to affirm that Chinese culture possesses its own spirit; moreover, it is an onto-logical, and metaphysical spirit of the nation. Christianity is understood as a kind of spirit as well, but a Western one, Christianity cannot take the place of the innate spirit of China. The strategy of "Chinese culture as substance and Western learning for application" actually grounds itself in the principle of "oneness of the substance/application". That is to say, Christian theology as a kind of spirit must be absorbed into the Chinese national spirit in order that Western learning could be applied without straying from the Chinese substance. In other words, the precondition of accepting Christianity is the "Chinese substance"; otherwise, the national spirit would be lost.

Although Chinese scholars have to admit the advantage of Western technology and social system, they also believe that the Chinese would retain the "Chinese soul" as long as the "Chinese substance" has been preserved. Therefore, the acceptance of Western culture is conditional, and even those proponents of "wholesale Westernization of China" do not really want to duplicate Western culture mechanically. On the contrary, they believe that the Chinese "spirit" is self-sufficient and reject Christianity as the "Western sub-

stance". In this sense, the proponents of Westernization and the advocators of national spirit are essentially the same in their attitude towards Christianity; that is, they are all preoccupied with Chinese ethnocentrism in their insistence on Chinese substance (national spirit).

Different versions of "Chinese theology" still deal with the relationship between Christianity and Chinese culture within the framework of "Chinese substance/Western application". As a kind of "spirit", Christianity should give way to the "Chinese" spirit when once they encounter each other; in other words, the Chinese are human beings through being "Chinese", and not the other way round.

"Chinese culture as substance and Western culture for application", which is actually a prolongation of the so-called "the distinction between Chinese (*Hua*) and foreign (*Yi*)", usually represents a kind of nationalist characteristic in the context of modern China. The national spirit of modern China consists of two fundamental elements, namely the political recognition by the modern nation state, and the ethicized "*Tian Tao*" (the way of the heaven) principle. And so they keep asking these questions: "Is Christianity capable of reviving the nation?" "Is Christianity based on Chinese ethics?" Both the "using of Christianity to revive the nation" and the "interpreting of Christianity based on Chinese ethics" are the theoretical results of "Chinese substance/Western application". The latter attempt is a strategy to use the spirit of Christianity to intensify the inherent Chinese substance; that is, to unify the Christian spirit and the irreplaceable Chinese soul. Although the discourse seems ridiculous that "one more Christian means one less Chinese," it shows the confidence of nationalists in Chinese culture as self-sufficient substance.

Sino-Christian theology questions the "spiritual problems" of China such as the "nationalized Christianity" (Liu Xiaofeng) and the "ethicized Christianity" (Yang Huilin). Such kind of ethic-centric nationalism was and will be a heavy burden to Chinese Christianity. The under-development of Chinese "theology" is due to the above framework of thinking. Having criticized the spirit of the Chinese, Sino-Christian theology, not surprisingly, is regarded as an attempt of "total Westernization" or "anti-tradition". However, these two critiques have missed the point of Sino-Christian theology; this shows that they still think in the framework of the "substance/application" and have not understood the *problematique* of Sino-Christian theology yet.

Modern Chinese philosophy of history undertakes a nationalist task: the revival of the nation. On the one hand, "the superiority of Chinese culture" is the natural consequence of Chinese monism (the oneness of the substance and application); on the other hand, it is also a reasonable response to the institutional oppression of powerful Christian countries. China accepts Marxism, which is also a foreign Western discourse, mainly because it is primarily a sort of political discourse, supposed to take the responsibility of reviving the Chinese

nation. Moreover, it is also said that one can find in Marxism the ethics of the "Confucian revolutionary spirit".[15]

According to Liu Xiaofeng, the dominant and conventional idea that Christian theology is a "Western" theology is in itself a misunderstanding, a product of the political culture of the nation state in the process of modernization. The real crisis of indigenous theology consists in its accepting the idea uncritically that Christian theology is a kind of "Western" theology; and hence, it rejects the language of Christian theology. This is probably the "rational craft" of the national spirit in the name of indigenization.[16]

Liu questions, "Is it that according to the imperative category of Historical Reason, thought is doomed to reject the lovely God, just because the idea of God is not native and without historical and psychological foundation?" In his *Zhengjiu Yu Xiaoyao*, Liu strongly contends that it is unreasonable to measure the truth of faith according to the criterion of being native. The native nationality is a seemingly sound excuse for refusing the possibility of conversion. Therefore, Sino-Christian theology "has to oppose the authority of Historical Reason adored by the historical-cultural psychology and anthropology."[17] Taking his favorite Russian thinkers (Lev Shestov, Dostoevsky, and Merezkovskiy), Liu believes that their attitude to Christianity could be the example for Chinese academia, for they apparently rejected the idea that a religion must grow from the native soil, and they also reject the idea of religion as morality or put morality above religion.[18]

Therefore, "when laws of history become the absolute values, out of which, there is no eternal truth, justice, and love; all values are nothing but the products of historical situations, and the actions of history are themselves the absolute values."[19] Setting historical laws against individual faith and insisting on a kind of absolutism immanent in history, the "*Tian Tao*" principle of Chinese thought accepts the idea of historical necessity and at the same time falls into a kind of nihilism. Sino-Christian theology thus questions whether the "*Tian Tao*" principle, which runs the risk of diminishing the individuals, could be summarized and accepted in the form of the imperative of national metaphysics.

Liu emphasizes time and again that despite being a theology speaking

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15 Gu Bin (Wolfgang Kubin) & Liu Xiaofeng, *Jidujiao, Rujiao yu Xiandai Zhonggui Geming Jingshen* [*Christianity, Confucianism, and Modern Chinese Revolution*] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 1999).

16 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History,* pp.90-91

17 Liu Xiaofeng, *Zhengjiu yu Xiaoyao* [Delivering and Dallying] (Shanhai: Sanlian, 1988), p.26

18 Liu Xiaofeng, *Zouxiang Shizijiashang de Zhenli* [*Towards the Truth on the Cross*] (Hong Kong: Sanlian, 1990), pp. 4-5. Sino-Christian theology is talking about Christ who bumps his bloody head against the iron wall of the "grand narrative".

19 Liu Xiaofeng, *Zhengjiu Yu Xiaoyao,* p.56

"Chinese", Sino-Christian theology is not a theology merely "belonging to" the Chinese. Since it is foreign to the Chinese way of thinking, Sino-Christian theology remains a "foreigner" or a theology of "foreign language". Only because it is a "foreigner" can Sino-Christian theology help Chinese thinking break through the Chinese Semantics. In the incessant polemics with its Other, Chinese thinking can keep correcting itself, and therefore, instead of merely belonging to the Chinese, it may become common intellectual resources for the whole humankind.

The Existential Hermeneutic of Individual Faith

Theological indigenization or contextualization interprets "God incarnate" as God's identifying with the world, and supports the enculturation of Christian faith, with a consequence of "de-theologization". For the Jews and the Greeks, the Word made flesh is impossible. The incarnation of God is the act of His *kenosis* (Philippians, 2:6-7), namely "being born in the likeness of human beings" rather than "identifying with humankind". God only identifies with Himself and reveals Himself as God "through humanization". The coming of God into the world in the form of flesh is in itself an indication of "non-identity", because this event in any case presupposes the existence of "difference" or "non-identity"; this means that God does not recognize any approaches of salvation within the world. "The Word became flesh" is all the time a paradox, for it is beyond human pre-understanding of God: a God as flesh, and at the same time remains God is a "paralogy".

"The Word became flesh" cannot be the methodological basis of "indigenous hermeneutic". Before using the concept of "anthropology", it is better for "indigenous hermeneutic" to keep itself within the confines of theology. Taking incarnation as its biblical or theological evidence, indigenous theology does not go deep enough into the New Testament theology to under-stand the theological significance of incarnation, nor does it really clarify the meaning of "being human" in biblical theology. Liu Xiaofeng reminds us that "what Christian theology talks about is the God of Jesus Christ, not any other God, gods or ultimate being." One should also keep in mind the "basic fact of human life and faith" that the conflict between religions is "regular and irreconcilable".[20]

Liu tries to break through the bondage of "Chinese-Western" opposition by emphasizing the individual existential experience. Once Chinese thinking is con-fined to this grammar, not only Christian theology cannot really take root China, but more importantly, Chinese thinking is also incapable of breaking out of the deadlock of nationalist grammar. Therefore, the strategy of being "the enemy of the Way" is, "through an existential-hermeneutical Sino-Christian theology, to

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20 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.65.

break through the language system of national ideology, and separate the original existential experience accumulated in it from the grand national narrative."[21]

Liu believes that the evangelical message of the Christ event is directly related to the original existential experience of human beings. Theology is related to the subject "I" of "I believe" or "I don't believe". In other words, "Christian theology is the result of the encounter of the divine Word with the individual existential experience, rather than the encounter of the divine Word with national ideology."[22] Moreover, "the incarnation of God is to renew the quality of the individual life rather than to establish the Church."[23] It is obvious that "the individuality of faith is one of the marks of modernity".[24] We can see that the "cultural Christians" coined by Liu could make sense in the proposal of Sino-Christian theology.

Liu resists on breaking through the language system of national ideology by a kind of individual-hermeneutic Christian theology, stepping out of the national grand narrative, and moving towards the original individual existential experience. Regarding the idea of Sino-Christian theology, Liu Xiaofeng says:

Sino-Christian theology tries to make Chinese thought a possible will towards God through the impossible interpretation: stepping out of the ultimate reality of Confucianism-Taoism, and unifying with the Word of the Christian God. The possible will of impossibility is the concrete historical language of faith… Sino-Christian theology is the revival of interpreting Chinese thought, as a particular national language, in the historical discourse of faith, making Chinese thought become the discourse of Christian faith. [25]

Liu's "individual hermeneutic" Sino-Christian theology is rooted in a radical hermeneutics; that is, taking the revelation theology (Christ event, Trinity) concerned with the "I believe" as the weapon of his thought. He has a high regard for those theologians of fideism and apparently shows a consistent Barthian stance from his *Zhengjiu Yu Xiaoyao* to *Zou xiang shi zi jia shang de zhen li*. Despite its differences from the conventional denominational theology, Liu's stance on fideism is stronger than that of those denominational believers who advocate the reconciliation of Christianity and Chinese culture, so that his position could even be called "decisionism".[26]

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21 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.95.
22 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.94.
23 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.77.
24 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.80.
25 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, pp.95-96.
26 Liu Xiaofeng appreciates those defenders of fideism, such as Pascal, Kierkegaard, Shestov, Dostoevsky, and Barth, who declare Christian faith as their stance. See *Zhengjiu Yu Xiaoyao*, p.7. In memory of the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus, Liu addressed again, "I believe there is no salvation outside Christ." See: Liu Xiaofeng, "Lang-man-de Fuyinshu zhong de Yeshu Jidu" (The Romantic Jesus Christ in the

Referring to the personal existential experience towards God, Liu explicates:

> Christianity is essentially a kind of religious ethics rather than political ethics. Unlike Judaism and Confucianism, Christianity is like Buddhism in that its religious ethics fundamentally concerns the salvation of individual life rather than the moral order of the community and the issues of social justice or equality. What Christianity provides is merely the idea of the absolute value of individuals and the idea that God has arranged the natural order of the world.[27]

Sino-Christian theology is by nature a theology of existentialist grammar. Etymologically speaking, "theology" is a discourse about "God". Sino-Christian theology therefore points to "the forming of the divine Word (God) in Chinese", which refers not to the revival of national spirit with the help of divine Word but the event that the "Word was made flesh". "Flesh" or "person" indicates existentiality, and the "forming" refers to the subjective existentiality of individual believers. Hence, Sino-Christian theology is essentially a theology of existentialism.[28] Liu's proposal of Sino-Christian theology provides a new horizon for Chinese thought. Without confining itself to a particular discipline called "theology", Sino-Christian theology is not even a specific discipline of Chinese academia called "theology", nor is it a grand enterprise of saving the nation. Only in this way can Sino-Christian theology really reflect on the question of the "split of modernity". And only by resisting the temptation of national spirit can Sino-Christian theology really pay attention to the question of "individual decision".

Because of the contingency of individual existence, individuals are in an ontological status of privation, which is an ontological dualistic difference in the becoming of Christian theology. There is no such dualistic difference in Confucianism and Taoism, which maintain the "oneness of the substance and application". Liu points out that "the forming of the divine Word in Chinese" is possible only if the individual speaking in Chinese accepts and speaks Christ, and makes the Word of divine love concrete speeches in Chinese. There is no personal encounter between individuals and "*Tao*"; only the "Word" of the "divine Word" and persons can encounter each other. The encounter is the "Word became flesh", namely the encounter of the eternal infinite individual and contingent finite individuals. Since the correlation of the divine Word and Chinese culture lies not in the general ideology of the nation, but merely in the forming of individual person, faith is a matter of the individual, and there is no such question as "the Sinification of Christianity".[29]

Gospel), *Logos & Pneuma* 12 (2000), pp.59-88.

27 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.49.

28 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, pp.42-72.

29 Liu Xiaofeng, "Editor's Preface", *Dao yu Yan: Huaxia Wenhua yu Jidu Wenhua Xiangyu*

Theology is based on the Word of God. The basic proposition of Sino-Christian theology is "the forming of the divine Word in Chinese". Here, the "Chinese" does not denote the ethic-centric nationalist grammar. Indigenous theology goes to the wrong direction insofar as it has no clear idea of the meaning of "being Chinese", and it does not take the suitability of using the language of faith to sustain the ghost of national culture seriously. "The forming of the divine Word in Chinese" refers to the formation of a kind of existentialism-oriented grammar of individual faith, which is the core of Christian theology and a way of thinking absent in Chinese thought. Liu uses it to break through the original semantics of Chinese thought. Therefore, Sino-Christian theology rejects the previous project of Chinese theology.

Believing in Christ is after all a matter of individual confession. The subject of believing is individual "persons" rather than "cultures". In this sense, the theological indigenization of Chinese Christianity deviates from the track of Christian theology. The heart of Sino-Christian *theology* is certainly "theology" rather than "Chinese". The identity of Christian theology consists in its response to the question: "Why God became man?"

The main concern of "cultural Christians", which is a special phenomenon of modernity, is "personal confession". The justification of such stance is up to the reading background of the individuals. Only by going out of the enquiry of natural ontology can individuals get sufficient spiritual resources to reflect the meaning of existence, so that they can freely make existential choices related to their ultimate concern.

In some sense, Sino-Christian theology opposes the original "Chinese semantics", namely those "grand national narrative" inherited from the original national language; in other words, the aim of Sino-Christian theology is to lead the Chinese into the ontic-hermeneutic of the Christian God rather than to intensify the "grand national narrative" as the tool of indigenization.[30] Hence, Sino-Christian theology does not generally refer to the theological writings in Chinese; this general idea of Sino-Christian theology lacks a philosophical-hermeneutical understanding of language *per se*. Sino-Christian theology, however, is a deconstructive power towards the "grand national narrative" and a turn to the meaning of individual existence. Liu Xiaofeng remarks:

The Christ event (the divine Word), which was, is and will be an unheard and incredible information for the national ideology of mankind. It is in tension with every original national ideology and its linguistic experience. Turning to face the Christ event, every language of national ideology will entail a thorough split.[31]

[*Tao & Word: Encounter of Chinese Culture and Christianity*] (Shanghai: Sanlian, 1995).
30 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.84.
31 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.85.

Sino-Christian Theology as a Theology of Impossibility

The earliest contact between Christianity and Chinese culture can be traced back to the ninth year of the "*Zhenguan*" regime of Tang Dynasty (635), which left the earliest written record and scriptures; the introduction of Catholicism into China did not start until Matteo Ricci's arrival in China (1582), and since then, Christianity began its process of sinification, together with several attendant questions related to Chinese language, Chinese culture, and Chinese context: "Whether Chinese is capable of being a bearer of Christian faith?" ,"Is language merely an instrument or itself part of culture?", "Why Western sciences can be introduced into Chinese context smoothly?", "Can Christianity be taken and used as natural sciences?"[32] Perhaps, the divine truth in its essence has nothing to do with nationalist discourse, and it is impossible to develop a kind of Christian theology out of Chinese language. But what does Christian faith mean to Chinese language? This is the question for Sino-Christian theology.

In my view, Christianity is not only the "other" to Chinese culture but also the "other" to all existing cultures—or rather—what Christian theology talks about is a "foolish God". For Christian theology, submitting to the strategy of assimilation of Chinese culture (e.g. the Jews in Kaifeng city), especially to the powerful discourse of Chinese language (love for country, love for church), may avoid the conflicts with Chinese thinking and thus gives Chinese academia a good impression. However, it also obscures the salvific grace of Christianity and intensifies the authority of Chinese language.

The "West" as known and accepted by modern China is actually a "split West", the result of the Chinese schema of "substance/application". On the one hand, it may point to the "Enlightenment rationalism" embraced by the proponents of Westernization; on the other hand, it implies "the Western Christianity" rejected by nationalists.

For Liu, the mission of Sino-Christian theology is to enable the Christian kerygmatic tradition to break through the domination of Confucianism-Taoism-Buddhism in Chinese, so that Chinese thought could touch the base of the philosophy of history of modernity. Lacking the knowledge of Christianity, it is hardly possible for Chinese thinking to have a deep understanding of Western thought after Nietzsche, not to mention touching the bottom of the philosophy of history of modernity.[33] What is the "the bottom of the philosophy of history of modernity"? It is about the increase of the responsibility of individual faith. The question is: "Before the collapse of the modern cosmology, what kind of existential-hermeneutic can undertake the responsibility of argument?"

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32 Tan Lizhu, "Cong Jidujiao De Hanhua Shuchuqu" (The Sinification of Christianity and Others), *Dushu* [Reading Books] 1997/6, pp. 89-94.

33 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.65.

Besides the myth of the "superiority of Chinese culture", the main targets of Sino-Christian theology are scientific rationalism and the ethics of nationalist state, which have occupied an eminent status in modern Chinese thought. The new task of Sino-Christian theology is to rethink the "*problematique*" of the philosophy of history of modernity in the spirit of Christianity, so that it can grasp in greater depth the "theological-political" question of scientific rationalism and the ethics of nationalist state.[34]

Sino-Christian theology is not a kind of traditionalism under (Western) nationalist discourse, nor is it a searching for "returning to tradition" in the name of different forms of "post-ism". Rightly speaking, Sino-Christian theology is "a wicked foreigner who covets China; it confuses Chinese cultural tradition, and tries to introduce an unparalleled change by talking about gods and ghosts." [35] For some traditional Confucianists, Christian theology is vicious in its "destroying the way of Confucian Saints and their statues, ruining the hierarchy and the worship of ancestors, disregarding our monarchs and teachers, terminating our tradition and trying to sweep our ethical principles." [36] Liu Xiaofeng says:

> If, as is said, Chinese itself cannot be detached from the ultimate reality of Confucianism and Taoism, "Sino-Christian theology" is in itself a contradiction in terms and a kind of impossibility… The very possibility of Sino-Christian theology just consists in this impossibility; in other words, its possibility lies in the deconstruction of the original metaphoric order of Chinese sustained by the idea of "*Tian Tao*". Sino-Christian theology must deconstruct Chinese thought in order to understand the Word of God, which is an action of Chinese thought to understand God… [37]

The construction of contemporary Sino-Christian theology tries to get out of the framework of nationalism and pan-moralism. It will change from an old paradigm of inculturation, indigenization, or communication, emerged since Ming and Qing Dynasty, to a new paradigm of modernity, and thus be an integrative part of Chinese academia, engaging in the reflection of the post-traditional (post-May-Fourth) "*problematique*."

The main concern of Sino-Christian theology is not whether there are any resources, be it evident or potential, for Christian faith in Chinese cultural

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34 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.11.
35 Huang Zhen, "Shi Er Shen Gai Xu" (Preface to Twelve Deep Sighs) in *poxieji*, vol, 6. Cf. Xia Guiqi ed., *Sheng chao poxieji* [Poxieji: An Anthology of Writings Exposing Heterodoxy] (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 1996), p.294.
36 Su Ji-yu, "Xie Du Shi Ju" (Concrete Evidence of the Evil Poison), *poxieji*, vol. 3; cf. Xia Guiqi ed., *Sheng chao poxieji*, p.180.
37 Liu Xiaofeng, *The Sino-Christian Theology and Philosophy of History*, p.88.

context, but rather, the point is whether a contingent individual shows his or her will of openness to the Christ event. In its insistence on "the oneness of substance and application" and "the superiority of Chinese culture", Chinese thought has been deficient in such posture of openness to the Divine. Although Christian theology cannot arise out of Chinese context, Sino-Christian theology, by its belief of "the forming of the divine Word in Chinese", will inevitably impact Chinese culture. Due to the absolute otherness of Christian theology, Sino-Christian theology, rooting itself in the context of modernity, can make more contribution than Buddhist scholarship to the expansion and renewal of Chinese culture.

By its identity as Christian theology, Sino-Christian theology does not simply mean that Christian faith is from the West; more importantly, it shows that believing in Christ means to identify oneself as an "other". This "other" is not an Other of "dissidence" but an Other of "difference". That is to say, "God is God". Facing the God as an "Other", the construction of Christian theology can only be self-critical, for the "Other" is by no means an object of "communication and transformation" for us. Similarly, the Cross is not merely the foolishness to Greeks and the stumbling block to Jews, but the foolishness and the stumbling block to the Chinese as well.

Theological "contextualization" or "indigenization" is to seek common ground between Christianity and Chinese culture, a strategy compelling the foreigner to be naturalized or compromised. In Chinese context, Christian theology is crucified by Chinese culture. Put in another way, Christianity is in the first place a "stumbling block" in Chinese cultural context, and this is a fact which we perhaps cannot or do not have to change. Isn't Christian theology talking about such an "Other"? For all cultures, including Jewish, Greek, European-American, Latin-American culture, Jesus Christ is the "foreigner", for whom Christian theology apologizes.

Just because what Christian theology talks about is an "Other", any effort to accommodate or adapt this "Other" as something familiar to particular cultures is to take it as "foolishness" as Paul said. Therefore, in view of the crucified God, Christian theology can only keep reiterating this "stumbling block" when it faces different cultural contexts. Sino-Christian theology should insist on the openness to "difference" as the right attitude of faith.

Going out of the "grand narrative" inherited from the language of national thought, refusing to be the mediator between Christianity and Chinese culture, and working towards a real conversion, this is the first flag of deconstruction that Sino-Christian theology raises in Chinese thought, which is also an inception of a real spiritual action initiated by God's entering into Chinese thought. Hence, Sino-Christian theology is an event of impossibility for contemporary Chinese thought. This Sino-Christian theology in accordance with the *theologia Crucis* is still to be launched.

PART III

Rereading Tradition

Sino-Christian Theology, Bible, and Christian Tradition

LAI Pan-chiu

Introduction[1]

In the last two decades, a group of intellectuals in Mainland China have come to the fore participating enthusiastically in Christian studies, especially in the discussion of Christian theology. Since not all of them proclaim themselves to be Christians, they are conventionally called "cultural Christians". Many of these "Cultural Christians" attempt to promote a "Sino-Christian theology". The main aim of this paper is to discuss the relation of Sino-Christian theology with biblical studies and the Christian tradition.

Before embarking upon discussion of the main theme, it seems necessary first to clarify the terms "Cultural Christians" (*wenhua jidutu*) and "Sino-Christian theology" (*hanyu shenxue*). The term "Cultural Christians" is some what ambiguous and controversial. It is ambiguous and even misleading because it seems to imply that "cultural Christians" are "Christians" in a "cultural" instead of "religious" sense. In other words, they are "non-religious" and thus different from those who profess Christianity as their religion. The term "cultural Christians" also seems to imply that other Christians are "un-cultural", which may mean un-civilized or barbaric in the Chinese context. Furthermore, the demarcation between "cultural Christians" and, if there is such a term, "religious Christians" is far from clear. Some people can be Christian in both "cultural" and "religious" senses of the word. Even Liu Xiaofeng, probably the best-known representative of "cultural Christians", uses the term to refer to intellectuals from Mainland China with personal faith in Christ, rather than a person who simply is interested in studying Christianity as a cultural phenomenon without any personal religious faith in Christ.[2] According to this definition, in terms of personal faith, "cultural Christians" are also "religious Christians"; they are not "religious Christians" merely in the sense that they are

2   Liu Xiaofeng, "Xiandai Yujingzhong de Hanyu Jidu Shenxue" (Sino-Christian Theology in the Modern Context), *Logos & Pneuma* 2 (Spring,1995), p.25

not officially registered members of any Christian church or regular church-goers.

With regard to the term "Sino-Christian theology", it should be clarified that it means literally theology (*shexue*) in the *han*-language (*hanyu*), more conventionally known as the Chinese language (*zhongwen*). The expression "*hanyu*" is a more recent construction, reflecting the awareness that China is a multi-ethnic country, in which there are many ethnic minority groups, although they are overshadowed in both cultural and numerical senses by the tribe of *han*. Thus, it is more accurate to call the official language of China "*hanyu*" rather than "*zhongwen*", which literally means the Chinese language or the language of China because there are many languages being used by different ethnic groups in China.

In the relevant literature, one can always find two types of definition of Sino-Christian theology. Broadly speaking, "Sino-Christian theology" could refer to any theology written in the Chinese (*han*) language, rendering it possible to trace the history of Sino-Christian theology back several hundred years. In the narrow sense of the term, Sino-Christian theology may designate specifically the theological thinking of "cultural Christians" or the scholars from Mainland China pursuing the academic studies of Christianity. In this sense, Sino-Christian theology often considers itself as the philosophical expressions of individual religious beliefs in the academic settings of the humanities and social sciences in the universities in Mainland China. It also presents itself as an alternative radically different from the "indigenous theology" advocated by the Chinese churches and seminary-based dogmatic theology.[3] The following discussion will be confined to Sino-Christian Theology in its narrow sense,[4] and the review and retrospection below will concentrate on a journal called *Logos & Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology* (1994-), published by the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies (ISCS) in Hong Kong, the major academic platform for "cultural Christians" and chief promoter of Sino-Christian theology for some years.

This paper consists of three main parts. The first part attempts to offer a critical review of the relationship between Sino-Christian theology and biblical studies, and thus draws attention to the fact that Sino-Christian theology has not been well-recognized by the Chinese churches, due to its failure to integrate itself with biblical studies. There are many possible factors contributing to such a situation. As widely acknowledged, the field of biblical studies has not received the academic status in Mainland China to which it is due for social,

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3 Lai Pan-chiu, "Typology and Prospect of Sino-Christian Theology", *Ching Feng*, n.s., 6.2 (2005), pp.211-230.

4 Given the title of the said conference, it is rather clear that the conference expects a review and retrospection of Sino-Christian theology in its narrow sense; otherwise, there would be no need to confine it to "ten years".

cultural, and political reasons. Moreover, with respect to the academic background of individual scholars, very few of them have received adequate training in biblical studies. More importantly, even those scholars occupied in the studies of Sino-Christian theology might not have fully recognized the academic character of biblical studies and its importance with respect to theological thinking.

The second part of this paper argues that among the advocates of Sino-Christian theology, there are a number of rather basic misunderstandings or misconceptions with regard to biblical studies that should be to be rectified. Moreover, as biblical scholarship in Mainland China is expected to be enhanced in the foreseeable future, sooner or later Sino-Christian theology has to take seriously its relationship with the Bible and biblical studies. If advocates of Sino-Christian theology were to pay more attention to the academic, humanistic, and intellectual characters of biblical studies, and look for a more interactive relationship between Sino-Christian theology and biblical studies, it would be conducive not only to the wider acceptance of Sino-Christian theology in academia and in the Chinese Church, but also to its integration with the Christian tradition.

The final part of this paper endeavors to suggest that in the long run, Sino-Christian theology may better appropriate the rich Chinese cultural resources, including the methodology of scriptural studies within the Chinese tradition, such as the Buddhist method of doctrinal criticism. In doing so, Sino-Christian theology may develop some rather distinctive approaches to Scriptures and biblical interpretation, and thus make its unique contribution to theological studies worldwide.

Retrospect on Sino-Christian Theology and Biblical Studies

In the present Chinese world, the principal force in biblical scholarship consists of researchers from theological seminaries, especially those outside Mainland China. The research strength of Mainland China scholars, one has to admit, remains relatively weak in this area. To date, articles on biblical studies by Mainland China scholars have been meager, and even fewer among them have been able to master the methodology generally adopted by contemporary biblical scholarship. To the present author's knowledge, there are a few academic books on Old Testament studies published in Mainland China, but the most notable of them remains a book co-authored by a young scholar in Mainland China and a senior scholar from Hong Kong.[5] With regard to the academic standard at the post-graduate level in Mainland China, taking New Testament studies as an example, the author regards one particular Master's

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5 Li Chi-chang (Archie Lee) & You Bin, *Shengming Yanshuo yu Shequn Rentong: Xibolai Shengjing Wuxiaojuan Yanjiu* [Discourse of Life and the Communitarian Identity: Studies of the Megilloth of the Hebrew Bible] (Beijing: Zhongguo Shehui Kexue, 2003).

thesis on the "new view on Paul"[6] to stand out from those of others in terms of its demonstration of knowledge of the recent developments in international scholarship. Nevertheless, compared with a Master's thesis on the same subject by a student from Hong Kong,[7] the former still shows a considerable shortfall in terms of both basic philological training and acquaintance with the latest discussions in the current international academic world.

The under-development of biblical studies in Mainland China is not merely due to its unfavorable external environment; it is exacerbated by the failure of advocates of Sino-Christian theology to recognize properly the present academic status of biblical studies. It seems that Sino-Christian theology still has not given enough weight thematically and methodologically to the Bible or biblical studies, let alone made it an indispensable component of Sino-Christian theology. Leung Ka-lun (Laing Jialin), a church historian teaching at a theological seminary in Hong Kong, once criticized the theology of cultural Christians, especially in terms of the methodology which separates their theological thinking from biblical studies:

Most of them are interested merely in Christian thought and its philosophical implications, and the main subjects of their studies are those theologians in history who were original in theological and philosophical thinking (especially modern theologians), so that they do not follow the conventional approach (or tradition) of theological studies: exegesis → biblical theology →historical theology → systematic theology → applied theology → practical theology; they rather deal with the thinking of those theologians separately without taking biblical studies into account. For them, it is less important whether these thoughts are orthodox or heterodox, and even whether they are conformable to the teaching of the Bible is not a matter of their concern. Therefore the so-called Christian theological thought is actually the thought of some historical figures who proclaimed themselves Christians. Normally it is impossible to do such kind of theological research in theological seminaries.[8]

Though sharp in his wording and controversial in his presuppositions,[9] Leung's

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6   Lu Hongjian, "Chonggu 'yin xin chengyi'- 'Baoluo xinguan' Shuping" (Reappraisal of "justification by faith" – an introduction to the "new perspective on Paul"), unpublished Master thesis, Renmin University of China, 2005.

7   Liu Tsui Yuk, "A Critical Analysis on 'All Israel will be saved' in Romans 11: 25-32 in the Light of Sociological Investigation", unpublished M.Phil. thesis, the Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2004.

8   Liang Jia-lin, "Youshi Women Qian de Zhai ma?"(Another debt that we owe?), in Institute of Sino-Christian Studies ed., *Wenhua Jidutu: Xianxiang yu Lunzheng* [Cultural Christian: Phenomenon and Argument] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 1997), p.108.

9   For instance, it is not necessary for Christian theology to follow the linear and irreversible path suggested by Leung Ka-lun: exegesis → biblical theology → historical theology → systematic theology → applied theology → practical theology. It is also

observation of the separation between theological thinking and biblical studies among the Cultural Christians is essentially accurate.

There is no doubt that Biblical Studies constitutes only a tiny proportion of the publications of ISCS. Generally speaking, Cultural Christians seldom quote the Bible in their theological writings, and even fewer devote themselves to in-depth research into biblical studies. Their research and writings bear no close relation to the Bible or biblical studies. Moreover, "Cultural Christians" are not supposed to be religious believers, and Sino-Christian theology presupposes no particular confessional stance with regard to the inspiration and the authority of the Bible. All of these factors create the impression that Sino-Christian theology is not very "biblical", implying that it bears no relation to the Bible, and thus stands out of line with the Christian Church. As a result, the recognition of Sino-Christian theology among the Chinese churches in China and abroad remains very problematic.

The question of whether Sino-Christian theology could be well-received by Chinese churches is only of secondary importance; a more important question is that if the bond of Sino-Christian theology with the Christian tradition as a whole is based on its relationship with the Bible, and if Sino-Christian theology does bear no relation whatsoever to the Bible, would that necessarily entail the separation of Sino-Christian theology from the Christian tradition as a whole? If this is the case, there arises not merely a question of the recognition or popularity of Sino-Christian theology in the Christian churches, but of the legitimacy of Sino-Christian theology, which concerns the fundamental question of whether it is still a part of Christian theology. The question is then: Is Sino-Christian theology a kind of theology belonging to Christianity? In other words, is Sino-Christian theology to be recognized as a Christian theology at all?

In view of the curriculum of Theological Studies as a whole, Biblical Studies is merely a branch of the theological encyclopedia. Moreover, Christian theology is not necessarily confined to, or identical with biblical theology, being capable also of presenting itself in the form of philosophical theology or apologetic theology. Accordingly, Sino-Christian theology as apologetic theology can organize itself around the critiques raised by the non-believers against the Christian faith instead of proceeding directly from the inherent doctrines of Christianity. Apologetics may make reference to the Bible indirectly, implicitly, and occasionally, rather than persuade its opponents by quoting the Bible directly as an authoritative text or proof text.[10] In the rather complicated academic environment of Mainland China, with its

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possible to proceed from natural theology. Indeed, one can even understand the relationship among exegesis, theology and practice in terms of a hermeneutical circle.

10　Lai Pan-chiu, "Typology and Prospect of Sino-Christian Theology", pp.218-221.

millions of non-believers, it is quite understandable and even reasonable that Sino-Christian theology makes very scarce reference to the Bible. So the question of whether Sino-Christian theology is Christian is not to be determined by the frequency of direct biblical quotation. Given the fact that theological studies are increasingly specialized, even those professors of systematic theology in theological seminaries may not copiously cite the Bible in their works. In fact, a number of famous Western theologians, e.g. Paul Tillich, do not quote the Bible very often either. However, one cannot argue that Tillich's theology must be inferior to that of Karl Barth simply because Tillich quotes the Bible far less often than does Barth.

The question as to whether Sino-Christian theology is Christian cannot be reduced to the question of whether it is biblical. From the very beginning, Sino-Christian theology has professed to assume an ecumenical or non-denominational stance, permitting it to make use of theological resources from any denomination of Christianity. In fact, ISCS publishes books from various branches of Christianity, including Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. Therefore, Sino-Christian theology is under no obligation to take the Protestant stance of *sola scriptura* and to adopt the theological approach suggested by Leung Ka-lun. Certainly, in terms of theological position and methodology, one can confidently argue that even though Sino-Christian theology is seemingly not very biblical at the present stage, it cannot be proved that it is not Christian. However, the way Sino-Christian theology conceives of the relationship between theology and biblical studies remains an inevitable question. This is because even Catholicism and Orthodoxy, despite their recognition of the importance of tradition and of upholding no principle of *sola scriputra*, also attach great importance to the close relationship between tradition and the Bible.

Perhaps we may turn to the fact that although biblical studies should have been an important part of Sino-Christian theology, it remains the "weakest link", if not the "missing link", in theological studies in Mainland China. This assessment can be confirmed by a very simple review of the articles published in *Logos & Pneuma*. In terms of quantity, the proportion of the articles on biblical studies is slight: on average less than one paper per issue, which usually consists of more than ten papers. As for the background of the authors of articles related to biblical studies, the majority are scholars from theological seminaries in Hong Kong and Taiwan, rather than scholars from the universities of Mainland China. With regard to the main themes of the publications, only "*Genesis* and modern political philosophy" in *Logos & Pneuma* No. 15, published in Autumn 2000 (pp.9-82), seems closely related to the Bible; even then, the articles published on this subject concentrate more on political philosophy than on the interpretation of *Genesis*. Among the articles related to biblical studies, other than some occasional and short book reviews

and reading notes,[11] one can find only one paper giving a detailed linguistic study of the Bible[12] and a survey of the development of Old Testament studies.[13] However, the main concern of all these articles is still the theological-philosophical ideas in the Bible, e.g. on suffering,[14] the idea of human being,[15] social ethics,[16] doctrine of God,[17] Christology,[18] and so on. Without paying enough attention to the fine analysis of Scriptural texts, most of these discussions focus on some rather general theological ideas. The only one embracing an attentive interpretation of a Scriptural text is nevertheless a translated article, which also focuses its attention on theological thinking - on the question of "poverty and affluence".[19] So to sum up, *Logos & Pneuma* as a whole provides very few articles offering in-depth exploration of Scriptural texts or biblical criticism, and the standard of its research has been far from in line with the international norm in biblical scholarship. With regard to other theological journals published in Mainland China, such as *Jidujiao Wenhua*

11 Liu Yi-Huan, "Yice *Xinyue* Heheben Jichu Luyu zhi Wu" (Conjectures on Few Possible Errors in the Union Version Chinese Translation of the *New Testament*), *Logos & Pneuma* 6 (Spring 1997), pp.222-231; Zhou Xiao-Zhen, "Ping *Lujia de Zhihui*" (A Review on *The Wisdom of Luke*), *Logos & Pneuma* 6 (Spring 1997), pp.232-243; Yang Ke-Qin. "Bu Jiao *Lujia de Zhihui* Taixueshu" (Don't let *The Wisdom of Luke* be too academic), *Logos & Pneuma* 6 (Spring 1997), pp.244-257; Huang Genchun (=Wong Kun-chun, Eric), "Ping Zhou Zhaozhen *Fan Youerde jiu Yingdang Ting*" (A Review on Zhou Zhaozhen's *Whoever Has Ears Ought to Hear*), *Logos & Pneuma* 18 (Spring 2003), pp.291-295; You Bin, "Shuide Shengjing? Hezhong Shenxue? - ping James Barr *Shengjing Shenxue de Gainian: Cong Jiuyue Guanzhi*" (Whose Bible? What Kind of Theology? —A Review on James Barr's *The Concept of Biblical Theology: From thePerspective of Old Testament*), *Logos & Pneuma* 19 (Autumn 2003), pp.281-286.
12 Liu Xiaofeng, "Baoluo Shuxin zhong de 'Shenti' yu Yichu tan" (A Semantic Exploration of σωμα in the Pauline Letters), *Logos & Pneuma* 20 (Spring 2004), pp.149-167.
13 Mark Feng, "Jiuyue shenxue jinxi" (Old Testament Theology in Present and Past), *Logos & Pneuma* 3 (Autumn 1995), pp.73-86.
14 Liu Xiaofeng, "Yueboji yu Gudai Zhihuiguan de Weiji" (Job and the Crisis of the Ancient Concept of Wisdom), *Logos & Pneuma* 5 (Autumn 1996), pp.79-115.
15 Tan Lizhu, "*Shengjing* zhong de Youhuo Xushu yu Rende Zaishi Lijie" (Human Beings' Worldly Understanding of the Narrative of Temptation in the Bible), *Logos & Pneuma* 8 (Spring 2004), pp.173-195.
16 Fang Zhirong (Mark Feng), "Jiuyue zhong de Guojia yu Shehui" (Nation and Society in the Old Testament), *Logos & Pneuma* 1 (Summer 1994), pp.263-269.
17 Fang Zhirong (Mark Fang), "Tianzhu Shengsan Aoji - *JiuYue* Anshi, *XinYue* Qishi, Xiangyishen Zongjiao Tishi" (The Trinitarian Mystery of the Lord – the Hint of the Old Testament, the Revelation of the New Testament, and the Cue towards Monotheism), *Logos & Pneuma*17 (Autumn 2002), pp.139-152.
18 Liu Xiaofeng, "Baoluo Shuxin zhong de 'Shenti' Yuyi Chutan" (A Semantic Exploration of σωμα in the Pauline Letters), *Logos & Pneuma* 20 (Spring 2004), pp.149-167.
19 R. Brändle, "Jinqian yu Endian: Lun *Gelinduohoushu* ba jiu zhang" (Money and Grace - On 2 Corinthians 8 & 9), *Logos & Pneuma* 8 (Spring 1998), pp.137-143.

Xuekan (Journal for the Studies of Christian Culture, 1999-) and *Jidu Zhongjiao Yanjiu* (Study of Christianity, 1999-), the situation is quite similar.

The current under-development of biblical studies in Mainland China might have been brought forth by several factors:

1. *The political atmosphere:*

In Mainland China, the Bible is usually regarded merely as a sacred object for believers' worship and devotion, so it is only supplied in churches and not available in bookstores. In other words, it is an object of religious piety rather than a subject of academic study. The political factor is well-exemplified by a conference held in Kaifeng, Henan province, in September 2002. Co-sponsored by Henan University and the Association of Chinese Comparative Literature, while most of the papers presented at the conference pertained to biblical Studies, the conference was held under the title "Hermeneutics of Classics and Communication of Culture". According to the editors of the conference volume, the word "Bible" was dropped in the official title of the conference because it was too politically sensitive. The conference organizers had even once planned to publish a collection of the papers in a very remote province in order to avoid attention from the government. Although the collection was finally published by a renowned publisher in Beijing,[20] the incident showed that biblical Studies remains, in the minds of scholars at least, a rather sensitive discipline in Mainland China.

2. *Rigidity of the requirements of the discipline:*

For most of the current scholars in Mainland China, Christian Studies or Theological Studies is still a brand-new field to which they switch their studies from other academic disciplines such as history, literature, and philosophy. It is straightforward for those scholars to switch their studies from history to church history, or from sociology or anthropology to empirical or field studies of Chinese Christianity, for it requires no essential change in methodology. The switch from philosophy to philosophical theology or systematic theology, though different in their methodology and the required background training, remains not so difficult. However, in pursuing biblical studies, those scholars from other disciplines need almost to start afresh as beginners due to the rigidity of requirements for the requisite training. With regard to New Testament studies, one's knowledge of the Greek language, Greek philosophy, and the history and culture of the ancient Greco-Roman world could be of a little help. However, for Old Testament studies, the case is more complicated in that it requires proficiency in several ancient languages (including Hebrew), knowledge of the

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20 Lu Long-guang & Liang Gong eds. *Shengjing yu Wenxue Chanshi* [The Bible and Literary Interpretation] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 2003).

ancient myths, history, culture and society, etc., as well as understanding of methodologies of modern biblical studies. It is not easy for academia in Mainland China to overcome these hurdles by themselves and to reach the international standard in biblical scholarship.

3. *The ignorance of the academic character of biblical studies:*
In its "Notes for Contributors", *Logos and Pneuma* shows a rather interesting attitude worthy of rumination:

> (The journal) treasures the intellectual, cultural and academic character of the contributions, and no articles of sermon, spirituality, and pure exegesis will be accepted. All the results of academic studies of Christian theology from the perspective of different disciplines (systematic--fundamental theology, biblical Scholarship, Church history, the history of dogma, the history of Jewish thought), Christian human sciences (philosophy, ethics, history, philology and aesthetics), Christian social sciences (politics, sociology, psychology and anthropology), and religious dialogue are warmly welcomed.[21]

What puzzles the author most is why, on the one hand, the research products of biblical scholarship are welcomed, while on the other, "pure exegesis" is rejected. Though no clear definition of "pure exegesis" is given in the "Notes for Contributors", one can infer from the context that "pure exegesis", comparable to sermons or literature of spirituality, is supposed to be lacking in "intellectual, academic, and cultural character". The prevalent exegetical practice of some Chinese churches might have given people such an impression or prejudice that "pure exegesis" is something without "intellectual, academic, and cultural character." However, what is worthwhile questioning is whether "pure exegesis" is really such.

Prospect of Sino-Christian Theology & Biblical Studies
Students of biblical studies may find that there are many academic books attempting to interpret the Bible from the perspective of social sciences.[22] Likewise, the aforementioned M.A. thesis of Liu Tsui-yuk also attempts to interpret a passage from the Bible by using a sociological method. Some Asian theologians even tend to express their theological thinking by means of biblical interpretation. Taking *Madang: Journal of Contextual Theology in*

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21 *Logos & Pneuma*, "Gaoyue ji Gaoli" (Notes to Contributors), *Logos & Pneuma* 1 (Summer 1994), pp.4-5.
22 Cf. Gerd Theissen, *Sociology of Early Palestinian Christianity*, John Bowden trans. (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1978); *Christian Origins in Sociological Perspective* (London: SCM, 1980); *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985); Philip F. Esler, *The First Christians in Their Social Worlds: Socio-Scientific Approaches to New Testament Interpretation* (London: Routledge, 1994).

East Asia (Seoul: Sungkonghoe University Press, 2004-), a newly-started journal of contextual theology in Korea, as an example, four of the five articles in the first issue of the journal are clearly related to biblical exegesis.[23]

Owing to their contextual nature, there is no doubt that this kind of biblical interpretation carried out by Asian theologians, who aim at making the Bible relevant to the Asian context(s), might be "subjective" to a certain extent. However, their "intellectual, academic and cultural character" is also rather evident, which can be seen from the considerable references to the results of the contemporary Western academic world, the analyses of the historical context of biblical documents, the training in original languages involved, and the background knowledge in history, archaeology, and even sociology. Sometimes, this kind of contextual exegesis also encompasses the social and cultural analysis of contemporary contexts.[24]

In a sense, one could say that exegesis is fairly intellectual in that even the most basic exegesis indeed requires knowledge of the scriptural texts, the history and culture involved. Moreover, probably no classical text in this world other than the Bible has been studied by so many methods, and one should not forget that hermeneutics, a prominent discipline of contemporary humanities, has been conducted for a rather long time in the context of biblical exegesis. Furthermore, the methodology of contemporary biblical scholarship is quite similar to the methodology adopted by contemporary international academia as the methodology of studying and interpreting texts in general. Therefore, exegesis may also be seen to be quite academic. Finally, without confining their studies to the Scriptures as ancient classics having a far-reaching influence on human history, the exegetes may study the Scriptures with the contemporary social or cultural problems in mind. For instance, some scholars have attempted to reflect on the problem of the encounter of faiths and cultures from exegetical perspectives.[25] The "cross-textual reading" of the Scriptures advocated by Li Chi-chang (also known as Archie C. C. Lee) illustrates clearly how one's cultural context might affect one's reading of the Scriptures, and how biblical exegesis may

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23 Kim Yong-Bock, "Power and Life in the Context of Globalization: A Biblical and Theological Perspective", *Madang: Journal of Contextual Theology in East Asia* 1.1 (June 2004), pp.2-25; Choi Young-Sil, "A Model of New Testament Hermeneutics: in the Experience of Korean Women", *Madang* 1.1 (June 2004), pp.69-84; Kim Micah Eun-Kyu, "Life and Ecological Ideas in Genesis ch.1: A View from Taoism and Buddhism", *Madang* 1.1 (June 2004), pp.85-112; Yim Tao Soon, "Reading the Bible from an Asian Perspective", *Madang* 1.1 (June 2004), pp.25-48.

24 Archie C. C. Lee ed., *The Asian Context and Biblical Hermeneutics* (Hong Kong: Christian Literature Council. 1996).

25 Heikki Räisänen, *Marcion, Muhammad and the Mahatma: Exegetical Perspectives on the Encounter of Cultures and Faiths* (London: SCM, 1997).

play a vital role in cross-cultural dialogue.[26] All these speak well for the cultural character of exegesis.

As stated above, the line of demarcation between "pure exegesis" and "biblical scholarship" is blurred, and it is too simplistic to make a sharp division between "biblical scholarship" and "pure exegesis" in the measure of the so-called "intellectual, academic, and cultural character", because even the most "pure exegesis" more or less measures up to the criterion. There is no reason for Sino-Christian theology to preclude biblical exegesis from its horizon. If one of the aims of ISCS is to improve the academic status and level of Christian studies in Mainland China, it has to pay adequate attention to, or even work energetically to promote biblical studies, including biblical exegesis. Therefore, in order to show how to interpret Scripture with the tools of the contemporary methodology in humanities and social sciences, and also to show that exegesis can be highly "intellectual, academic, and cultural", it is advisable for ISCS to be more open to academic exegesis and to translate more books on exegetical methodology and/or books on the biblical interpretations and hermeneutics. If biblical studies were to attain its due academic status in China, the academic status and the legitimacy of Sino-Christian theology would be consolidated and strengthened.

Certainly, it is not realistic to expect that biblical scholarship in Mainland China will be able to measure up to the international standard in a short time. Nevertheless, the present author has always been cautiously optimistic about the future of Christian studies in Chinese. In the foreseeable future, the scholarship of Sino-Christian theology, not excepting biblical studies, is expected to make considerable progress. This prudent optimism, rather than being the product of the ignorance of the current difficulties and handicaps, is derived from those hopeful signs noticed personally by the author.

To the knowledge of the author, some theological seminaries and ecclesiastic institutions of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas countries have already sent a number of fellow workers to teach subjects related to biblical studies in Mainland China, e.g. the Chinese Theological Seminary of Hong Kong, the Lutheran Seminary of Hong Kong, Taiwan Theological Seminary, as well as some other overseas institutions. In spite of being conducive to the progress of the biblical scholarship of Mainland China, such teaching support is rather loosely organized; the most systematic and substantial support of an advanced international level being that from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), which will have a far-reaching influence on the development of biblical scholarship in Mainland China.

The Divinity School of Chung Chi college of CUHK has hosted for a

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26 Archie Lee, "*Aijiangnanfu* yu *Aige* zhi Xiangrong: Kuawenben Yuedu zhi Lizheng" (Engaging *Lamentations* and *the Lament for the South*: A Cross-textual Reading), *Zongjiao yanjiu* [Religion Studies] 1 (2003), pp.196-207.

number of years a lecture series called "Chuen King Lectures", which has been delivered by various world-renowned biblical scholars, including Abraham Malherbe (1996), C. K. Barrett (1996), Gerd Theissen (2000), Jack M. Sasson (2001), Morna D. Hooker (2001), and I. Howard Marshall (2006). In addition, the professors of the Divinity School have organized a number of academic conferences on biblical studies, e.g. the "Ethnic-Chinese biblical Colloquium", with participants from Mainland China and overseas held in May 2004. Moreover, the School supported the aforementioned conference, "Hermeneutics of Classics and Communication of Culture", described as the first academic conference related to biblical studies held in Mainland China in the past several decades. The conference was followed by a second, "Biblical Colloquium in Memory of the Centenary Anniversary of the Birth of Professor Zhu Weizhi", co-sponsored with Nankai University, held in July 2005. The publication of the series of biblical studies edited by Lu Long-guang (also known as Lo Lung-kwong) and Liang Gong[27] will play a positive and important role in the development of the biblical scholarship in Mainland China.

More importantly, with the financial support from the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, several students from Mainland China have already undertaken their doctoral studies on the Hebrew Bible at CUHK. Their training, including methodologies of contemporary biblical criticism, as well as Hebrew and other ancient languages, is no different from that of the famous universities in the West. Among the teachers one can even find some world-class scholars such as the late James Barr. Though many of these students had not been adequately trained in the studies of the Hebrew Bible before coming to CUHK, the education they have received in Hong Kong has been in line with the international standard. It is expected that even though the standard they achieve might not be the same as that attained at first rate universities in Europe or USA, their research capacity will, without doubt, far exceed that of many current Mainland China scholars. Their returning to the Mainland after graduation may enhance significantly the overall standard of biblical scholarship in Mainland China.

What merits special attention is that many of these doctoral students in the Hebrew Bible program are not Christians, whose research is purely from

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27 Lu Long-guang & Liang Gong eds., *Shengjing Jiedu* [An Interpretation of the Bible] (Beijing: Religious Culture, 2003); Lu Long-guang & Liang Gong eds., *Lüfashu - Xushi Zhuzuo Jiedu* [An Interpretation of the Torah & Narrative Books] (Beijing: Religious Culture, 2003); Lu Long-guang & Liang Gong eds., *Shigeshu - Zhihui Wenxue Jiedu* [An Interpretation of Biblical Poetry & Wisdom Literature] (Beijing: Religious Culture, 2003); Lu Long-guang & Liang Gong eds., *Xianzhishu - Qishi Wenxue Jiedu* [An Interpretation of the Prophets & Apocalyptic Literature] (Beijing: Religious Culture, 2004); Lu Long-guang & Liang Gong eds., *Sifuyinshu Jiedu* [An Interpretation of Four Gospels] (Beijing: Religious Culture, 2004).

an academic perspective and has no direct connection with their personal religious belief. They are living testimony to the fact that biblical studies can be a non-confessional academic field of research and not necessarily a confessional discipline that may only be conducted by religious believers. Scholars as such may pursue their research, from the viewpoint of academic specialization, in literature, history, Western culture, and even West Asia studies, as well as religious studies. It is believed that they may substantially enhance the biblical scholarship of Mainland China in terms of both quality and quantity. However, the significance of their studies to the construction of Sino-Christian theology remains uncertain, for their research might have no direct and necessary relationship with Christian theology.

Theology & Bible from a Chinese Perspective

As shown in the above review and investigation, how to conceive the relationship between theology, Bible and biblical studies remains a vital problem for Sino-Christian theology.

In the present Chinese academic world, there are two prevailing approaches to linking theology with the Bible. The first approach, supported by Leung Ka-lun and many teachers of theological seminaries, emphasizes the authority and the priority of the Bible in theological thinking, and pursues a one-way linear path from exegesis to theological tradition and then to application. The weakness of this approach lies in its ignorance of the dialectical relationship between the canon and the tradition: canon creates tradition and vice versa, and both have their own fluidity;[28] that is to say, tradition involves negotiating identity with and within canon.[29] The other approach is known as "contextual interpretation", which has been influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the Asian theological movement, and which adopts a method similar to that of the contextual biblical exegesis or contextual theology prevalent in neighboring regions. Although it does not first pursue an "objective" interpretation of Scripture and then apply it to a concrete situation, it does take the here-and-now situation into account as a constructive element of the interpretation so as to establish the possible significance of a particular passage of the Bible to the current situation, especially the political, economic and social contexts. However, contextual exegesis, unlike the first approach, tends to be rather subjective or arbitrary, and gives priority to its relevance to the present context rather than to its link with the Christian tradition.

Both approaches make use of the established methodologies from regions other than China. A more original approach formed within the Chinese

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28 Delwim Brown, *Boundaries of Our Habitations: Tradition and Theological Construction* (Albany: SUNY. 1994), p.29.

29 Delwim Brown, *Boundaries of Our Habitations*, pp.83-92.

academic world is that of "cross-textual reading", proposed by Li Chi-chang (Archie C. C. Lee). It is true that cross-textual reading is a method highlighting the characteristics of the Chinese context; namely, a number of believers in Chinese context would read the Scriptures in comparison or contrast to some Chinese classics, and thus probably may interpret various passages of the Bible in a way radically different from the conventional interpretation. One can find precedents of this sort of cross-textual reading in the history of Sino-Christian theology in the broad sense of the word.[30] Furthermore, were the method adopted by Sino-Christian theology, it might lead to a kind of theology with distinctive Chinese characters. However, how does the cross-textural reading distinguish itself from comparative literature? What is its possible significance for theological methodology? Not even these issues been adequately clarified by the proponents of cross-textual interpretation of the Bible, let alone the relationship between cross-textual interpretation of the Bible and the Christian tradition.

One of the characteristics of Sino-Christian theology is its use of materials from traditional Chinese culture. Interestingly enough, if one invest-igates the way in which Chinese culture conceives of the transmission of tradition, one finds that Confucianism (especially the tradition of "*xin-xue*", literally speaking, "heart-mind learning") and Buddhism (especially the Ch'an school) emphasize the succession of "heart-mind" over that of "scripture", which is only the testimony to the former.[31] Similarly, the Bible reads, "Do all you can to preserve the unity of the spirit… There is one body and one Spirit… one and the same hope… one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God…" (Ephesians 4: 3-6; Jerusalem Bible). It is noteworthy that there is no mention of "one Scripture". In fact, the canon adopted by Roman Catholicism is slightly different from that of Protestantism. Therefore, instead of adhering to "one Scripture", Sino-Christian theology could inherit the ecumenical Christian tradition in terms of "one Spirit" or "one heart-mind", which may include not only the faith and hope belonging to the domain of Sprit or heart-mind, but also the object or content of faith (one Lord, one God) the one heart-mind attested to and the liturgy (one baptism) testifying the transmission of the one heart-mind.

If the Christian identity of Sino-Christian theology is also largely dependent on its relationship with the Christian tradition, a further question is raised as to how to decide whether Sino-Christian theology is a continuation

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30 Li Chi-chang (Archie Lee), "Kuawenben Yuedu Celue: Mingmo Zhongguo Jidutu Zhuzuo Yanjiu" (A strategy of Cross-textual Reading: Studies on the Works of the Christians of Late Ming Dynasty); Jiao Yuqin trans., *Jidujiao Wenhua Xuekan* [Journal for the Studies of Christian Culture] 1 (2003), pp.165-187.

31 Lai Pan-chiu, "Inheriting the Chinese and Christian Traditions in Global Context: A Confucian-Protestant Perspective", *Religion & Theology* 10/1 (March 2003), pp.7-11.

rather than a disruption of the Christian tradition. According to the analysis given by Christoph Schwöbel, there are three different ways to understand the continuity of the tradition in the history of Christianity. The first model, introduced by Irenaeus of Lyon, is to understand tradition as a "continuous chain" of the original message which is preserved in the unbroken apostolic succession from apostles to the present Pope. The second understanding of tradition is the "consensus model", which suggests that the Christian tradition is preserved in one consensus of faith, e.g. the *consensus fidelium* suggested by Vincent of Lérins, which means the faith held by all believers of all times. The third model adopts the strategy of "return to the origin" of the tradition, called by Reformers *ad fonts*, namely, returning to the Bible as the yardstick for tradition.[32]

As many cultural Christians do not have strong connections with the Christian churches and sometimes even consider themselves outside the ecclesiastical polity, it is not easy for Sino-Christian theology to accept the first model, which comes rather close to the stance of Roman Catholicism. In fact, it is also difficult to demonstrate the concrete ecclesiastical (not to say "apostolic") succession of Sino-Christian theology in historical terms. As has been noted, since Sino-Christian theology in its present stage of development remains not very "biblical" in its appearance, the adoption of the third model may not be helpful either. Therefore, the second model is perhaps a more feasible approach to understand how the theological activities of Cultural Christians can continue the Christian tradition. This is because despite having no formal affiliation to a Christian church, they do share the faith of Christians. As Schwöbel points out, the problem of the second model lies in its need for the third model as a supplement, for what the consensus of believers of all generations and all places signifies remains rather unclear.[33] Certainly, the stress on consensus in the second model and the emphasis on Scripture in the third model do not conflict with each other.[34] For Sino-Christian theology, the virtue of the second model, nevertheless, might precisely lie in its seeming limitation pointed out by Schwöbel. The distinctiveness of Sino-Christian theology lies in its emphasis on the language it employs. Owing to the close linkage between language and its living context, the consensus of the believers in the Chinese context is not necessarily expressed in an unambiguous universal language (comparable to Esperanto) and thus cannot be identical with the language of the Scriptures or the ecumenical creeds. It, nevertheless,

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32 Christoph Schwöbel, "Rationality, Tradition and Theology: Six Theses", in Marcel Sarot & Gijsbert van den Brink eds., *Identity and Change in the Christian Tradition* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), pp.179-180.

33 Christoph Schwöbel, "Rationality, Tradition and Theology: Six Theses", p.181.

34 Lai Pan-chiu, "Inheriting the Chinese and Christian Traditions in Global Context: A Confucian-Protestant Perspective", pp.11-16.

shall and can be re-interpreted or translated in the Chinese context. If the mission of theology is to construct the future of the tradition by using the inherited faith and resources,[35] compared with the other two models, the second model of understanding the continuation of tradition is eligible to provide for Sino-Christian theology greater hermeneutic space, and more possibilities of participating in and therefore enriching the Christian tradition.[36]

Other than its contributions to the understanding of Scripture and the transmission of the Christian tradition, the Chinese cultural resources may also inspire some alternative paths in approaching the relationship between theology and biblical studies. For instance, the Chinese Buddhist method of doctrinal criticism, which attempts to criticize, rank and organize the scriptures according to their different theological contents, may provide for biblical theology a possible method for handling the question of theological diversity within the canon.[37] The method is similar to "content criticism" in biblical studies, also called "theological criticism", for the "content" refers to theological content. Underlying this kind of theological criticism is the presupposition that the ultimate authority does not lie in the Scriptural texts but with the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures. The theological criticism is not to use a non-theological or non-Christian authority to reject the Bible; but, as Luther had also said, to "urge Christ against Scripture". It presupposes that the Bible was written by human beings susceptible to mistakes and thus bears the theological opinions and orientations of the authors or the editors.[38] Therefore, with regard to the relationship between theology and the Bible and biblical studies, it is of no necessity that theology should be unilaterally determined by the Bible or biblical studies, whereas theology can also conduct a critique of the theological formulations in different parts of the Bible; by doing so, a hermeneutic circle may be formed. It is possible that this approach to biblical studies has been secretly carried out throughout the entire history of Christianity, but has been seldom adopted publicly and systematically, with the exception of obvious examples such as Martin Luther and Origen. However, almost every school of Chinese Buddhism regards this kind of doctrinal criticism as an indispensable component; in fact, Zhang Chunyi (1871-1955), a Chinese promoter of Mahayana Christianity, has already tried to apply the

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35 Delwim Brown, *Boundaries of Our Habitations,* p.148.

36 Lai Pan-chiu, "Inheriting the Chinese and Christian Traditions in Global Context: A Confucian-Protestant Perspective", *Religion & Theology* 10/1 (March, 2003), pp.19-21.

37 Lai Pan-chiu, "Zhongguo Fojiao de Panjiao Duisheng Jingshenxue de Qishi" (The Inspiration of the Chinese Buddhist Doctrinal Criticism to Biblical Theology), in Chen Zuoren ed., *Wujinde Zhuiqiu* [The Endless Pursuit] (Hong Kong: Religion Society, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1988), pp.36-62.

38 Robert Morgan, "Sachkritik", in R. J. Coggins & J. L. Houlden eds., *A Dictionary of Biblical Interpretation* (London: SCM / Philadelphia: Trinity, 1990) pp.604-605.

method to the criticism of different Scriptural texts.[39] In short, as stated in the above, Sino-Christian theology is capable of making its unique contribution to the Christian tradition as a whole by making use of its cultural resources.

Between Church and Academy

To sum up our discussion, biblical studies remains under-developed in Mainland China for many reasons, one of them being the failure of advocates of Sino-Christian theology to recognize the academic, social and cultural characters of biblical Studies. This failure reflects a deep-seated problem facing Sino-Christian theology, which is an intellectual movement advocated by a group of Chinese intellectuals interested in the academic studies of Christianity but not necessarily affiliated to any Christian church. For Sino-Christian theology, as an intellectual movement evolved from academia, an important problem is how to conceive its relationship with Christianity, especially the Christian churches and the Bible. Whereas many church leaders have rejected Sino-Christian theology on the grounds that it does not look particularly "biblical", this paper argues that Sino-Christian theology seldom makes reference to the Bible on legitimate grounds that are both practical and theological. However, this paper also suggests that it remains desirable for Sino-Christian theology to develop a more proper interaction with biblical studies. Such interaction will consolidate the Christian identity of Sino-Christian theology, make Sino-Christian theology more acceptable for the Chinese churches, and help Sino-Christian theology to make better use of its cultural resources, including the methodology of scriptural studies in the Chinese tradition, in formulating some rather distinctive approaches to biblical studies. However, for Sino-Christian theology, the problem concerning its relationship with the Bible or biblical studies remains merely part of the wider problem with regard to its relationship with the Christian churches, as well as the problem of the Christian identity of Sino-Christian theology. These questions are so far-reaching that they need to be further discussed from a number of other perspectives.

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39 Lai Pan-chiu, "Chuli Jiaoli Duoyanghua zhi dao: Dacheng Fojiao de Fangbian yu Jidu Zongjiao de Qianjiu" (Ways of Handling Doctrinal Diversity: the Skillful Means of Mahayana Buddhism and the Accommodation of Christianity), in Wu Yan-sheng, Lai Pinchao & Wang Xiaochao eds., *Fojiao yu Jidujiao Duihua* [Dialogue between Buddhism and Christianity] (Beijing: Zhonghua, 2005), pp.364-382.

Messianic Predestination in Romans 8 and Classical Confucianism

YEO Khiok-khng

This experimental essay seeks to use an inter-subjective hermeneutic to read the texts of Paul and Confucius intertextually. The reading is concerned with crossing borders and fusing horizons in cross-cultural interpretation. The paper will read Paul's messianic (Christological) predestination language using the lens of the Confucian millennial understanding of *Datong* (Great Togetherness). It will also read Paul's eschatology in tension with Confucius' political and moral philosophy of recovering the golden age, namely the Zhou dynasty.[1] The hope is that a more responsible and creative reading can become a viable option for how we understand human history, time, salvation, and the role of human beings in God's redemption of the whole creation.

Intersubjectivity of Cross-cultural Interpretation [2]

An intersubjective reading assumes a rhetorical-hermeneutical reading process that is interactive and persuasive in its communication. In *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, I allotted a considerable amount of space to spelling out the significance and process of an *interactive* model in biblical reading and cross-cultural hermeneutics based on rhetorical theories.[3] The rhetorical inter-action among text, writer, and reader is based on rhetorical and literary theories which are *less intentional and articulate in noting the significance of multi-textual influence, the subjectivity of a text and its reader as well as laying out a two-way reading process.*

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1   Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Confucian classics and Romans in this paper are the author's.

2   On the survey of contemporary methods of biblical interpretation, see Carl R. Holladay, "Contemporary Methods of Reading the Bible", *The New Interpreter's Bible*, vol. (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), pp.125-149; on the theory of biblical hermeneutics, see Anthony Thiselton's magnum opus*, New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Biblical Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992). On the methodology of intersubjectivity, see" Michael Morton and Judith Still eds., *Intertextuality: Theories and Practices* (Manchester & New York: Manchester University Press, 1991); George Aichele and Gary A. Phillips eds., *Intertextuality and the Bible, Semeia* 69/70 (1995).

3   Yeo Khiok-khng, *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10: A Formal Analysis With Preliminary Suggestions for a Chinese, Cross-Cultural Hermeneutic* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1995), Chapter 3.

The term "intertextuality" was coined by Julia Kristeva to indicate that a text does not exist in a closed system of its own but in interrelation with other texts through quotations, references, allusions and influences of various kinds.[4] The intersubjective influence conveyed through the medium of a "text" is clearly seen in the "various cultural discourses"[5] because "the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture".[6] The assumed locus of meaning-production in this inter-subjective process has shifted from the author to the reader. Both axis of intertextuality—via the writer (who is the first reader) and the readers (who are co-producers of textual meaning)—allow the "dialogism" or "heteroglossia" (exchange of language in M. Bakhtin's understanding) of texts to work in the genesis of meaning.[7]

The processes of reading- and meaning-production are always dialogues between the writers and the readers. The authority of interpretation does not reside in the frozen text or in the first writer, but is to be found in the interactive process of the text, involving both the writer and the reader, which I have previously termed "rhetorical interaction".[8] Gadamer writes of the inter-subjective and inter-interpretive understanding process which is productive and reproductive.[9] A text not only carries meaning but allows readers to create meanings. Similarly, readers not only interpret text, they are being read by texts, viz., their stories are made meaningful by the texts. Because understanding and reading processes are reproductive and productive, a writer cannot control the meaning of a text and limit it to *just* his own "original" intention.

The question then is: to what extent does this intersubjectivity between text and readers exist? On the extreme case, one may argue that any text can be "rewritten" by readers, as reader-response theories have shown.[10] For example, Roland Barthes would even argue for "the death of the author," thus putting the

4   Julia Kristeva, "Word, Dialogue and Novel", in Toril Moi ed. *The Kristeva Reader* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Kristeva, however, does not think that texts function for readers as an intersubjective network; they function only as intertextual networks.

5   Jonathan Culler, *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), p.32.

6   Roland Barthes, *Image, Music, Text* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1977), p.146.

7   "Dialogism" and "heteroglossia" are Bakhtin's terms in his work, *The Dialogic Imagination*, Michael Holquist ed., Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist trans. (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981).

8   Yeo, *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, as the title of the work indicates, see also pp. 15-49.

9   Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed. (New York: Crossroad, 1989), p.261.

10 See the discussion in "Reader-Response Criticism", in Elizabeth A. Castelli, Stephen D. Moore and Regina M. Schwartz eds., *The Postmodern Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995), pp.20-69.

authority of interpretation only on the text and the readers.[11] Similarly, Culler writes, "There are no moments of authority and points of origin except those which are retrospectively designated as origins and which, therefore, can be shown to derive from the series for which they are constituted as origin."[12]

Confucian Messianic Expectation, *Datong*, and Recovery of the Golden Age
Both motifs of messianic consciousness and national salvation are present in biblical (Jewish and Christian) and Confucianist utopian history, but the dynastic change and hope of the return of the golden age is quite distinctive of Chinese history. Yet the Confucian political ethics and the biblical (especially Pauline) theology are intertextual lenses I often use to understand history. Jewish and Christian views look to a transcendental reign of God beyond national history. In those views, eschatological and millenarian hope is not only about national salvation, it is also about cosmic salvation (cf. Rom 1:20, 25; 8:20-22). In critiquing the domination of various empires, Jewish and Christian views portray the God of history whose intended will of salvation "invades" the world and becomes the *telos* (goal) of history. The question I often ask in reading Romans 8 is: Does Paul's argument regarding Christ as the *telos* (goal, purpose) of cosmic salvation provide a comprehensive narrative that excludes other narratives?

As we will see in this section, the majority of Confucianists, in contrast to the biblical view, see the Chinese Great Togetherness/Harmony (*Datong*) as a realization of a past golden age. Is that Confucianist view too parochial?

We will take a look at both traditions rather independently before concluding with an intertextual reading of these two. My intention is *not* to make the claim that my reading of Romans 8 is the only valid, or even a better one, than those that have been offered by previous biblical scholars. My intention is to use my Confucianist lens to re-read Romans 8 and to argue that this is another plausible reading.[13] In the reading process, I also hope to use Romans 8 to offer helpful critiques to some of my Confucianist assumptions of history so that my Confucianist-Pauline hermeneutic will broaden my understanding of how God is at work in and beyond a particular cultural process and historical tradition.

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11 *Roland Barthes by Roland Barthes*, Richard Howard trans. (London and New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), p.140.

12 Jonathan Culler, *The Pursuit of Signs: Semiotics, Literature, Deconstruction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1981), p.117.

13 This paper does not deal with the question of "indeterminacy" and "completing plausible interpretations", which I dealt with in "Culture and Intersubjectivity as Criteria of Negotiating Meanings in Cross-cultural Interpretations", in *The Meanings We Choose* Charles H. Cosgrove (ed.) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), pp.81-100.

In contrast to the Pauline vision of Christ narrative of God's cosmic salvation, the Confucian vision of national salvation posits a moral transformation of humanity in the hope of recovering the previous ideal dynasty. There are a few observations we can summarize regarding the Confucian view of salvation. These observations will serve as lenses for me to read Romans 8. I must admit that my selective understanding of Confucian political ethics is influenced by my interest in some of the themes in Romans 8 as well.

Recovery of the Golden Age (Datong)

First, the recovery of the golden age as the *Datong* in Confucian thought looks backward at history for the ideal goal within its social-political context. This strikes me as a prominent spatial-temporal frame that Romans 8 also uses. Confucius (or known as Kong Zi, 551-479 BCE) regarded the Western (Earlier or Former) Zhou (1050-770 BCE) as the "golden age," only 200 years or so earlier than "Spring and Autumn" (Chun Qiu, 770-476 BCE) when he was born. Later Confucians were also fond of looking to antiquity as a prototype of an ideal age to which people in a disintegrating society should look. To them, antiquity was not a pre-civilization Garden of Eden but the golden age of Zhou as the era of highest human achievement.

Confucius' understanding of *Datong* is not nostalgia for the good old days. His messianic hope of recovering the golden age of the past served primarily as a backward stretching of the imagination of Chinese who were living in a state of cultural and moral deterioration. Confucius wanted the Chinese to contemplate the Great Harmony (i.e., *Datong* in Chinese) in the perfect world. His *Datong* utopian hope was a critique of their chaotic and deteriorating society.

Continuing the tradition of Confucius, Mencius' social utopian understandings combine to form a government that is responsible to the people; Mencius also teaches that a royal government (*wangdao*) seeks to benefit all by distributing resources fairly according to the "well field system" (*jing tian zhi*), and requires all to contribute according to their abilities.[14] It is a socialist system of government based on division of labors, consideration for others, and communal solidarity.[15]

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14 Wolfgang Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness. Recurring Themes in Four Thousand Years of Chinese Cultural History*, Michael Shaw trans. (New York: Seabury, 1976), pp.24-25.

15 For example, Mencius (Meng Zi) taught King Xuan of Qi the reason of Wenwang of Zhou. He possessed a large piece of land and yet it was considered too small by his people. The reason was that Wenwang shared it with his people. (Mencius 1B, 2). See *The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena and Copious Indexes*, vol. 1, James Legge trans. (Reprint; Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), pp.153-154.

Self-Perception as Heaven-Sent

Second, the self-perception of Confucius as the "messiah" (heaven-sent and heaven-chosen) to bring about the ideal of the golden age is a distinctive ethos in Chinese philosophy. "Messianic" consciousness is not just a biblical or Pauline concept; it is evident in Confucianism as well. Bauer's research into this messianic concept in Chinese history shows Confucius as a self-conscious, "predestined messiah" of his own society.[16]

Confucius identified himself with the duke of Zhou (Zhou Gong), the brother of the founder of the dynasty, Wuwang (Warrior King), who was regent for Chengwang, Wuwang's son and successor. The Analects (*Lun Yu*) often mentions the duke of Zhou, and some scholars have suspected that perhaps Confucius longed to be such a personality and restore the lost golden age.[17]

The self-perception of messianic consciousness seems to be the legacy of Confucianism. Subsequently every Confucianist has the conviction and aspiration to serve one's country after completing a moral education. That legacy also makes Confucian moral philosophy political in function. After all, the political semantic domain of the title, Zi (*tzu*), being the title of Confucius (Kong Zi [Kung-tzu] is his name in Chinese), reflects an assumption of Chinese reality. The title Zi was first used to refer to royal princes and kinsmen, then to wise counselors of feudal lords, and finally to philosopher-teachers.

The significant point in Confucius' yearning for the restoration of peace and order in the world is his understanding of the heavenly mandate, i.e., the calling that is from the world beyond for him to fulfill, and the mission of saving the society in which he lives. Throughout Chinese history, few people had as clear a calling as Confucius. In *Historical Records* (*Shi Ji*), there is an account of Confucius as the ideal ruler:

> Three months after Confucius had assumed the government of the state (*Lu*), even cattle dealers no longer cheated others by demanding excessive prices; men and women walked along different sides of the road, and objects lost on the streets were no longer picked up. (*Shi Ji* 47:667b)[18]

Confucius did have the ambition to be a political leader, but the hope was unfulfilled.[19] Confucius' despair is recorded in the Analects 9:9: "The phoenix does not come; the river gives forth no chart. It is all over with me!" The phoenix is a mythical creature belonging to the heavenly realm that sends forth

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16 Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness*, pp.22-23.

17 Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness*, p.22.

18 Julia Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp.211-212.

19 This interpretation regarding Confucius is popular in the Tang (618-906) and Qing dynasties (1644-1912), see Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, p.207, n. 7.

messages concerning the arrival of sage-king Shun. The river chart is a gift given to Zhou king during his enthronement, the chart maps out his territory indicative of a peaceful reign.[20]

Political Morality in Confucian Datong

Third, the intended purpose of heaven for Chinese society in Confucian thought focuses on political morality as a consummation of salvation of that society. Of course, the concern of salvation is the main theme of Paul's letter to the Romans; salvation, as related to the righteousness of God, is about creating the people of God who will live a life of holiness in Christ.

The assumption of this political morality is that the Confucian *Datong* vision as a trans-historical reality can be seen in Confucius' teaching of Tian Dao ("the Heavenly Principle" or "the Heavenly Way"). How did the uncrowned king reign and bring about *telos* in Chinese history? He reigns by being and teaching other to become *ren ren* (persons who love). Thus Confucianism emphasizes moral education rather than warrior nobility, political virtues rather than political prosperity, relational harmony rather than kingship kinship. Confucius believed that *Tian* not only gave birth to the people but continued to regenerate and sustain them. Thus, in terms of morality, Confucius regarded *ren* (love) as the fountainhead of all virtues. He exhorted all to actualize *Tian-ming* (mandate of Heaven) by committing themselves to *ren,* because *ren* is what makes human beings human. In terms of political morality, he emphasizes that the sage-rulers are to be virtuous, providing an example for others to follow, and thus bringing about the renewal of the society (*Great Learning* [*Da Xue*] 1:1). The *Doctrine of Mean* (*Zhong Yong*) likewise states that if a sage-ruler knows how to cultivate his own character, he will know how to govern other people (20:11).

As a result of his vision of political morality, Confucius did not popularize a patriarchal lineage of royal succession. Rather, he advocates virtues of *ren* and righteousness. He mentioned that Yao and Shun were regarded as virtuous rulers who left their thrones not to their sons but to the best qualified candidates. Analects 4:13 recounts, "If [a king] is able to govern his state with the disposition of modesty and propriety (*li-rang*, i.e., "yielding") [possibly includeing the idea of readiness to give it up], what trouble can he have? If he is unable to govern the state with modesty and propriety, what has he to do with the rites and propriety?"[21]

In imagining the existence of goodness and beauty in a perfect society, Confucius' *Datong* vision emphasized music, propriety, character, and harmonious interpersonal relationships, because the Zhou dynasty is the prototype of

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20 Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, p.211. The Analects translation is that of Ching.

21 Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, p.210.

Datong. Confucius believed that beauty and goodness were the foundations or the source of music and propriety, and that the potential for beauty and goodness resided in every person.

Mencius (372-289 BCE) is the first person who fully developed Confucius' ethical and social philosophy in the political realm. His sense of a vocation to save the world is also clear, even though the time cycle for him has not come. He explained his commitment based on two reasons: First, he believed in the goodness of human nature, that every human being should have a messianic consciousness. His democratization of an inherently good human nature motivated the conscience of the people toward social responsibility. Second, he believed in the "quasi-mystical notion of a salubrious force pulsating through all beings"[22] (*hao-ran zhi qi*), i.e., because "heaven does not speak... people are the only court of appeal and decide whether or not a dynasty has the 'mandate'. A new ruler must be 'introduced' to both heaven and the people before he can be certain of his office. It is therefore a basic premise of every ideal government that the prince owns everything in an 'equal manner' with the people."[23] His second point is also a democratic one, but of the mandate of heaven. Such a view suggests that the validity of heavenly mandate needs approval from the people.

Cyclical Movement of History

Fourth, the Confucian democratization of messianic consciousness of all people for their society works and continues in the cyclical movement of history. The typical Chinese cyclical worldview works well with the periodization view of history. Since the view of historical time is cyclical, the periodization cannot be progress but instead a spiraling alternation between order and disorder. Long ago, Mencius said: "Since the appearance of the world of men, a long time has indeed elapsed, consisting of alternating order and disorder" (3B, 9). Not in keeping with that worldview, Mencius (2B, 13) delineates cycles of history in the following dispensations: (1) from the sage-kings Yao and Shun and Yu (24th-23rd centuries BCE) to the founder of Shang, (2) from the founder of Shang to the founders of Zhou (23rd-12th century BCE), and (3) from the founders of Zhou to Confucius (12th century to 551 BCE). The alternating sequence of old-new periods is attempted in the Qin dynasty, and the old-new-old pattern becomes evident in the earlier Han dynasty (206 BCE-6 CE).[24]

Given this Chinese cyclical/ spiraling understanding of history, national salvation involves the rule of law and the propriety of virtuous rulers and

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22 Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness*, p.49.
23 Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness*, p.23. See Mencius 5A, 5. Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 2, pp.354-357. Translation of the Mencius is that of Bauer.
24 See Fung Yu-lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Derk Bodde trans. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), p.160. Cf. *Shi Ji*, Chap 74.

democratized rule of virtue by all self-perceived educated Confucianists. As such, sage (philosopher) and ruler are inseparable, i.e., crowned kings have to be virtuous and virtuous persons (*ren ren*) can be uncrowned kings.

A popular Confucianist understanding of political messianism in China is that in a five-hundred-year cycle there would supposedly be a ruler vested with the heavenly mandate to reign over China. Bauer gives examples of messianic consciousness in Chinese history, and not all these figures are strictly political rulers. The first is the duke of Zhou (who died in 1105 BCE according to traditional chronology); next is Confucius (551-479 BCE); then the historian Sima Qian (Ssu-ma Ch'ien, ca. 145-90 BCE); the illegal emperor Wang Mang (45 BCE -23 CE); and the philosopher-emperor Yuandi (508-555) of the Liang dynasty.[25] Bauer notes,

> Curiously enough, men who did not live during these periods of renewal also believed that this messianic idea applied to them, particularly Mencius. He is the first to explicitly discuss this five-hundred-year rule (Mencius 2B, 13 and 7B, 38).[26]

This Confucian messianic mandate of saving the world lies in the consciousness of the political commitment of his moral philosophy. Confucian moral philosophy serves its political purpose of bringing about peace in the world through the process of self-cultivation, family harmony, and nation governing.

The Narrative of Christological Predestination for "Jews and Gentiles" in Romans 8

Turning to Romans, we note the thesis of Romans 8:28-30 to be a discussion of the eschatological community of sonship created by the Spirit. Perhaps, the Confucian emphasis on the mandate of heaven fulfilled in the ethical life of a community has guided the way I read Romans 8. From my reading I understand that the ethical life force saves a community as it forms harmony in a world of suffering and moral deterioration.

Leaving aside the difference between *recovering* history (alternating cyclical view of history) and *looking forward* to the future (eschatological view of history), the Confucian vision of *Datong* is similar to the ideal presented in Romans 8:18-30, which spells out the salvific hope (Rom 8:20, 24-25) or future glory (Rom 8:17, 18, 21, 23, 30; cf. 1:23) of all God's people (Jews and Gentiles) together with creation in the context of present suffering (8:17, 18-23, 26). Paul encourages the audience to hope as the children of God (Rom 8:18-30).[27] Paul

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25 Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness*, pp.429-430, n. 44.

26 Bauer, *China and the Search for Happiness*, pp.429-430, n. 44. *The Chinese Classics*, see Legge trans., vol. 2, pp.232, 501-502.

27 Robert Jewett, *Basic Bible Commentary-Romans* (Nashville: Graded, 1984), p.98.

assures the community of faith that human weakness is overcome by the intercession of the Spirit and the loving purpose of God.

Focusing on Romans 8:28-30, we note a few key insights of Paul, which may be similar or different from the teachings of Confucius:

*Sovereignty of God (*Theos*) and Transcendence of Heaven (*Tian*)*
First, in the context of an imperfect world, the sovereignty of God (*Theos*) speaks of the *comprehensiveness* of God's purpose in creation; this is similar to the *macro* vision of Confucius' political ethics and its grounding of ethics in the transcendental *Tian* (heaven). The point of God's comprehensive purpose will extend Paul's understanding of predestination in a cosmic dimension later (vv. 29-30), and there, the language of predestination is set in the context of encouragement and not judgment. Here (v. 28), Paul argues that "all things work together for good for 'those who love God,'[28] who are called to his purpose" (8:28).[29] "All" (*panta*) includes suffering, sin, weaknesses, adversity, or bearing of the cross.[30] "Works together" (*sunergeô*) means assist or profit towards benefit.[31] Not all things serve the comfort of the people of God, but all things work together to their salvation. God does not cause everything but God uses every event, good or bad, towards an eventual greater good. *Eis agathon* is goodness realized eschatologically, goodness being understood as the *telos* of God's creation.[32] Nothing will be meaningless and stay outside God's purpose (eschatologically; cf. Rom 14:16). Cranfield summarizes the point well:

> We understand the first part of the verse, then, to mean that nothing can really harm – that is, harm in the deepest sense of the word – those who really love God, but that all things which may happen to them, including such grievous things as are mentioned in verse 35, must serve to help them on their way to salvation, confirming their faith and drawing

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28 "Those who love God" is the common designation in the OT of God's elect, the Jews (see Exo 20:6; Deut 5:10); this phrase is now used here to refer to Christians, Jewish or Gentile alike. See C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans,* vol. 1, 6th ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975-1979), p.424 on "those who love God" as a designation of Jewish piety.

29 C. E. B. Cranfield, "Romans 8:28", *Scottish Journal of Theology* 19 (1966), p.206.

30 On "*panta*" (not *Theos*) as subject, see discussion in J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1988), p.481; Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary* (New York: Doubleday, 1993), p.523; Brendan Byrne, *Romans* (Collegeville: Liturgical, 1996), pp.271-272.

31 Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, F. Wilbur Gingrich and F. W. Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature* [*BAGD*] (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979), p.795.

32 Or as Dunn puts it, "the temporal purpose... of moving history and through history to its intended end." See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8, Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1988), p.482.

them closer to their Master, Jesus Christ. But the reason why all things thus assist believers is, of course, that God is in control of all things.[33]

All things do not work together for good *on their own*, but God's sovereign act is the under-girding force behind God's absolute control and omniscient (all knowing) power over everything.[34] God is able to bring good out of all things, and that is the Christian hope.[35] Paul gives the faithful assurance that the future belongs to the children of God. This assurance strengthens the people of God as they struggle with sin and suffering. The future is secured because it is grounded in the eternity of God. The eternal counsel/purpose of God in creation becomes the very purpose of humanity.

*Eschatological Adam (Christ) and Ideal Community (*Datong*)*
Second, for Paul cosmic salvation is inextricably connected with God's *primordial goal of transforming the fallen world* by means of the eschatological Adam. Analogously, the mandate of heaven (*tian-ming*) is to transform the morally corrupted world for Confucius. I understand the eschatological Adam as the realization of an ideal community (*Datong*) rather than a salvation by means of an individual. I also understand Romans 8 to mean that the power of God's gospel redeems the *whole* creation. The power also revealed the righteousness of God (Heaven). The ultimate purpose of God's righteousness is to restore all to wholeness and to bring the totality of creation back into loving relationship with God.

Paul begins with God's love for believers through God's sovereign election and calling, and ends with God's divine purpose of our glorification through Jesus Christ (see the five aorist verbs in vv. 28-30). This is a narrative that speaks of the Oneness of God who is impartial and whose righteousness revealed in Jesus Christ is based on grace. Even though the first point (on the narrative of Christ for the cosmic salvation) may look hegemonic to (post)modern readers, the second point (on grace and faith) qualifies the first point by grounding the narrative within the socio-political context. I believe the Confucian moral critique of political ideology has given me a helpful lens to read Romans 8 with a political perspective also.

Against the Roman ideology of violence because of polytheistic faith, Paul's narrative lifts up the Christ event as just/fair because it is based on a principle of "from faithfulness [of Christ] to faithfulness [of Christians]" (1:18). Romans 8:28-30 seem to underline the hope of cosmic salvation which "characterizes the life in the Spirit to be the life of those who are righteous by

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33 Cranfield, "Romans 8:28", p.212.
34 Douglas J. Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp.527-58.
35 John A. Zeisler, *Paul's Letter to the Romans* (London: SCM, 1989), p.225.

faith."[36] Against the competitiveness and boasting of house-churches in Rome (e.g. Jewish and Gentile Christians) – a manifestation of similar Roman ideology of boasting – Paul appeals to the narrative of Christ as the unifying force for them to welcome one another based on grace.

But why isn't the narrative of Christ as articulated by Paul an imperialistic one? The narrative of Christ has its universal effect ("Jews and Gentiles"), but it does not seek to "conquer", it seeks to include all by means of grace. Though it is *one* narrative for all, it does not have to be seen as imperialistic. Having *multiple* narratives cannot guarantee that they will not conquer each other; in fact, conflicts among these narratives will more likely result in violence if divine grace is not their driving force. The narrative of Christ is one championed by the grace of God. If there is one narrative of the eschatological Adam (ideal community, also Christ) sent by the Creator to be the way for co-existence of many, then that plan of salvation deserves consideration by all. The question is: who is that eschatological Adam? What is the plan of salvation?

"Pre-horizoning" of Christ and Predestination of Individuals

Third, in light of the moral freedom I find in Confucian political ethics, I see the same moral freedom in the language of predestination in Romans 8. I know it is possible to see the predestination language as a doctrine that separates believers from unbelievers (sheep and goats), but I want to suggest another plausible reading. That is, the predestination language is a theological understanding of God's cosmic salvation through *pre-horizoning* of Christ as the ultimate purpose. This is a comprehensive narrative for humanity, including the vision of Confucius and others, while at the same time differentiating these narratives for the sake of enriching the whole.

The problem is that, the language of "predestination" or "pre-horizoning" looks parochial to many. Grayston argues that, "The old word is 'predestined' (as in NRSV) – which means that the destination is chosen, but not the names or the number of those who will reach it. The Greek word might be Englished as 'pre-horizoned' – meaning that God has marked out the limits but not those who stray beyond them."[37] Predestination means to mark out a boundary or horizon beforehand to serve as a goal or purpose. The verbs *protithêmi* and *proorizô* and the noun *prothesis* refer to planning, purposing, or resolving to do something. All of these terms convey the idea of initiating an action.[38] The program of God's salvation for humanity is set in motion as God marks out the purpose,

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36 Cranfield, "Romans 8:28", p.204.
37 Kenneth Grayston, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Peterborough: Epworth, 1997), p.75.
38 See Paul Jacobs and Hartmut Krienke, "Foreknowledge, Providence, Predestination," in Colin Brown ed., *New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* [*NIDNTT*], vol.1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975-1978), pp.695-696. Also *BAGD*, p.706, cf. Eph 1:11, 3:11, 2 Tim 1:9.

without predetermining every action in the process. In other words, it is plausible to read Romans 8 as describing the beginning in which God marks out a destiny for humanity – such as the Confucian understanding that to be human is to actualize virtue in a community. That *telos* (goal) or destiny, in this biblical text, is Christ who is God's paradigmatic Savior of the world (righteousness of God) through faith by grace. The paradigm is qualified by "through faith by grace". Therefore, what is predestined is primarily not believers or unbelievers but Christ, the purposeful creation of God by means of God's ideal community characterized by faith and grace.

"Firstborn" and Virtues of Faithfulness and Love

Fourth, analogous to the ethical salvation of Confucian society via virtue and becoming *ren ren* (loving persons)*,* Christ was portrayed in Romans 8 as the first born (*prototokôs*) and the defining horizon. Humanity will be formed (*proorizô*) and become sharers (*summorphous*; cf. Phil 3:21)[39] in the image (*eikôn*) of God's Son.[40]

"Firstborn" speaks likewise of the resurrection life of the new age; Christ as the first born "implies his preeminence but also his sharing of sonship with numerous Christians".[41] The image of the "firstborn" as used in the Old Testament refers to one who receives the birthright, thus one who is the heir having a position of preeminence, prestige and power. The term is also used often in the Old Testament to refer to Israel as God's chosen, beloved one, instrumental in God's salvific plan.

"Firstborn" is also a messianic term, an epithet for the Davidic King (cf. LXX Psalm 88 [89 in English Bible]:28) who will restore Israel.[42] When this messianic term is used for Jesus, its nationalistic (David) and ethnic (Israel) connotations seem to be overturned into an *inclusive paradigm* of salvation for all who believe. Jesus trusted in God and was faithfully obedient in suffering and now is the pioneer of salvation for all who respond in love to God's call to believe and follow in Christ's footsteps.[43] The narrative of Christ is for the Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, male and female, and all social classes. The Christological means of salvation has its goal that all will be made in the likeness of the Son, set right with God and glorified at the parousia.

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39 In Phil 3:21, the word is used to speak of the transforming body of lowliness to that of glory; thus, the resurrected humanity from the dead is emphasized.

40 *Eikôn* in Romans 8:11, 23 speaks of the resurrection body of God's Son despite death, i.e., the end (resurrection) determines the destiny (life) of humanity. Note the similar theology as expressed in Ephesians and Colossians: God seeks to transform the whole Cosmos through Christ as the "first born" of this new creation.

41 Fitzymer, *Romans*, p.525.

42 See Byrne, *Romans*, p.273. Cf. Heb 1:6; Rev 1:5.

43 Steve Mosher, *A Study in Romans* (Scottdale: Herald, 1996), p.9.

Foreknowledge of God and His Purposeful Acts
Fifth, *predestination* is often understood as predetermination of the individual decision process. It can also mean the sovereign purpose of God's salvation for creation—sovereign in final outcome and sovereign in full control of the process. After all, Heaven (*Tian*) is sovereign, transcendent and all knowing.

Foreknowledge can mean to choose individuals beforehand for a special relationship, such as foreknowledge of the faithful response of selected individuals.[44] But my reading understands foreknowledge to be foresight concerning the purposeful act of salvation in which believers will respond faithfully. Indeed, because of the sovereignty of God and eschatological view of history, foreknowledge can be understood as the Hebraic understanding of "knowing" with affection and predilection.[45]

God has foreknowledge, God knows all, all the time, in all time. God knows the sweep of history in a moment – "line" of history in a "dot". Yet when God creates, God is involved in history, God unfolds the moment into a spiral movement of history – recovering eschatological telos *and* re-imagining the golden age. What God knows and does in eternity appears to us as prior action. Throughout the unfolding of God's plan, "light falls from the divine past and the divine future".[46] In Romans 8:28-30, the Christian's hope rests in God who has been there for the people of God even before God's call was known.[47] Nothing is accidental in God's plan, nothing is sheer luck or chance, and everything has a purpose in God's creation.

One ought to be careful not to read the language of predestination as a divine prediction and a closed system of static fate; otherwise, the narrative of Christ could be comprehensive and yet rigid, or could be specific and yet exclusive. This language of predestination and foreknowledge is a reassuring one for those in suffering, weakness, and in need of grace. And foreknowledge of God should be understood in the eschatological view of history, i.e., God intends *all* humanity to have an affectionate relationship with God as children of God.

The Love and the People of God in Christ
Sixth, the Christian hope is knowing that, though God foreknew the costs of creating through the suffering and giving of his Son, yet because *God is love* and wills all humankind into loving relationship, God calls his Son(s) into obedience.

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44 *Proginoskô* signifies more than an advance knowledge or precognition, it suggests looking with favor, and is even used of sexual relations. See Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1959), p.394.

45 See Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, p.482; Fitzymer, *Romans*, p.525. See Gen 18:19, Jer 1:5; Hos 13:5; Amos 3:2; Psalm 1:6, 1 Cor 8:3, 13:12; Gal 4:9, 2 Tim 2:19.

46 Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p.244.

47 R. D. Kaylor, *Paul's Covenant Community* (Louisville: John Knox, 1988), p.157.

So God creates. This is similar to the general Chinese understanding that Heaven has empathy and passion (*tian you qing*) for all.

More importantly, the Confucian messianic consciousness helps me to understand the divine mission of believers in-Christ. The "in-Christ" destiny is probably not an election to mere privilege but more a call to responsibility that gives birth to the mission of God's community. Election/calling means being called to a responsibility, assuming an office for duty.[48] Verses 29-30 phrase God's plan in four parallel clauses with the repeated key words "foreknew, predestined, justified", and the climax of God's salvific plan is the connecting verb "glorified".[49] Those who respond to God's call to be in loving relationship with God are justified by the gift of God's grace to be the bearers of God's purpose.[50] The link of justification brings the reader back to the central theme of stressing faithfulness/faith in Romans chapters 1-4.

Paul's conviction of God's plan progressing towards its goal makes him assert that the future glorification of humankind (Adam theology again, cf. Ps 8:5; Heb 2:8-10) is a completed action (gloried in the *aorist* tense) as far as God's sovereign plan of salvation is concerned. In this way Paul seems to assure Christians of their hope in the proleptic consummation of God's plan. This is the ultimate confidence Christians can have while living in the present and neither fully glorified nor totally released from the power of death, sin, and the law. Paul encourages them that the Spirit is working at this eschatological age, and God's intention is to bring to glory all who have been justified by faith in Christ. As the redemptive process and unification of all creation of God's plan continues, the readers are assured of being called as divine agents to proclaim the gospel and to transform the world.

Intertextual Reading of Pauline and Confucian Horizoning of Human History

The intertextual reading of the Pauline and the Confucian texts has not been explicit. I want to show how intertextual reading helps us differentiate each text from the other as well as cross borders for creative interpretations.

Intertextual Reading Between Confucius and Paul

I am aware of the huge differences between Paul and Confucius, Romans and the Analects, but I am challenged to try an intersubjective reading because that is an honest way I can read Romans 8 and Confucian classics as a Chinese-Christian. The intersubjective reading of Romans and Confucianism does not mean that the two cultures and theologies are all similar or the same.

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48 See Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*, pp.103-104; *NIDNTT*, vol. 1, pp.536-543.

49 Moo, *The Epistle to the Romans*, p.530.

50 John A. Zeisler, *Paul's Letter to the Roman's* (London: SCM, 1989), p.227.

Intersubjective reading only means that a Chinese-Christian reader allows his full subjectivity (thus his cultural repertoire) to come in full contact with the subjectivity of the text (thus textual context). It will be shown that the intersubjective reading has allowed the use of language not only to describe but also to recreate meaning of a particular text. For example, Paul's highly theological and Jewish understandings of human beings, sin, Torah, Christ, salvation, are not the same as the humanistic and moral connotation of Confucius' political philosophy. Yet they can be brought to dialogue, and as a result of this dialogue, Paul's Christological lens is colored with the social and moral aspects of ethics and politics, and Confucius' humanistic lens is colored with the theological necessity. Let me summarize my discoveries thus far.

In-Group and Communal Language
1. The intertexuality of the in-group language in Romans 8 and the communal understanding in Confucianism:

Reflecting upon the process of struggle in my reading of Romans and Confucianism, it is fair to say that I take my reading clues from both texts in many respects. Two of the most influential aspects are the proleptic understanding of the in-group language of predestination in Romans 8 and the communal understanding of Confucianism.

Paul is talking about those in Christ already; therefore it is an "in-Christ" language necessitating us to be very cautious, if not prohibiting us, to speak of the final destiny or salvation status of "those who are not in Christ". How do we know they are not in Christ? To speak this message to non-Christians might cause misunderstanding or confusion. It is a language of *posteriori*, in the sense that only when one is in, and only from the perspective of the in-group, can one look forward to the assured state of glory. It is therefore not a language of prediction, as if history is a linear process.

Both Pauline theology and Confucianist ethics have their universal appeal. Unfortunately, the narrative of Christ in Pauline theology has been used in Christian missionary movements to prejudge or condemn the destiny of others and rigidly exclude other narratives that might correct or enhance the narrative of Christ. After all, the purpose of Paul's rhetoric in Romans 8 is to unite Jewish and Gentile Christians and proves the impartiality of God in the salvation of all humanity.

Similar concern of hegemonic violence could be raised regarding Confucianist ethics. Though limited in its cultural ethos, the Confucianist ethic has reigned in Chinese political history to the point where Chinese rulers abuse their power by barring any questions regarding their ethical behaviors, and some Confucianists use ethics to justify their political power to rule over their "inferior". These are distortion and abuses to both Paul's and Confucius' understanding.

The Pauline language of predestination is not an eternal comprehensive decree of God to discriminate between believers and unbelievers. It is, as I interpreted above, a communal understanding of the goal of conforming to the firstborn of creation. In other words, Jesus Christ does not simply represent himself, an individual identity. Rather, Christ, as the "pre-horizon" of God's boundary of salvation, represents the *corporate identity* in which humanity will be called to conform, be transformed, justified, and glorified the Great Harmony (*Datong*) of God's creation. The Son of God has the group identity of sons of God. Paul's theology emphasizes shared sonship. The designations of Jewish and Gentile believers – "those who love God," "saints," "called," "those God foreknew, predestined, justified, gloried" – have the identity of solidarity of *ren ren*.

I know Paul's understandings of theology, Christology, ecclesiology is communal. Yet I must confess that because of my formal training in biblical studies in the West and my enculturation into the assumptions of modernity, I am often tempted to read Paul with an individualistic perspective. Doing a comparative study between Paul and Confucius helps me to overcome my bias.[51] Confucius is helpful to my reading of Paul and vice versa. Confucius understands a human as a social being with personal selfhood. Confucius says, "Virtue does not exist in isolation; there must be neighbors" (Analects 4:25). "In order to establish oneself, one helps others to establish themselves" (Analects 6:28). Confucius' understanding of the socialization process is that one authenticates one's being, not by detaching from the world of human relations, but by making sincere attempts to harmonize one's relationship with others. Similar language is used by Paul to speak of Christians being "pre-horizoned and conformed to the likeness of God's Son" (8:29). The participation in the death and resurrection of Christ in Romans 5-6 speaks of a similar Christian socialization process whereby Christians authenticate their beings by imitating Christ.

Spiritual and Ethical Humanity
2. The intertextuality of the spiritual-ethical humanity in Pauline and and Confucian societies:

The notion that Paul speaks only of theology and Confucius speaks only of humanism is simply not true. They both speak of theological ethics of a particular community, be that in Roman house churches or in ancient China. We have seen that the Confucian understanding of being human is to live out the mandate of heaven, to be *ren ren* ("loving persons"). To be *ren ren* is to be courteous, diligent, loyal, brave, broad-minded, kind (Analects 13:19, 14:5,

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51 See Yeo Khiok-khng, "*Li* and *Jen* (Torah and Spirit) in Romans", *What Has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing? Biblical Interpretation from a Chinese Perspective* (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998), Chap. 6.

17:6)—virtues that are to be actualized in public. To be a *ren ren* is to express and to participate in the holy as a dimension of all truly human existence. Fingarette writes, "Human life in its entirety finally appears as one vast, spontaneous and Holy Rite: the community of man (humanity)."[52] The human is transformed by participation with others in communal ceremony. And that is the mandate of heaven, that all may live in righteousness and orderliness in relation to others as a society of sacredness. Many of these ethical teachings of Confucius are helpful lenses for me to understand the ethical dimension of a spiritual community in Romans.

Thus Paul advocates different factions of the Roman house-churches to "welcome one another in Christ" (15:7) and to "greet one another with a holy kiss" (16:16) despite their differences. People are called into the "fiduciary community" (Confucian language) of sharing intentions, values, and meanings. This fiduciary community of sharable values is the "beloved of God" (Rom 1:7, 9:25) community in Christ to whom the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Roman house-churches belong. The fiduciary community advocated in the Analects does not have the notion that all persons will always finally agree. On the contrary, it is natural that diverse personalities will have differing visions of the Way.[53] Similarly, the "strong" and the "weak" in Romans are not encouraged to be other than themselves as they must hold true to their own "measuring rod of faith". The singularly crucial point for both groups is "the continuous process of symbolic exchange through the sharing of communally cherished values with other selves".[54]

This similar emphasis in Paul and Confucius is presupposed by their social/communal understanding of human nature. In the Analects, for example, the self is a center of relationships rather than the center of an isolatable individual. The self is a dynamic, open organism which actively seeks human community for wholeness of life and is transformed through the work of Christ. In Romans 8, those God foreknows are the Christians, called into conformity to the firstborn, also having a communal identity of God's new creation. The group is prior to individual; therefore Christ is prior to Christian.

Oneness of God and Violent Ideology
3. The intertextuality of Oneness of God (Heaven) in both Confucian and Pauline ideals in the context of violent ideology and polytheism:

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52 Herbert Fingarette, *Confucius: The Secular as Sacred (*New York: Harper and Row, 1972), p.17. Cf. Analects 3:17, 4:5, 6, 8.

53 Cf. Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (New York: State University Press, 1985*)*, p.83.

54 Tu Wei-ming, *Confucian Thought: Selfhood as Creative Transformation* (New York: State University Press, 1985*)*, p.83.

Confucius' preoccupation with political ethics has its "antireligious" tendency (Analects 5:13, 6:22, 7:21, 11:12) because of the violence and manipulation of "gods and ghosts". Confucius is living in an age when superstition dominates peoples' lives, thus his rationalistic tendency is to critique the archaic supernatural beliefs of the past. It is more accurate to describe Confucius as "unreligious rather than irreligious". His wisdom is to advise people to keep an appropriate distance from spirits and earnestly attend to ethical responsibility toward others (Analects 6:20). And Confucius has his own religious life of praying and offering sacrifice (Analects 2:5, 3:13, 17, 7:34). Confucian *Tian* is both the creator and the field of creatures. Confucius thinks *Tian* is awesome and respected by all sages (Analects 16:8), *Tian* has intentions (Analects 9:5, 3:24), and *Tian* possesses understanding (Analects 14:35, 9:12). And more importantly, for Confucius, *Tian* is the source of moral power (Analects 3:24, 7:23, 9:5, 8:19, 9:6,12, 11:9, 14:35). Confucius transfers the *tian-ming* ("Mandate of Heaven") from a highly political claim of the ruling family to a universally appropriated one for all. That is, Confucius seeks to popularize that elitist and political mandate of *tian* so that everyone can cultivate virtues and bring about universal peace and prosperity. As for the rulers, Confucius emphasizes that the sage-rulers are to be virtuous, providing an example for others to follow, and thus bringing about renewal of the society. Confucian ideals discussed here are good reminders to Christians that preoccupation with eschatological hope without attending to ethical responsibility to our neighbors is a weak faith. And religiosity without ethic can bring about violence that is often sanctioned in the name of one's god(s).

For Confucius, the social understanding of being human speaks of the necessity of cultural pluralism but only within the boundary of cultured teaching (*wen, jiao*) – that of *li* (ritual propriety), *yue* (music), and *ren* (love) and other virtues. Confucianism will regard those who do not practice cultured teaching as immature persons (*xiao ren*, literally means "little persons") or barbarians (non-Chinese). Similarly, the Pauline theology of the Oneness of God seems to pose a comprehensive narrative that does not condone polytheism. This is a difficult issue regarding the boundary of cultural and religious pluralism, and I will offer my tentative reflections.

The Oneness of God and the impartiality of God go together, and theologically they serve to respond to an inherent ideology of violence of the dominant Roman Empire. The cultural problem of Romans 8 is the polytheistic ideologies of patriarchy (in familial and societal structures), hierarchy (in institutional power structures), imperialism (in Roman, Herodian and even priestly politics), oppression (between the ruling elite and marginalized peasants), and colonialism (in racial tension and immigration situations), which resulted in violence – socially, politically and religiously.

The Roman ideology of polytheism and conquest is displayed in the splintered nature of Roman house-churches, evident by the various boastings (Rom 4:2, 11:18) of Jews and Gentiles. Paul argues that the will of God for Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome is the righteousness of God. How can the Jew and the Gentile and the many factions within the Roman house churches live in harmony? Based on the Oneness of God (Rom 3:30, 16:27, cf. 5:15-19) of both Jews and Gentiles, Paul's Christology in Romans 8 emphasizes the sovereignty of God in creation; thus the narrative of Christ is evident in Paul's understanding of the salvation of Jews and Gentiles. The sovereign love of God creates by means of Christ's redemption, and the predestined Christ in loving obedience is *the* divine plan of God's creation and redemption of the world. Christ as the eschatological Adam (new humanity) has saved the first Adam (old humanity) from the bondages/slavery of sin, death, and cultural boastings.

Jews and Gentiles alike are addressed using the same terms (saints, those who love God, firstborn, called, predestined), so the promise, inheritance, and privilege of Israel are opened to all. The Adam Christology (Christ as the image of God) is inclusive of all because all shared the sonship with Christ. The Pauline answer is the Oneness of God, the impartiality of God, the righteousness of God by means of grace.

This question of co-existence for humanity was also Confucius' concern in the splintered society of his days. Confucius answers the problem of ethnic conflict, cultural deterioration, and moral confusion: "The person of humanity is naturally at ease with humanity" (Analects 4:2). In a Chinese-Christian terminology, the answer is that God's Spirit (Rom 8:1) wills the faithful (all God's people) to become fully human in loving relationship with others (*ren ren*), and the firstborn (Christ) makes it clear and possible for humanity to co-exist based on the principle of grace and faith (trust) rather than on cultural boasting. The power of God's gospel is that it grants righteousness to all who place their faith (trust) in Heaven. That faith and grace is concretely expressed in our "faith" (trust) and "grace" towards one another.[55]

The conviction of Paul's Christological predestination as the only plan of God's salvation could be exclusive and even hegemonic. Yet we see that the subversion to and reversal of power overcomes the problem of exclusivism similar to the Confucian ethic of virtue (*de*) as the prerequisite for a person to become a ruler. If Christological predestination explains God's interruption in human history (as seen in the death and resurrection of the Christ-event), then the Christ-event allows us to discern the meaning and intended goal of history. Thus an *analogical or metaphorical understanding* of how God is at work in Christ becomes a key hermeneutical tool. For God's work is not limited by

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55 A. R. C. Leaney, "Conformed to the Image of His Son (Rom. VIII. 29)", *New Testament Studies* 10 (1964), p.479.

culture and language, but God's Spirit transcends culture and language while working in them. In other words, just as I see Confucian ethics being practiced in other societies, I also see how God-in-Christ is at work in other cultures and traditions.

God's involvement in history through his firstborn of creation is the narrative and *mythos* of deciphering meaning out of chaos, redemption out of violence in all societies. No matter how great the magnitude of violence and destruction is in the final conflict of human history, the *ren ren* (full humanity in loving others) and the Crucified God in his death as the firstborn do not accept the "will to power" of any ideology: not the violence of the Pax Romana, the murderous jealousy of Cain (Gen 4), or the Lion of Judah (Revelation). The *ren ren* will rule by means of virtue and not physical force. Confucius' political ethics of de (virtue) has the drawing force of virtuous rulers guiding the nation by means of his moral excellence, without exerting physical force. Analects 2:1 writes that "those who rule with de (moral force) are like the North Star that seated in its place yet surrounded by multitude of stars".

The Crucified God incarnated as the Lamb of God does not accept tragedy, but establishes redemptive meaning. The resurrection confirms Abel's and Christ's innocence. The voice of Abel, the "son of Man" was raised up to heaven. Confucius may die without realizing his aspiration of finding a virtuous ruler, yet his political ethic reigns in China for two millennia. Confucian de (virtue) can be self-sacrificing, and the Cross is a "violent" event, but they do not condone violence. The end of the crucified Christ was the beginning of new life. "Christian eschatology follows this Christological pattern in all its personal, historical and cosmic dimensions: *in the end is the beginning.*"[56] There is hope amid all historical ambiguities because God's future transcends history and God is the actor in history.

Confucius' anthropological and moral ideals are grounded, and thus legitimized, in the patriarchal kinship and ancestral cult. Thus, we see on one hand, the moral vitality and cultural inclusiveness of Confucian vision of national salvation; on the other hand, we see the rigidity of propriety and the violence of pre-determinism. It is not a surprise to see that Confucius' philosophy is a political and moral one, and that he is worshipped as an "uncrowned king" and the greatest teacher. The irony is that at times his moral philosophy seems unable to transform his assumptions regarding the political reality and rigidity of tradition; thus the result is that many are taught to observe their places and to maintain proprieties within the given culture.

The Confucian vision of national salvation for China is a noble one, and his vision of retrieving the golden age in the Shang and Zhou dynasty can supplement Paul's eschatological emphasis. Unfortunately, Confucian retrieval of the

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56 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ: Christology in Messianic Dimensions,* M. Kohl trans. (London: SCM, 1990), p.x.

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golden age was often taken in a linear view of history. In the next point I will discuss the Confucian view of time and that of Paul.

Paul's and Confucius' Understanding of Times
4. The intertextuality between Paul's and Confucius' understandings of time: Confucius' vision of the ideal regent is of an ethical but not a religious person, largely because of his preoccupation with the society, and because of the changes in worldview from the Shang to the Zhou: the new worldview emphasizes the here and now – a helpful critique of the preoccupation of the future in Paul's eschatological theology. The Chinese concept of time is cyclical, or rather, a spiral of two interlocking sets of "heavenly stems" and the "earthly branches".[57] Confucianists view history as moving in a spiral motion, unlike the linear view of Paul. Confucianists have a dynamic understanding of time, unlike the modern, scientific view that time is merely a linear progression of past, present, and future – the past is taken to mean the passing of the present, future is the prolongation of the present, and the present is the only possession one has. Chinese seldom talk about absolute time but time associated with events – dynamic time.[58] In the Confucian process of production and reproduction, time never comes to an end or repeats itself.

The linear view of time is too static; the cyclical view is too closed a system. A synthesis of both views can be done if we understand the biblical understanding of past, present, and future as not tenses but modes of existence and aspects of action.[59] In other words, God's narrative in human historical time is what predestined Christology is about. The present is our spontaneous and continuous experience of the Holy despite our current historical ambiguity and despair. The past refers to realized acts of God in history. The future is the coming (advent or parousia) of the radically new creation of God assured by the past and to be realized in the present. The manifest destiny of history through Christ is God's new creation towards wholeness. The dynamic understanding of God's working in history is not simply a linear or a cyclical but a spiral process. Redemptive event can happen at *kairotic* (opportune, meaningful time), thus repeating moments.

The traditional Confucian worldview believes in the constant flux of the universe following a "predictable pattern consisting either of eternal oscillation between two poles or of cyclical movement within a closed circuit. [So]... all

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57 Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, p.210. The English translation of Mencius is Ching's.
58 See Thomé H. Fang, "The World and the Individual in Chinese Metaphysics", in Charles A. Moore ed., *The Chinese Mind: Essentials of Chinese Philosophy and Culture* (Honolulu: University Press of Hawaii, 1967), p.240.
59 On especially the differentiation of future and advent as well as novum, see Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ*, pp.22-28.

movement serves in the end only to bring the process back to its starting point."[60] However, in Paul's view, historical events are dated backward to the beginning of Creation, and the end of history is defined by Christ.

In Chinese history events are dated cyclically every sixty years or from the rise of new emperors. And the dominant view in Chinese history is to look for a golden age in the past – in other words, the circle of degeneration characterizes Chinese history – and it is the circle of conscious cultivation of selves in harmony with society or cosmos that will bring back the golden age.

For 5000 years or so, Confucius has reigned without a crown, yet his moral philosophy is not subversive enough within the political culture to transform Chinese society seeking the recovery of the golden age. Looking backward without looking forward does not allow him to see the possibilities and hopes of the future. The conservatism of looking to the past will provide some guidance, but creativity in re-appropriating the past could bring about freedom and hope as he would look to the future for openness and direction. Yao and Shun are exemplary rulers, but only within the historical contexts and problems. The notion of an uncrowned king may liberate the idea that kingship is not lineage and all can become kings, since education and wisdom are not limited to or by an elitist few. Yet, the question is whether the Confucian ideal of a philosopher-sage becoming a king is a philosophical legitimization of the old kingship, or a replacement of the old using a new paradigm of kingship.

Conclusion

I used to think Confucius and Paul were incommensurable (that probably is still true if an intertextual reading is not used), but a cross-cultural reading of the Pauline text and the Confucian texts has helped me understand that their differences can complement each other. Confucius' political context is a helpful lens for me to reread the political power of Paul's gospel mission – an ecclesial space that will transform and replace the larger political space. Confucius' ethical insights have led me to observe the communal problems faced in Romans with regards to group behavior and identity. Paul's theology of Christ clarifies the personal and political salvation of the Chinese. Paul's cross-cultural sensitivity with Jewish and Gentile Christians helps me overcome the possible ethnocentrism of working with mono-cultural texts such as that of the Analects, the Mencius, and Romans. Lastly, Paul's eschatological definition of the goal (the end) of history from the future supplements my Confucianist retrieval reading of history from the past golden age. The openness of the future will surpass the past, the New Jerusalem will transcend the Garden of Eden, but eschatology does not delete the golden age (e.g., *Datong*), just as future does not discount history. My Chinese-Christian worldview now has stretched to include

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60 Derk Bodde, *Essays on Chinese Civilization* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981), p.239.

past, present, and future in the full spectrum of dynamic time. Despite the recurring or spiral movement of dynamic time, it has a forward thrust towards the creation of God's people based on the incarnation of faith and grace. The virtue of Christ and Christians is faithfulness and love and hope for the salvation of humanity and the whole cosmos.

Reflection on Enlightenment:
A Proposal of the Focus of Sino-Christian Theology

LIN Hong-hsin

"Enlightenment" is a "term for the major intellectual and cultural movement of the 18th century, characterized by a pronounced faith in the power of human knowledge to solve basic problems of existence".[1] Most scholars agree that the beginning of the Enlightenment could be traced back to 1680, but whether it concluded in 1789 with the beginning of the French Revolution or passed through the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods till 1815 or even later than 1815 was still debatable.[2] One thing is for sure that the period of Enlightenment has covered the European area in the 18th century. The term "enlightenment" comes from French "*lumières*". It means illumination and inspiration. In German "*Aufklärung*" means illustration and clarification. In this essay, I will adopt the "Enlightenment" as a historical movement in Europe and "enlightenment" as the goal of the movement which seeks illumination and clarification, but sometimes both are interchangeable.

Kant published "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in Dec 1784, who defined the ideal of the Enlightenment as follows: "Enlightenment is humankind's exit from its self-incurred immaturity".[3] Kant believes that it is possible for mankind to use one's own reason that only depends upon one's own resolution. "*Immaturity* is the inability to make use of one's own understanding without the guidance of another. *Self-incurred* is this inability if its cause lies not in the lack of understanding but rather in the lack of resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another."[4] Through such a definition, Kant appeals to using one's own reason bravely as a motto of the Enlightenment shows, "*Sapere aude*", that is to say, dare to know! However, pursuing enlightenment is absolutely not the monopoly of the Enlightenment. It is legitimate for any age to seek resolution and courage to use reason independently in order to dare to know.

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1 P. H. Reill & E. J. Wilson eds., *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment* (New York: Facts On File, 1996), p.131.

2 P. H. Reill & E. J. Wilson eds., *Encyclopedia of the Enlightenment*, p.131.

3 I. Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?", in James Schmidt ed., *What is Enlightenment* (Berkeley: University of California, 1996), p.58.

4 I. Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?", p.58.

Context of Sino-Christian Theology

In the current trend of thought of pursuing enlightenment in the modern China there have been far more enthusiastic propagandists than theorists. That is to say, the Voltairian figures outnumber the Kantian figures. But the Voltairian way of enlightenment, which treats religions as superstitions, is only one possibility among many. It is irrefutable that such a way has dominated the scenario of modern China.

In 1915 Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), one of the three founders of Chinese Communist Party, founded *The Youth Magazine*, which was renamed *New Youth* latter on, and led the movement of New Culture pursuing democracy and science enthusiastically. The movement was very influential. Any critique against feudalism and blindness was welcome everywhere. Independent thinking became a sacred goal. In the first issue of *The Youth Magazine* Chen Duxiu says:

> The superiority of Europe to others lies in the rise of science and the theories of human right as well. It is just like that two wheels are indispensable for a cart. The modern time is moving on day by day. Everything and every event have to resort to the principles of science in order to define their rules. The end is that all thoughts and actions must definitely follow reason and exclude superstition. All ignorance and inappropriate behaviors should be terminated. If our people would like to catch the West and get rid of dark ages and superficial culture, we should emphasize both science and human right.[5]

Chen Duxiu has emphasized both science and human right (democracy) as the indispensable two wheels of a cart by creating a slogan "Mr. D and Mr. S". Science is a synonym for reason here, because resorting to the principles of science is the same as following reason. What has been enthusiastically expected is all ignorance and inappropriate behaviors will be brought to an end. Chen Duxiu's expectation of enlightenment tends to be over optimistic, because the flourishing development of science might mean high technology but not necessarily pervasion of reason.

The Voltairian enlightenment intends to replace Christianity with Deism or Atheism.[6] Religion is dealt with as another name for superstition. Exalting reason is the same as discarding religion. For instance, the then president of Peking University Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) appeals for the substitution of religion with the aesthetic education. He thinks that "the origin of religion is nothing other than the constitution of our own religious functions" and the issue of religion in the West belongs to the past.[7] He tries to internalize religion just

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5   Chen Duxiu, "Jinggao Qingnian" (To the Youth), *Zhongguo Jindai Qimeng Sichao* [Modern Trend of Enlightenment in China] vol. 2, Ding Shouhe ed. (Beijing: Sheke Wenxian, 1999), pp.7-8.

6   Li Feng-ming, *Fuertai* [Voltaire] (Taipei: Dongda,1995), pp.77-123.

7   Cai Yuanpei, "Yi Meiyu Daiti Zongjiao" (Replacing Religion with Aesthetic Education),

like aesthetic feelings because the issue of religion has passed away. But from his time up to now religion stands the long lasting none the less. It is not only that the aesthetic education has not taken the place of religion at all, but also that religions are booming up everywhere in the modern world. The issue of religion does not pass away at all. Moreover, the global growth of Christianity in the 21st century is going to reach her historical peak.[8]

There has been a blank of deep reflection on enlightenment. On the one hand, during the great mass fervor of pursuing "Mr. D and Mr. S" promoted by the New Cultural Movement, Chinese intellectuals tended to oversimplify enlightenment. In the fact, to exit from human's self-incurred immaturity is not as easy as the slogan of "Mr. D and Mr. S" shows. On the other hand, Nietzsche as a severe critic of the Enlightenment and a precursor of the post-modern thinking has aroused the interests of many modern Chinese intellectuals who tended to skip over enlightenment as something out of date. There has been a great amount of literature about Nietzsche written by famous Chinese thinkers and scholars who are fascinated by Nietzsche.[9] In an essay I have written:

> The reasons why there have been interests in Nietzsche in the modern China are multiple. There is a need of transforming the loser image for Chinese through the superman philosophy of Nietzsche; the critique of Nietzsche against Christianity is in accordance with the trend against the West which has been represented by Christianity; the "God is dead" trend of thought starting from Nietzsche is in resonance with the Chinese mentality against the Western religion; and there is a longing for a colorful world of the philosophy of arts initiated by Nietzsche.[10]

The neglect of reflection on enlightenment, no matter it is caused by oversimplification or the interests in Nietzsche and the post-modern thinking, implies a lack of solid ground for the construction of enlightenment. Moreover, in this decade pursuing economic growth and modern technology

Zhongguo Jindai Qimeng Sichao [Modern Trend of Enlightenment in China] vol. 2, p.303.

8　Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002).

9　Cheng Fang ed., *Wo Kan Nicai – Zhongguo Xuezhe Jun Nicai 1949 Nian Qian* [I See Nietzsche: Chinese scholars on Nietzsche before 1949] (Nanjing: Nanjing University, 2000); Gao Yuanbao ed., *Nicai zai Zhongguo* [Nietzsche in China] (Shanghai: Sanlian, 2001); Jin Huimin and Xue Xiaoyuan eds., *Pingshuo Chaoren: Nicai zai Zhongguo de Bainian Jiedu* [Comments on Superman—The Interpretation of Nietzsche in China Since 100 Years] (Beijing: Sheke Wenxian, 2001); Cheng Fang, *Nicai zai Zhongguo* [Nietzsche in China] (Nanjng: Nanjing,1993) is the first study on the history of Chinese reception of Nietzsche in the 20th century.

10　Lin Hong-Hsin, "Nicai de Yongheng Huigui zhongmoguan zhi Pingshu" (In Dialogue with Nietzsche's Eschatological View of the Eternal Recurrence), *Logos and Pneuma* 17 (2002), p.75.

have rapidly transformed China from a pre-modern society into a modern society which is moving on to the post-modern scene. If the reflection on enlightenment is still in short, there will be a terrible blank for the ground of a modern society. The result is that the basic structure of such a changing society will be unstable.

While we turn back to those who are interested in enlightenment, it is noteworthy that those who pursue enlightenment superficially could bring forth another disaster. It is not unusual to see that an enlightener turns out to be an anti-enlightener very fast. Those who pursue enlightenment need to reflect on enlightenment in depth in order to prevent from becoming an obstacle of enlightenment. We must say that the superficial enlightenment is the enemy of Chinese enlightenment just like the feudal tradition. In this essay, we will first explore "irony of enlightenment" and "regression of enlightenment" in order to deepen the understanding of enlightenment and refrain from repeating the same mistake. And then we will propose Sino-Christian theology to focus on "enlightenment". Pursuing enlightenment blindly in a way of ignoring religion will be trapped into anti-enlightenment. On the contrary, with the reflection on enlightenment offered by religious reference may help promoting enlightenment in a healthy way.

Irony of Enlightenment

American historian Carl L. Becker (1873-1945) published his serial lectures in1932 as *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*.[11] The subject of this book is very startling as he maintains: "And yet I think the *Philosophes* (philosophers) were nearer to the Medieval ages, less emancipated from the preconceptions of medieval Christian thought, than they quite realized or we have commonly supposed."[12] The reason is that, "passionate faith and an expert rationalism are apt to be united".[13] While adopting reason in a very enthusiastic way, it is more like a faith rather than rationalism. The problem is that those who claim to be rational and are opposed against faith in an enthusiastically way are not aware of that they are constructing another faith by destroying the old simultaneously. In his words: "But, if we examine the foundations of their faith, we find that at every turn the *Philosophes* betray their debt to medieval thought without being aware of it."[14]

The main idea of Augustine's *The City of God* has been adopted as the title of the book. Like the city of God, heavenly city is the perfection of all beautiful ideals and wishes. Ironically, the *Philosophes* of 18th century are very rational

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11 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1932).

12 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.29.

13 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.8.

14 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.30.

and objective in their outlooks, yet in the fact they are constructing their own heavenly city in a very irrational and subjective way.

Old Men in New Clothes

In the general perception, the 18th century is a rational age which has kept distance from the middle ages which emphasize the traditional authority and are filled with superstitions. The *Philosophes* are thinkers of this rational age of enlightenment. They are supposed to be the model of independent thinking with reason. But Becker questions that whether they are actually the medieval old men only dressing in the new clothes of enlightenment.

According to the observation of Becker, what really decisive for ways of thinking are not reasoning and logic, but rather, the "climate of opinion" which he has adopted from Whitehead.[15] The "climate of opinion" of the 18th century as the trend of thinking drove the Philosophers to pursue to be rational very enthusiastically. Ironically, the end of that age is the irrational and aimless destruction of Citizen Robespierre during the French Revolution. "We can watch this enthusiasm, this passion for liberty and justice, for truth and humanity, rise and sire throughout the century until it becomes a delirium."[16]

Becker thinks that it comes close to the truth by saying that the Philosophers of 18th century have developed their own beliefs rather than put heavy weight on reason. One of theirs beliefs is the worship of nature and natural law.[17] They have adopted the scientific discoveries of the 17th century in order to set up the foundation of their own belief.[18] They believe that nature functions precisely like a machine and natural law has taken the place of medieval God. Human beings should live with nature harmoniously just like that in the medieval times human beings seek to live together with God harmoniously.[19] Since both human and nature are created by God and human beings are a part of nature, the human thinking and behaviors should be in harmony with the rules of nature.

But while facing the difficulty that human customs are not always in harmony with the rules of nature, those rational Philosophers turns out to be irrational by denying any disharmony. "No doubt the difficulty could be avoided by declaring that there was no disharmony."[20] In fact, it is impossible that any difficulty will disappear only by neglecting it. The result is the rise of dogmatism.

Academic Works with Predetermined Conclusions

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15 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.5.
16 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.43.
17 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.51.
18 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.57.
19 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, pp.63-64.
20 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.66.

In addition to their worship of nature and natural law, the Philosophers of the 18th century construct "new history" as a view of history with a heavy value judgment. They believe that the modern time is far better than the past, so they want to get away from the past in order to get into the brand new era. Therefore they are not interested at all in the consecutiveness of history, but rather presuppose the common principles of human nature.[21]

Behind their presuppositions there is a deep psychological factor, namely the ambition to pursue the actions which change the world. "The reason is that the eighteenth-century Philosophers were not primarily interested in stabilizing society, but in changing it."[22] What interests them is not the historical fact of the past, but rather the future development from now on.[23] To this end, the so-called "rational" thinkers are not interested in any fact more than effectual profits according to their belief. Now the objective rationality has been put away into the corner.

Ironically, the Philosophers have hold on a set of knowledge, just like those whom they are opposed to, namely the medieval scholastic scholars who hold on the revealed knowledge.[24] Such a way of thinking with preconceptions has enabled them to get what they want from history without respecting historical facts. Their academic works of historical studies are running after predetermined conclusions even at the expense of falsifying history. According to the value system of "new history", right or wrong can be finally judged. "This was the function of the new history: to make that distinction, which abstract reason was unable to make, between the naturally good and the naturally bad, between the customs that were suited and those that were unsuited to man's nature."[25] The point is not to explore the historical past, but rather that how the ground of judgment can be derived from the historical past. If it cannot be found, then it can be made. In this sense, historical studies are nothing other than the service for a religion, namely the religion of enlightenment.

The problem of the Philosophers lies in their self-direction and self-performance. There is no distinction between their wishes and the rules of historical development. They firmly believe in the general principles. They believe that the general human nature is good, and it is very easy to be enlightened and to follow reason and common sense.[26] Under such a mask of the rules of historical development, their wishes look like very rational and objective. Becker sharply points out that the Philosophers are self-deceiving unconsciously. "They do not know that the 'man in general' they are looking

21 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, pp.88-100.
22 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.97.
23 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.98.
24 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.102.
25 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.108.
26 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, pp.103-104.

for is just their own image, that the principles they are bound to find are the very ones they start out with. This is the trick they play on the dead."[27] Becker mocks at their historical studies as a trick play on the past. They project their own images as the ideal images and their own principles as ideal principles.

Religion of Enlightenment
Becker has called the belief of the Philosophers as a religion of enlightenment, or a humanitarian religion of the 18th century, because it is a religion which esteems human beings as the highest standard. However, it looks like more a religion than a philosophy. Such a religion is an earthly religion. "The new heaven had to be located somewhere within the confines of the earthly life, since it was an article of philosophical faith that the end of life is life itself, the perfected temporal life of a man; and in the future, since the temporal life was not yet perfected."[28] According to the religion of enlightenment, the heavenly city is located on the earth. The key words are "temporal life" and "future perfection". Though humankind has not yet been perfected, yet it is its own savior. With the human endeavor and progress, perfection will definitely come.

That the belief of the Philosophers, who accuse religions of superstitions, has been termed as a religion of enlightenment is itself an irony. The eschatological hope of such a religion is that "posterity would complete what the past and the present had begun".[29] The Philosophers believe that the completion of the heavenly city lies in the hands of posterity. Because the coming ages will be far better than now, the Philosophers are capable of overcoming the dissatisfaction of the contemporary state with an optimistic attitude. "It is an optimism projected into the future, sustained by the conviction that what is wrong now will shortly be set right."[30] In other words, the future becomes God. "It replaced God as judge and justifier of those virtuous and enlightened ones who were not of this world."[31] Thus the Philosophers are pilgrims who wait and hope for the future which will justify them as correct and righteous.

From the perspective of the religion of enlightenment, there was similarity between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Becker noted that De Tocqueville had regarded the French Revolution as a "political revolution which functioned in the manner and which took on in some sense the aspect of a religious revolution".[32] It was not only a political revolution, but a political

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27 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, pp.103-104.
28 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.129.
29 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.129.
30 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.137.
31 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, pp.140-141.
32 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.154.

revolution carried out in a religious way. This new religion is a humanitarian religion; its dogmas are liberty and equality as the sacred doctrines of the Revolution; its worship is the civic festival; its saints are the heroes and martyrs of liberty.[33]

Becker applies the observation of De Tocqueville further into the rise of communism. "Like the eighteenth-century religion of humanity, the communist faith was founded on the laws of nature as revealed by science."[34] Corresponding to the faith of the French Revolution, the communist faith claims to be the truth itself. "The new faith, like the old, looks to the past and to the future; like the old, it sees in the past a persistent conflict, and in the future a millennial state."[35] Becker observes the Russian Revolution, which is stepping into the historical stages, in a similar way: its dogmas are the theories of Marx interpreted by Lenin; its festivals are the days of the Revolution; its saints are the heroes and martyrs of the communist faith; its icons are the portraits of Lenin; it pilgrimage is a road to Lenin's tomb.[36]

Repetition of History
In the last paragraph of *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosopher*, Becker sighs with emotion by pessimistically pointing out.

If that should by any chance be what fortune has in store for us, it is not too fanciful to suppose that "posterity", in the year 2032, will be celebrating the events of November, 1917, as a happy turning point in the history of human freedom, much as we celebrate the events of July, 1789. What then, are we to think of all these "great days", these intimations of utopia?[37]

Though a hundred years is a long time, yet human beings always repeat the same story. While reviewing the October Revolution of 1917 in 2032, i.e. one hundred years after publishing *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, it is probably like reviewing the French Revolution of 1789 in 1932. The October Revolution of 1917 could be as great as the French Revolution of 1789, and the former could also be as tragic as the latter. On the one hand, it is a great epoch-making event. On the other hand, it is more or less only a repetition of human history. Notwithstanding that it takes a long time for us to learn something from history, Becker quotes Marcus Aurelius, "the man of forty years, if he has a grain of sense, in view of this sameness has seen all that has been and shall be?"[38] What Becker strongly suggested was, the October Revolution of 1917 would probably be only another repetition of human history and therefore

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33 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.155.
34 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.161.
35 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.162.
36 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.165.
37 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, pp.167-168.
38 Carl L. Becker, *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*, p.168.

unable to lead to perfection. The collapse of Soviet Empire has proved his presentiment.[39]

Summary

Revolutionists become anti-revolutionists. Such an irony of revolution can be proved by many historians. But enlighteners become anti-enlighteners that has been easily ignored. Since the New Cultural Movement which appealed to enlightenment, have we really been enlightened?[40]

Regression of Enlightenment

The Frankfurt School based upon the Institute for Social Research of the University of Frankfurt since 1929 is very unique among those who criticize against the Enlightenment. According to the tradition of Marx they have severely criticized the Enlightenment, yet not without a hope for enlightenment itself. One of the best examples is *Dialectic of Enlightenment* co-authored by M. Horkheimer and Th. W. Adorno, the founder and the second major figure of the Frankfurt School.[41] The opening words of the book point out a paradox: "the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant."[42]

According to the definition of Kant that the Enlightenment seeks to overcome humankind's self-incurred immaturity and use one's own reason independently, it is necessary to get rid of fear which keeps human beings from being masters. Originally the Enlightenment was to get human beings free from fear in order to be masters, but on the contrary the result was a disaster of new enslavement caused by technology. From liberation into enslavement is itself a paradox. Horkheimer and Adorno claim that the Enlightenment has not succeeded yet.

Self-destruction

It states in the introduction: "It turned out, in fact, that we had set ourselves nothing less than the discovery of why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism." [43] To the surprise of most people, the Enlightenment does not bring into civilized human condition,

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39 The former President of Soviet Union Gorbachev announced his resignation on Dec 25, 1991. His power was taken over by Yeltsin as Russia's first post-Soviet president, and then Soviet Union as a sovereign state was terminated as well.

40 Lin Hong-Hsin, "Are we really enlightened?", *ISCS Newsletter*, 2004/2.

41 Horkheimer & Th. W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (New York: Continuum, 1990). See also the original German edition: Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, *Dialektik der Aufklaerung.Philosophische Fragmente* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch, 1971).

42 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.3.

43 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.xi.

but rather retreat back to barbarism. The problem lies in that "we still trusted too much in the modern consciousness".[44] In other words, the difficulties of the modern ago which has been shaped by the Enlightenment are caused by the modernity itself. The Enlightenment, which is supposed to be progressive yet becomes regressive, is itself the cause of difficulties.

Both Horkheimer and Adorno have realized that the difficulties caused by the Enlightenment are first of all the self-destruction of enlightenment. During the development of the Enlightenment, it "already contains the seed of the reversal universally apparent today".[45] None the less both Horkheimer and Adorno emphasize the idea of enlightenment. They suggest, "If enlightenment does not accommodate reflection on this recidivist element, then it seals its own fate."[46] They expect that through real enlightenment all the difficulties will be exposed and solved. The key to solving difficulties caused by the Enlightenment lies in enlightenment itself.

Retreat into Mythology

According to *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, the understanding of "the prime cause of the retreat from enlightenment into mythology is not to be sought so much in the nationalist, pagan and other modern mythologies manufactured precisely in order to contrive such a reversal, but in the Enlightenment itself when paralyzed by fear of the truth."[47] In a word, the cause of the regression of Enlightenment lies not in the factors outside the enlightenment, but rather inside the enlightenment. It is not that mythology pushes enlightenment into reversal, but that enlightenment itself retreats into mythology.

In contrast to what the Enlightenment criticize, namely traditional society which is filled with various myths, both Horkheimer and Adorno criticize that while the Enlightenment resolves the mythical world, it constructs another new mythical world. "In advance, the Enlightenment recognizes as being and occurrence only what can be apprehended in unity (*Einheit*): its ideal is the system from which all and everything follows." "Unity" is a keyword of the ideal of the Enlightenment which pursues unification. "System" is another keyword which produces unity. The point is that the spirit of the Enlightenment intends to include everything into a unified system in order to produce unity for the convenience of scientific calculation, experiment and understanding. The unified power of the technical world has created another mythical world which is capable of absorbing everything into its system. The result is that the old mythical world has gone away, but another new mythical world has been built up.

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44 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.xi.
45 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.xiii.
46 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.xiii.
47 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, pp.xiii-xiv.

The Enlightenment intends to resolve the mythical world, but it shapes a new mythology through technology and constructs a new mythical world. The end is that nature has been dealt with by technology simply as an object just like an object in the laboratory. As a unified object, nature is therefore alienated and estranged from human beings. Finally, everything in the cosmos will be absorbed into the technological system. In the past, the ancient people dealt with nature by witchcraft and everything in the cosmos was absorbed into the mythical system. In the present, the modern people deal with nature by technology and everything in the cosmos is absorbed into another mythical system.

Mythological Heroes
The Enlightenment has not only formed a new myth of unification, but also shaped new mythological heroes who conquer the whole world. The scientists are especially the heroes among heroes. With the memory of being persecuted by Nazi regime, both Horkheimer and Adorno write:

Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things in so far as he can make them. In this way their potentiality is turned to his own ends (*Dadurch wird ihr Ansich für ihn*, through this, things are settled down in their own ways for him).[48]

Just like a dictator knows people in so far as he can manipulate them, a scientist knows things in order to use them to manufacture something. The relation between the manufacturer and the manufactured is as far and alienated as the manipulator and the manipulated. A dictator intends to locate every one into a system according to his will, and a scientist intends to locate everything into a system according to the scientific principles. Consequently, a dictator dominates people, and a scientist dominates things. While everything has been absorbed into the technological system, human beings are certainly no exemption.

The Enlightenment has brought into a new spirit of dictatorship. The modern scientists intend to locate everything into a scientific system in a similar way that the antique people intend to locate everything into a mythological system. The modern scientists are even harsher than the traditional dictators in terms that they want to control everything in every way. What they really want is to define everything precisely. In the ancient time, there was alienation of human beings from nature caused by the taboos of a mythical world. Do the modern people escape from living in alienation caused by the new taboos of a new mythical world?

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48 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.9. Translation modified.

Logic of Dialectical Thinking
Totally speaking, the logic of the critique of Horkheimer and Adorno against the Enlightenment is as follows:

Raised and Swollen Subjectivity
→ Mythical World

Forced Identity into a Unified System
→ Mythical System

Control, Utilization of and Therefore Alienation from Nature
→ Mythical Taboos

First, the raised human subjectivity by the Enlightenment has swollen itself further in a way that mythological heroes dominate the whole world. The result is a retreat into the mythical world before the Enlightenment. Second, technology brought in by the Enlightenment has enforced unification by absorbing everything into a technological system. The result is a retreat into the mythical system before the Enlightenment. Third, the intention to control and utilize everything has alienated human beings from nature. The result is a retreat into the mythical taboos before the Enlightenment.

Solution
According to Kant, "Enlightenment is humankind's exist from its self-incurred immaturity." But the problems caused by the Enlightenment have made mankind back into immaturity in terms of submitting to a technological system, being incapable of making use of one's own reason and lacking resolution and the courage to use reason. While facing the problems caused by the Enlightenment both Horkheimer and Adorno expect that the principle of enlightenment will solve the problems none the less. "It (enlightenment) comes into its own only when it surrenders the last remaining concordance with the latter (enemy of enlightenment) and dares to transcend the false absolute, the principle of blind dominations. The spirit of this kind of unrelenting theory would turn even the mind of relentless progress to its end."[49]

 Both Horkheimer and Adorno expect that the principle of enlightenment should be carried out thoroughly, then human beings will be totally liberated from fear and establish their sovereignty. They contend that we should never give way to the new enslavement by insisting on criticizing the absolutization of technology. Only when the principle of enlightenment has been carried out

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49 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p.42.

thoroughly without any compromise, the problems will be solved. This is the heavy dose of medication prescribed by Horkheimer and Adorno who believe that "the spirit of this kind of unrelenting theory would turn even the mind of relentless progress to its end."

Summary
The regress of the Enlightenment is a terrible development of history, which is supposed to exist from self-incurred immaturity but actually retreats into another self-incurred immaturity. Technology brought in by the Enlightenment is enforcing unification universally through absorbing everything into a technological system. Moreover, while technology cooperates with commercial activities, every person is absorbed into a commercial system. The ideal of the Enlightenment to control and utilize everything has alienated human beings from nature. Moreover, the exploited and polluted nature is fighting back against human beings through poisoning and disasters. It is for sure that enlightenment has an ability of self-destruction, but is it also for sure that it has an ability to discover and solve the problems caused by itself?

Proposed Focus of Sino-Christian Theology

The Philosophers of 18th century are old men dressing in new clothes in the sense that they want to break off the absolute authority of tradition but actually they build up the absolute authority of reason instead. They want to abolish the intolerance by tradition, but they establish the intolerance by reason. Those rational Philosophers become irrational while reconciling the conflict between the objective fact and their belief by declaring that there is no disharmony at all and doing academic works with predetermined conclusions. They would rather reconstruct history in order to adapt to their own belief.

While the Enlightenment which criticizes religion as superstition turns out to be a religion of enlightenment, such an ironical repetition of history reminds us of the limitation of human beings. That those who seek enlightenment become anti-enlighteners shows how slow the human growth in the history is. While considering the context of Sino-Christian theology, which is mixed up with the pre-modern, modern and post-modern contexts, Sino-Christian theology should pay attention to how to be enlightened.

The Philosophers of 18th century look like rational and objective, but they build up their own heavenly city irrationally and subjectively. In its Sino-context of the 21st century Sino-Christian theology should pay attention to whether those which are rational and objective in outlooks are really so. Will we repeat the same mistake like the Philosophers of 18th century? Will we adopt the method of denying any difficulty in the Sino-context of the 21st century as well? So long as the Philosophers of 18th century are medieval old men dressing in new clothes, Sino-Christian theology should be concerned about whether the Sino-intell-

ectuals of the 21st century are feudalistic old men dressing in new clothes as well. Inasmuch as the Philosophers of 18th century do the academic works with predetermined conclusions, Sino-Christian theology should be concerned about whether the Sino-intellectuals of the 21st century take self-image as the ideal image and their own principles as the ideal principles. Since the Philosophers of 18th century prove that history repeats itself, Sino-Christian theology should be concerned about whether the history of 21st century in the Sino-context is another repetition of human history.

Both Horkheimer and Adorno have pointed out that the Enlightenment intends to get human beings free from fear and make them masters, but on the contrary it brings in the new enslavement of technology. Whenever human beings become the dictators of the world through technology, human beings fall into the state of being dominated by technology. Whenever commerce cooperates with technology, there is no chance for anyone to escape from the fate of being dominated. While facing the problems caused by the Enlightenment, both Horkheimer and Adorno insist that the principle of enlightenment will solve all those problems. But we must ask, whether such an expectation of enlightenment is too optimistic? While the main problem caused by the Enlightenment is the self-destruction of enlightenment, how is it possible for the trouble makers to become the solvers of the trouble? Above all, while human beings have been raised to an extent as absolute subjects, how can human beings get involved into the problems caused by human beings without making a dilemma that the involvement of human beings is itself a way of raising human subjectivity further? It is crucial that Sino-Christian theology should offer a reference which is capable of overcoming such a dilemma.

Therefore, Sino-Christian theology should take the issue of enlightenment as a main focus in order to prevent from a blank of the ground of modern society in the Sino-context. Through our discussion of the irony of enlightenment and the regression of enlightenment we have seen that the problem-solver can be the problem-maker and there has been always a temptation for enlighteners to become anti-enlighteners. The key lies in whether there is a reference to surpass such a paradox. Sino-Christian theology should seek a reference from the perspective of Christianity to reflect upon enlightenment in depth in order to promote enlightenment in a healthy way.

Examining the Ground of Reason

From the perspective of theological reflection, when the Philosophers of 18th century rely upon reason and treat religions as superstitions, they neglect that even reason itself needs a ground such as basic belief which is similar to religion. Karl Barth (1886-1968) holds that "there is no philosophy that is not to some

extent also theology".[50] The reason is that "there is no man who does not have his own god or gods as the object of his highest desire and trust, or as the basis of his deepest loyalty and commitment. There is no one who is not to this extent also a theologian."[51] Barth's view can be applied into those who deny the divinity, because they "would in practice merely consist in transferring an identical dignity and function to another object",[52] no matter it is "nature", "creativity", "an unconscious and amorphous will to life", "reason", "progress", or "a redeeming nothingness", "even such apparently 'godless' ideologies are theologies".[53] In other words, it is impossible to deny something ultimately without claiming some other things ultimately instead.

In a similar way, Paul Tillich (1886-1965) claims that "every creative philosopher is a hidden theologian (sometimes even a declared theologian)".[54] From the perspective of ultimate concern,[55] every philosopher has his own ultimate pursuit and commitment. In this sense, there is no difference for a philosopher from a theologian. That is to say, in the aspect of ultimate pursuit and commitment, those who claim to be atheists acknowledge the existence of a certain "god". Accordingly, there are no absolute atheists except those who deny one god or some gods. In the absolute sense, there are no atheists who are ultimately concerned. To the end, reason itself is not ultimate but rather has its own ground. Sino-Christian theology should inquire about what is the ground of reason.

If we want to exit from our self-incurred immaturity, it is necessary to be aware of where reason is standing upon. With this regard H.-G. Gadamer (1900-2002) has done a great contribution to the ground of reason. Gadamer has taken "Prejudice" (*Vorurteil*, it is better understood as "pre-understanding") as a starting point of understanding. From this perspective he has shown that the prejudice of Enlightenment is an intention to be opposed against all prejudice by rejecting all authority and cutting off its ties with tradition. But the blindness of Enlightenment lies in its prejudice against all prejudices. Whenever one is aware of its own prejudice, it is not easy to be misguided by its prejudice. But whenever one is unaware of its own prejudice, it is highly possible to be guided by its own prejudice unconsciously.

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50 Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p.3.
51 Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, p.3.
52 Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, p.3.
53 Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, pp.3-4.
54 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol.1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p.25.
55 Tillich has taken "Ultimate Concern" as an abstract translation of Mk 12.29. See: P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 1 (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1951), p.12: "The object of theology is what concerns us ultimately." "Our ultimate concern is that which determines our being or not-being."

Although Gadamer has mainly adopted the neutral meaning of "prejudice" (*Vorurteil*) as pre-understanding, yet it implies a negative meaning like "bias". Owing to such a double meaning, sometimes it tends to be ironical as he says, "The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the enlightenment, will itself prove to be a prejudice, and removing it opens the way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness."[56] In a word, the greatest prejudice of the Enlightenment is to be confident of its own ability to get rid of all prejudices. This implies that the bias of the Enlightenment is the unawareness of its own prejudice. Removing such a bias is necessary for soundly developing the ideal of enlightenment.

2. Examining the Limitation of Reason

Contemporary French philosopher Edgar Morin (1921-) contends that there are two characters of reason, "rationalization" and "rationality": One is the constructive nature, and another is the critical nature.[57] The former is to construct according to rational judgment, and the latter is to destroy according to rational judgment. From such a perspective, the function of reason in the middle ages relies upon religion in terms that the constructing reason builds up what religion needs and allows on the one hand, and the critical reason destructs what is not in accordance with religion on the other hand. The result is that reason functions as a defending mechanism through rationalization by "maintaining the consistency of logic of one's own system at the expense of paralyzing the critical function and the dialogue with the real world".[58]

Both "rationalization" and "rationality" come from the same source of reason. But the two show totally different characters. The former excludes all those which are different from one's own view and the latter adopts a tolerant attitude to those which are incomprehensible. On the one hand, "rationalization" has its predetermined conclusions, so reason is actually following those conclusions. On the other hand, "rationality" allows an open attitude and reason is following rational principles. In fact it is difficult to make a distinction between the both, because it is difficult to discern rational principles from predetermined conclusions. In many cases we may see that the way of rationalization is superior to the way of rationality. This has exposed the weakness of reason.

The problem of the Philosophers of 18th century lies in a confusion of rationality with rationalization. For instance, both Voltaire and Diderot appeal to

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56 H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), p.276. Cf. H.-G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1986), p.280.

57 Edgar Morin, *Penser l'Europe* (Paris: Gallimard, 1990). The only available for this essay is the Chinese edition, *Fasi Ouzhou* [Reflection on Europe] (Beijing: Sanlian, 2005), p.49.

58 Edgar Morin, *Fasi Ouzhou*, p.49.

reason and tolerance, but they would harshly impugn those which are inexplicable to them as "irrational" in a very negative sense.[59] The point is that, "Reason is not only the source of critical thinking, but also the source of producing myth."[60] It is not unusual to see that whenever reason criticizes myth and religion there are myth and religion produced by reason. "Whenever reason regards as the moment of defeating myth and religion, myth and reason parasitize reason itself and occupy it."[61] The moment whenever reason turns to a new myth and religion is always a moment turning from tolerance to intolerance. Therefore, Morin contends that it is necessary to delineate the limitation of reason and to develop dialogues with those who are different from us, including the "irrational", the "irrationalization" and "myths which are seemingly born to be riddles".[62]

The Philosophers of the 18th century intend to criticize myth, religion and autocracy and construct a system of examination by reason. But it is ironical that reason itself is exempt from any examination.

The blindness of the enlightenment philosophers lies in regarding myth and religion as falsehood, superstition and deception by excluding all the real and deep connections of myth and religion. It is owing to the blindness against myth reason creates its own myth inside itself such as the myth of rational order. Thus reason identifies itself with the truth. This is a road leads to playing God. The end is that the deification of reason leads to insanity.[63]

Whenever reason regards itself as limitless, it is a moment of deifying itself. The Enlightenment demands that reason is the only authority above all. "In general, the Enlightenment tends to accept no authority and to decide everything before the judgment seat of reason."[64] While calling every authority into question, reason regards itself as the highest authority as if it can be separated from historical tradition. But this has reflected an irrational attitude for blindly following the authority of reason which is exempt from any examination.

In fact, reason itself is not limitless at all because it is rooted in the temporal and spatial situation. In Gadamer's words, "the idea of an absolute reason is not a possibility for historical humanity."[65] The real human beings exist only in the temporal and spatial contexts of history, so is reason of human beings not beyond them. "Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms."[66] In this sense, reason is not self-sufficient at all, and "it is not its own master but remains

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59 Edgar Morin, *Fasi Ouzhou*, pp.51-52.

60 Edgar Morin, *Fasi Ouzhou*, p.55.

61 Edgar Morin, *Fasi Ouzhou*, pp.54-55.

62 Edgar Morin, *Fasi Ouzhou*, pp.55-56.

63 Edgar Morin, *Fasi Ouzhou*, p.51.

64 H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), p.272.

65 H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.276.

66 H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.276.

constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates."[67] Reason is not its own master in terms that it is shaped in the historical context. It is impossible for reason to interrogate the historical tradition as if it is standing on a position beyond the historical tradition. Sino- Christian theology should examine the authority and limitation of reason from the perspective of presupposition and pre-understanding with religion as a reference.

Examining the Limitation of the Agent of Reason

In addition to examining the validity of reason, Sino-Christian theology should examine the agent of reason as well, because the agent of reason is connected to reason itself and the way to use reason. Since Kant would say that dare to know in order to be mature, it might cause a misperception that while making rational judgments the agent of reason is independent of history and exempt from any examination. With regard to this, Gadamer says, "In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it."[68] History is not something belongs to human beings, but rather, it is presented by all human beings. In this sense, human beings live in history and therefore belong to history rather than go beyond it. "Real historical thinking must take account of its own historicity."[69] Human beings are those who live in history and think about history. But we must notice that even the action of thinking about history itself happens in history.

Jürgen Habermas is dissatisfied with Gadamer's position that reason "is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circum- stances in which it operates". For Habermas, the stand of Gadamer has not been carried out thoroughly enough, because reason has been founded upon a narrow and close ego only operates in the given circumstances. Habermas contends that reason has been shaped during the process of communication in the changing context. That is to say, the agent of reason has been put into a living context of communication. He criticizes that Gadamer does not realize the power of reflection in the process of understanding which should not be overshadowed by the phantom of autonomy and separated from its changing context.[70] For Habermas, the agent of reason is not an idealistic ego, but rather shaped in the changing context and it can be realized only by the power of reflection. He believes that whenever such a reflection is applied, it will not be confined by any form of dogmatism.

Both Gadamer and Habermas are against the radical enlighteners who have absolutized reason. Gadamer emphasizes that reason is not self-sufficient but rather dependent upon the given contexts. But Habermas places emphasis on the influence of changing contexts upon the agent of reason, because he has sensed

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67 H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.276.
68 H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.276.
69 H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p.299.
70 Jürgen Habermas, *On the Logic of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge: MIT, 1988), p.168.

a certain residue of Idealism in Gadamer. Both thinkers have been aware of the limitation of human beings. While facing the position of Enlightenment of putting everything before the judgment seat of reason, Gadamer emphasizes the possibility of recognizing the authority of tradition through rational judgment. This is owing to a limitation of human beings, for tradition is prior to the existence of human beings in many ways. Habermas implicitly criticizes Gadamer's respect for tradition as a form of dogmatism and contends for a continuous critique against tradition in a changing world. This is due to another limitation of human beings, for tradition as constructed by human beings is always imperfect. Sino-Christian theology should inquire about the limitation of the agent of reason who is under the influence of tradition and constructing the imperfect tradition simultaneously. Above all, it is the agent of reason who is located in the given context and changing context.

Epilogue: Are we really enlightened?

Sino-Christian theology should ask continuously: are we really enlightened? The target of the question of Sino-Christian theology should not be other than those who are doing Sino-Christian theology. Those who think themselves have been enlightened could be those who are not enlightened at all. Only when the rational critique can be applied into self rather than others, it is time to be on the way to be enlightened.

Are we really enlightened? If we are not enlightened at all, we are surely incapable of dealing with the problems brought in by enlightenment. How can human beings in problems solve the human problems? Above all, human beings in problems are the real human problems. Pursuing the ideal of enlightenment is to solve these problems.

Can human beings enlighten human beings? Can human beings be enlightened by human beings? How can the word of human beings really enlighten human beings, unless it is the word of the Creator of human beings? This should be an important starting point of Sino-Christian theology.

Appendix

Preliminary Survey on the New Generation of Scholars of Christian Studies in Mainland China

GAO Xin

Introduction

The academic study of Christianity has resumed in Mainland China since the 1980s under the reform and open policy of the Chinese government. During that time, along with the introduction of Western thoughts into the Chinese academia and society, Chinese scholars of various humanistic disciplines began to research into the study of Christianity or Christian studies in the course of exploring Western cultures.

Owing to the special religious policy and political environment, Christian studies in Mainland China possesses several characteristics when resumed in 1980s. In terms of the characteristics of the researchers, most of the scholars of Christian studies proclaim themselves to be intellectuals rather than theologians, academicians studying Christianity rather than practicing Christians. They usually do not adhere to any Christian church. Furthermore, these scholars mainly came from different humanistic disciplines in universities instead of from denominational churches, theological seminaries or academic departments of religious studies in universities. Over the last thirty years or so, Christian studies has successfully gained public recognition in the Chinese academia due to the work of these scholars. As more and more scholars participate in Christian studies, various approaches to the study of Christianity have been developed: historical, philosophical, theological, sociological, etc. In the development of this burgeoning academic discipline, significant changes might have taken place within the discipline itself and the scholars involved.

According to Prof. He Guanghu, scholars of Christian studies in Mainland China can be classified into three generations.[1] The first generation consists of scholars who were active mainly during the period of 1950s to 1970s and can be further divided into two groups. The first group consists of church members who received patronage from the government and their main concerns were more political than academic due to the special political environment of China in that period. The other group of the first generation refers to scholars who, though not within the church circle, began to reflect and discuss the religious issues in

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1   He Guanghu, "Jiangshan dai you Rencai chu – Ershi Shijimo zhi Ershiyi Shijichu Zhongguo Jidujiao Yanjiu Xuezhe Sumiao" (Trends of Chinese Scholars in Christian Studies in the Turn of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century), *Logos & Pneuma* 29 (Autumn 2008), pp.53-73.

China during the late of 1970s.[2] As for the second generation scholars, most of them are graduates (aged twenty to thirty) from humanistic disciplines such as history, philosophy, literature, etc. in universities when China began to implement the reform and open policy in the beginning of 1980s. At that time, there were only two or three departments of religious studies in universities in Mainland China. As a result, very few scholars of the second generation had received the specialized training in religious or theological studies. According to Prof. He, the second generation scholars, who played the leading role in the field of Christian studies from mid-1980s to the later half of 1990s, can be described as "from knowing to understanding, from seeking to reward",[3] whereas the third generation scholars are characterized as "from learning to specializing, from interest to commitment".[4]

Prof. He's crude classification and general delineation of the characteristics of scholars of Christian studies in Mainland China of the three generations may provide an important hypothesis concerning the development of Christian studies in Mainland China. However, Prof. He's hypothesis is based primarily on his informal observation and impressions, which may better be tested and confirmed by a more concrete survey on the scholars of the third generation.

Under the auspice of a research project directed by Prof. Lai Pan-chiu of the Chinese University of Hong Kong, a survey of the new generation of scholars of Christian studies was conducted. This survey is conducted respectively by Dr. Gao Xin during a conference organized by the China Academy of Social Science, Beijing in December 2008 and Dr. Sha Mei during a conference held at Heilongjiang University, Harbin, in January 2009.

The scholars being targeted for survey are primarily those of the age 35-45 with the academic rank comparable to associate professor or below. They are supposed to belong to the third generation according to Prof. He's classification. The survey aims at testing if this batch of scholars has any characteristic making them distinguishable from the older generation, especially the second generation according to Prof. He's classification. These characteristics may include: academic orientation, research interests, religious commitment, church affiliation, professional training, understanding of the academic, personal, cultural and ecclesiastical significance of their research work, etc.

As the topic remains sensitive to some scholars, the participants being invited to take part in the survey had been shown beforehand: (1) a formal letter from Prof. Lai Pan-chiu, indicating the academic purpose of the survey and

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2 He Guanghu, "Trends of Chinese Scholars in Christian Studies in the Turn of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century", p.57.

3 He Guanghu, "Trends of Chinese Scholars in Christian Studies in the Turn of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century", pp.61-62.

4 He Guanghu, "Trends of Chinese Scholars in Christian Studies in the Turn of the Twentieth and Twenty-First Century", pp.66-70.

pledging to keep confidential the personal identification of the scholars participating in this survey; (2) a questionnaire in one page listing the 5 questions to be asked with blank space for filling in short answer; and (3) a consent form which the scholar participating in the survey has to sign to indicate his/her consent.

The main questions that this survey sets out to address are as follows:

1. What is the major reason or motivation for your engaging in Christian studies? Is it purely for academic interests, purely for religious reasons or both?
2. How do you evaluate the achievements and limitations of the "senior" scholars of Christian studies in Mainland China?
3. Do you have any religious affiliation? Do you worship at a Christian church - never, occasionally or regularly?
4. How do you perceive the significance or meaning of Christian studies to the Chinese academia, churches, culture and society?
5. To what extent are you affected by the academic study of Christianity in your own personal or spiritual life?

There are total 28 scholars surveyed. Of the 28 participants, 14 of them are accomplished by means of face-to-face conversation, the other 14 by filling in the questionnaire by the scholar himself/herself. Below is a summary of the results of this rather preliminary survey of the new generation of scholars of Christian studies in Mainland China.

Why Studying Christianity?
With regard to the first question, 13 out of the 28 participants indicate that they engage in Christian studies for purely academic interests. There are 11 participants stating that the motivations of their studies originate from both academic interests and religious reasons. There are 2 participants suggesting that their research motivations began as some sort of "faith seeking understanding". Another scholar suggests that the motivation of his / her study of Christianity is to search for the goal and meaning of life. Only 1 participant replies that his or her reason for studying Christianity is due to chance with no specific intention. Among the 11 participants who are motivated by both academic and religious reasons, some of them think that they can make a clear distinction between academic consideration and personal belief. They believe that personal religious preference should not and will not offer any methodology for academic research and teaching. They can thus ensure that their academic activities would measure up with strict academic standards and educational requirements. Other participants who are also motivated by both academic and religious reasons suggest that it is not easy or even realistic to make religious involvement thoroughly separate from academic research. According to their own

experiences – both academic and religious, in the pursuit of the ultimate value of life, the study of Christianity is deemed to have a positive influence on the personal development and to help them to achieve a more reflective attitude towards life and belief, and hence strengthen their religious convictions. At the same time, they also believe that while they can maintain an objective and neutral stance in their teaching and research, their religious experiences can provide some sort of insights and critical perspectives on their academic studies. In short, Christian studies can combine their academic activities with their lives and make these two benefit each other.

Evaluation of Previous Generation

With regard to the second question concerning the achievements of the senior scholars, as most of the participants started their academic work, consciously or unconsciously, on the foundation accomplished by the senior scholars, how to understand and evaluate the achievements of the senior scholars will be an important indicator showing their perception of the academic trends and the difference between the two generations. Based on the results of this survey, there is a rather extensive consensus among the participants that the senior scholars of Christian studies in Mainland China have made considerable contributions to the Chinese academia. Through translating relevant books into Chinese, teaching courses at universities and writing books about Christianity, they took on the responsibility of introducing the knowledge of Christianity to the whole of Chinese academia, helping Chinese intellectuals and ordinary people understand Christianity in an appropriate way. But their most important achievement remains that they were the first to bring Christianity to the Chinese academia. During the period of Cultural Revolution, Christianity and its relevant studies were associated with reactionism and foreign invasion. Thanks to the senior scholars, the subject-matter and nature of Christian studies had been changed from a political or ideological enterprise to an academic discipline of humanities. Due to their endeavors, Christian studies had successfully established itself as a fairly systematized discipline in Chinese academia more than twenty years ago. They could thus be regarded as the pioneers of Christian studies in Chinese academia.

In addition to the academic accomplishments of the senior scholars, some participants also express their admirations and respects for the senior scholars. Considering the special political environment where they started their initial work and the ideological burden which they bore for years, the younger scholars are particularly impressed by the passion and the courage of these senior scholars. It is agreed that the pioneering work of the senior scholars laid the solid foundation of Christian studies in Chinese academia and made a great impact on the younger generation.

Besides their praises of the contributions made by the senior scholars of Christian studies, the participants also give their reflective and critical comments on the work done by their seniors. Their comments can be summarized as follows:

Firstly, from the academic perspective, the works of the senior scholars are not critical enough to match the academic standard in terms of originality and creativity due to the fact that they mainly concentrated on translation and introductory work. According to the participants, the translation and intro-ductory work are absolutely important but they are not adequate for the further development of Christian studies. The growth and progress of this discipline, including the theoretical articulation of Sino-Christian theology which remains under construction, require novelty and expertise at a higher level.

Secondly, as very few senior scholars of Christian studies were formally trained in religious or theological studies, most of them started their studies of Christianity from the perspectives like history, philosophy, literature, foreign languages, etc. Their academic background made the research foci of the senior scholars sometimes not so directly relevant to religious or theological studies. Though this might be quite inevitable in Mainland China especially at that time, the participants agree that the construction of the conceptual framework and methodology of Christian studies calls for a much more specialized training of religious or theological studies.

Thirdly, since most of the senior scholars devoted themselves mainly to the translation and introductory work, they have not fully explored the diverse aspects of Christianity at length. The participants unanimously pledge to take up the responsibility to carry on and further promote the multidisciplinary studies of Christianity and to delve even deeper into Christian studies.

Religious Affiliation

Regarding the third question concerning religious affiliation, 8 participants express that they have Christian faith. Among this group of declared adherents, 3 are regular churchgoers, including 1 serving as deacon in his or her church; another 3 worship at a church occasionally; the remaining 2 never go to church and prefer their individual way of worshiping or together with their family members. There are 14 participants indicating that they do not have any religious affiliation but their detailed answers are interestingly diversified. Among those who gave further details about their religious activities, 4 of them have never attended church worship, 1 is a frequent churchgoer, 6 attend church worship occasionally, and 1 claims that he/she sometimes attends church activities but with no religious implication.[5] Concerning this question, there are 3 participants who do not explicitly express whether they have any religious

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5 The 2 scholars who have no religious belief do not indicate whether they go to church or not.

belief, but they seem to show observable religious sentiment during the conversation. One of these 3 participants says that he/she has religious sentiment; another says he/she wishes to adhere or commit to the Christian faith; and the last one indicates that he/she attends worship at church rather often. Among the 3 participants who prefer not to declare their religious affiliation(s) due to personal reasons, one of them discloses that he/she goes to church occasionally and the others indicate that they do not exclude themselves from church activities and worship.

Interestingly, we can see from the replies that most of the participants who do not profess the Christian faith are open to church activities and some of them often attend church activities. One of the possible reasons for this is that participating in church activities is regarded as a direct means of acquainting the scholars with Christianity and in this way they can have a better understanding of Christianity. Another possible reason may be that some scholars consider the Christian church, similar to the Buddhist temple, as a nice and peaceful place for contemplation and spiritual cultivation.

Social Significance of Christian Studies
Relating to the fourth question concerning the significance of Christian studies for the Chinese academia, churches, culture and society, responses offered by the participants are quite positive and affirmative. No matter how diversified their research interests and personal belief are, all the participants share similar recognition of the significance of Christian studies in Mainland China. They agree that Christian Studies has exerted great impact on the Chinese academia, culture and society. From the perspective of academic structure, Christian Studies offers a significant frame of reference to the Chinese academia. Some participants suggest that Christian studies in the universities can complement and save the inadequacy of ecclesiastical theology. Furthermore, Christian Studies is able to respond to the development of ecclesiastical theology and the dilemma of "faith crisis" in China. It is the consensus of the participants that the resumption and development of Christian studies in Mainland China contributed greatly to the integrity of the humanistic ecosystem of Chinese academia, the construction of human sciences in China and the cultural exchange between East and West. Other than the tremendous impact on the Chinese academia, the participants also mention that Christianity as a global religion with a long history will contribute to the moral civilization and social transformation of contemporary Chinese society. Regarding the prospect of Christian studies in Mainland China, the participants also agree that Christian studies will continue to play an important role in various areas in the future.

Concerning the non-confessional Christian theology formulated by the Chinese scholars, especially those of the previous generation, the opinions of the participants can be divided into two camps. One camp suggests that this

kind of academic Christian theology articulated mainly by scholars with almost no Christian faith and no ecclesiastical function is very meaningful. It brings forth significant influences to the contemporary Chinese society, such as offering guidance to the government's policy related to religious issues. It can function as a bridge between believers and non-believers. It can also provide some sort of mediating function among different religions and between Christianity and the government. The other camp takes a more critical stand and argues that this kind of non-confessional theology or Christian studies accomplished mainly by scholars of public universities is inadequate. It is because it intentionally or unconsciously ignores from time to time the faith community in China for certain reasons. Scholars of this camp of thought propose that Christian studies in Mainland China, instead of being restricted to the academic tradition of refraining from making contact with religious communities, should include various academic traditions and the contemporary religious lives in a broader sense. In the long term, they suggest, Christian studies in Mainland China should face the faith community in a more gentle and positive way, which may benefit the growth of faith community. When Christian studies in China is better integrated with the faith community, a genuine and dynamic "Christian community" will be formed in Chinese society. Moreover, they also suggest, Christian studies should concentrate more on the theological perspective rather than the philosophical or historical. As a result, a more active interaction between Christian studies and Chinese churches can be expected in the future.

In terms of the meaning of Christian studies to the society, some participants think that the significance or influence of Christian studies in Mainland China has already gone beyond the academia itself. It provides an opportunity for the Chinese people to understand Western cultures and religions in an objective and multi-dimensional way. In turn, the recognition obtained by Christian studies also helps the Chinese people to reckon the realities of China in a new way. As some participants suggest, some Chinese people began to understand the realities of China from the perspective of Christianity. When people can perceive the tensions demonstrated in Christianity, they may have similar view on the practical problems in China. In the eyes of some other participants, Christian culture can also enrich traditional Chinese culture and will bring out the best from both sides in the future. Since Christian culture has some unique features which Chinese traditions cannot provide, including the ideas of original sin, confession/repentance, etc., Christian culture can function as a valuable complement in this respect. Owing to the possible contributions of Christian culture, some participants suggest that Christianity should be an indispensable partner for the establishment of the public value in China. At the same time, the development of Christian studies in China can be regarded as a re-interpretation of the Christian tradition and an extension of Chinese culture. In other words,

Christian studies can enrich Chinese culture and can contribute to a more flourishing future for Chinese society on the whole.

Concerning the prospect or future development of Christian studies in Mainland China, most of the participants come to the general agreement that Christian studies in Mainland China should be undertaken by well-trained Christian theologians and scholars with specialized training in religious studies. The study of Christianity in China should be more inclusive to cover different Western theological traditions. Furthermore, the participants also think that Christian studies in Mainland China should keep on bringing fresh ideas to the issues concerning social welfare, social transformation and morality. It will then enhance the plurality of Chinese culture and society as a whole.

Personal Significance of Christian Studies
As to the last question concerning the impact of Christian studies on the personal or spiritual life of the researchers, most of the participants recognize that the study of Christianity, though an academic activity by nature, has a rather beneficial effect on their personal or spiritual life in various ways. One group of the participants indicates that their studies of Christianity made them committed to Christianity. Scholars of this group usually had no religious belief before engaging in Christian studies. However, in the course of their academic explorations, they were deeply inspired by the vital principles and the uniqueness of Christianity, and thus became attracted and even adhered to Christianity. Another group of participants feel that they were perplexed by the tension between Chinese tradition and Christian culture especially when they strived for their personal liberation and spiritual cultivation. Though attracted by Christianity as a religion, they have not resolved the problems or tensions between the distinctive traditions of these two cultures. One of the obvious characteristics of these participants is that facing the conflicting elements of Chinese and Christian traditions, they have the difficulties in identifying themselves as Christians. For instance, they still feel that it is not easy to forsake entirely the Chinese tradition and accept wholeheartedly the Christian doctrines. Answers given by the third group of participants, who makes no commitment to Christian faith, are quite diversified. Most of participants of this group admit that Christian Studies has influenced their worldviews in a constructive way. For example, through studying Christianity, some of their previous negative impressions on Christianity, such as the misunderstanding of Christianity as an ideological weapon of Western Imperialism, have been rectified. Being inspired by the spiritual power of Christianity, some participants think that their academic studies of Christianity affected their lives deeply and offered an important alternative way of living apart from the Chinese traditions. As the message or spiritual resources of Christianity is so closely related to life, their spiritual lives were positively enhanced and expanded after studying Christianity. It is Christian studies that made them

experience the transcendence and religiosity in their lives. Therefore, they can adopt a more sensible and open attitude in the subsequent years of their lives.

Prospect of Christian Studies
As some of the participants involved in in-depth interviews, they had the chance to elaborate their opinions on issues not listed in the questionnaire. During the interviews, some of the interviewees expressed their proposals or visions for Christian studies in Mainland China. As the future development of Christian studies in Mainland China will be dominated sooner or later by this new generation, the proposals or visions articulated by the interviewees may shed light on the prospect of the discipline of Christian studies in China.

The first aspect to be mentioned is that some of the interviewees propose to broaden the scope of Christian studies on the one hand and to delve deeper into some specialized areas on the other. Whereas scholars of the older generation focus on philosophical studies of Christianity, the interviewees propose to promote a wide range of sub-disciplines within Christian studies, including biblical studies, sociology of religion, spirituality, original theory of Sino-Christian theology, moral role of Christianity in Chinese society, etc. With regard to the translation work, some interviewees argue that the translation of works in foreign languages other than English, for instance, Latin, Spanish, Portuguese, etc. is also very important. These non-English foreign languages and their materials are necessary for studying literatures and Catholic studies, and hence deserve to be taken seriously. They expect that Christian studies in Mainland China should grow in a comprehensive way covering various areas or aspects and develop its own creative theoretical framework in the future. As a branch of the humanities in Chinese academia, Christian studies may then become more mature as well as specialized and can play a significant role in the Chinese academic tradition.

Another observation from the survey is that the interviewees place emphases on the realities of Chinese society, the establishment of public values in China and the relationship with the faith community. According to some of the interviewees, research on sociology of religion and public theology will be beneficial to discussion of the cultural, social and religious issues from the Christian perspective, which can provide new options different from those of the Chinese traditions. Some interviewees believe that they should give their responses to the relevant social problems in contemporary Chinese society. For instance, some of them claim that they have the obligation to response to the increasing number of Christians in China and to apply the results of their research to practical religious matters in contemporary China. During the interview, many of the interviewees expressed from time to time their concerns which cover human spirituality, Chinese society, moral issues, and even ecosystem or environmental problems. The interviewers got the impression that

most of the interviewees do not take their studies of Christianity as merely a job for earning a living. Instead, they regard Christian studies as a vocation which deserves their greatest passions and devotions to further promote it both for the sake of academic interest and for the well-being of the society. It is thus expected that more and more of this kind of socially engaging discourse will emerge and even become dominant in Christian studies in Mainland China in the future.

The third aspect to be mentioned is about religious experience. According to the friendly sharing of the interviewees, the religious experience of the scholars of the younger generation may be much more extensive and intensive than that of the senior ones. This refers to both the survey findings that the percentage of declared/confessional Christians is expected to be significantly higher than the older generation and that more scholars of the new generation show some sort of religious sentiment towards Christianity. With regard to the latter group of scholars, though they have not committed to Christianity, they can evaluate Christianity positively in a frank manner.[6] Even those who study Christianity merely from a detached position have plenty opportunities to contact Christians around them and to understand the practices of Christianity in China and the West. As a result, some new features of Christian studies may emerge in the future, for example the study of Christian Spirituality. As the subject matter for the study of Christian spirituality is the subjective religious experiences or feelings of Christians, the researcher is expected to have analogous experience or feeling in order to have any in-depth understanding. The religious sentiment or spiritual experience of the scholars of the younger generation may have made them better equipped (in comparison with the older generation at least) to understand and even further develop Christian spirituality into a genuine academic discipline. For those who have no Christian faith or sentiment towards Christianity, they may not have the desire or passion for the study of Spirituality. However, through attending the church activities and observing or even participating in the prayer and/or ritual of Christianity, they may be able to contribute to the study of Christian spirituality through their "field studies". In short, given the increase of Christians in number as well as the overall religious sentiment among the younger scholars, the prospect for the development of the study of Christian spirituality should be much more promising than before.

Summary, Analysis & Reflection

Though the size of sample of this survey is rather small in number, after analyzing the records, some significant observations can be made.

In terms of academic orientation, the younger scholars participating in the

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6 For this possibility, see Milton Wan, "Shenxue Yanjiu yu Jidu Zongjiao Jingyan" (Theological Studies and Its Corresponding Religious Experiences), *Logos & Pneuma* 29 (Autumn 2008), p. 127.

survey agree that Christian studies should be broaden in scope and further specialized in the future. Since the senior scholars have contributed a lot to the introduction of Christian studies into the Chinese academia with a strong cultural mission and have established successfully the legitimate status of Christian studies as an academic discipline in the Chinese academia, the younger scholars accepts that it is the task of this new generation to further develop the discipline in a different way. The younger scholars propose that while the philosophical and historical perspectives adopted by their seniors remain very useful, these perspectives do not constitute or exhaust the entirety of the methodological framework for Christian studies. Other methodologies like theological, sociological and anthropological approaches should be taken into consideration seriously and deserved to be promoted. Other than the methodologies, the participants also point out that, though the introductory work and translation are important and still deserve to be continued, much attention should be paid to the innovation of original theories in Christian studies. The Christian Studies in China should not be exhausted by the introduction of the Western theories or translation of the famous works of Western scholars. It also should not indiscriminately adopt the methods used in Hong Kong and Taiwan either. In short, scholars of the younger generation share the opinion that the methodology of Christian studies in Mainland China should be more pluralistic in the future and should aim to develop its own characteristics, theories and even methodologies according to the concrete conditions in Mainland China.

Another observation to be made from the survey is that the proportion of Christians shows a considerable increase among the younger generation scholars. Approximately 30% of the participants declared themselves as Christians in the survey. In contrast, most of the senior scholars devote themselves to the study of Christianity mainly for their academic interests and do not declare themselves as believers, adherents or practitioners of Christianity as a religion. This difference in terms of attitude towards Christianity is reflected in the participants' perception of the significance of Christian studies in Mainland China. Whereas scholars of the older generation tend to overlook or downplay the significance of Christian studies for the Christian churches, some of the participants clearly indicate the positive significance of Christian studies for the Christian churches, including the ecclesiastical theology. Some participants even voice their criticism of the work of the senior scholars at this juncture – lack of commitment or relevance to the religious community. Though it is not easy to carry out a comprehensive survey to get the accurate numbers and percentages of Christians of the two generations, most of the participants state that they can sense the phenomenal difference between the two generations with regard to their religious affiliations.

Possible factors for this significant change can be manifold:

Firstly, dramatic changes took place with regard to the political and social

environments in which the older and younger generation scholars conduct their research activities. Most of the senior scholars had experienced a highly ossified ideology in the Cultural Revolution before they began their academic study of Christianity. At the initial stage of their academic careers, they needed to tackle the remaining ossified notions widespread in Mainland China at that time. Compared with the senior scholars, the surrounding environment of the younger generation scholars are much freer and pluralistic. They have not experienced the ossified ideology and tough times of the senior scholars.

Secondly, in terms of learning experience, in comparison with the senior scholars, the education and training received by the younger generation scholars are more systematic and specialized and less ideological. Under the call for the urban-educated youths to go to the countryside during the Cultural Revolution, most of the senior scholars who were primarily considered as the educated youth at that time had to drop out of school and interrupt their formal studies. It is thus quite fair to say that their background trainings were more fragmentary and ideological. In contrast, having been systematically trained in schools and universities, the younger generation scholars are better equipped with a solid knowledge base and a more open attitude for their future developments. The university education the younger generation underwent is relatively less ideological. Moreover, their proficiency in foreign languages allow the scholars of younger generation to acquire resources in those languages and thus digest the information about Christianity in a more direct, reliable and comprehensive way. Besides the formal education received in China, a good number of the younger scholars have the experiences of studying abroad, attending the overseas academic exchange programs, visiting the seminaries, divinity schools and the departments of religious studies in the universities overseas, etc. They thus have a lot of opportunities to contact the Christian scholars abroad and to know the recent developments of both Christianity as a living religion and Christian studies as an academic discipline. It is evident that the communications between Chinese and Western scholars to a certain extent helped some Chinese scholars to overcome the ideological barrier or prejudice against Christianity. It can be said that whereas the senior scholars normally conduct their study from a relatively distant position and taking Christianity merely as part of human civilization, the understanding of Christianity the younger generation achieved is much more concrete and comprehensive. However, it is noteworthy that based on the results of the survey and the academic background of the participants, there seems to be some sort of loose correlation between the younger scholars' attitudes towards Christianity and their academic background or specialties. Generally speaking, scholars specializing in Marxist Philosophy usually hold a more indifferent or even alienated attitude towards Christianity as a religion, especially the confessional or devotional aspect of Christianity. At the same time, very few of these Marxist scholars have made the commitment to Christianity.

Thirdly, the internal development of Christian studies as an academic subject in the Chinese academia is another important factor. The senior scholar had to grope and struggle for ways to establish this new discipline when they started the study of Christianity, with extremely limited resources and the uncertain political situation at that time. After years of development, the younger generation scholars can develop their research on the groundwork prepared by their seniors with relatively plentiful resources at their disposal.

Referring to Prof. He Gaunghu's hypothesis, the results of this survey seems to support the overall observations that there are some significant differences between the older or second generation and the younger or third generation. In terms of religious affiliation, this new or third generation of scholars as a whole is relatively more religious and less alienated to the Christian churches. In terms of academic orientation, the new generation tends to be more specialists rather than generalists, to be more open to the spiritual dimension, and to be more socially engaged in a more public way.

As a survey aiming at identifying the differences between the older and younger generations of scholars and sketching the characteristics of the younger generation, it is far from comprehensive due to the size of the sample and the number of questions asked. Though one may find some significant differences between the two generations, some sort of commonalities among the younger scholars and some general trends of development, one can hardly draw any definite or decisive conclusion on the new generation of scholars of Christian studies in Mainland China from the results of this survey alone. More time and concrete evidences are needed in order to further explore how the future development of Christian studies will be effected by the characteristics of the scholars of this new generation. It is noteworthy that during the interview, many participants expressed that it is time to conduct a similar survey because enough materials have been accumulated in this area since 1980s to support such kind of survey. Furthermore, a similar survey on a broader scale will be beneficial to our understanding of the past and will serve as a reference for the future.[7]

Die Reihe "Studien zur interkulturellen Geschichte des Christentums" arbeitet im Überschneidungsgebiet von Missions- und Religionswissenschaft, Ökumenik und Interkultureller Theologie. In historischer, sozialwissenschaftlicher und theoretischer Erforschung verfolgt sie die Frage der Identität des lokalen und globalen Christentums. Sie tut dies in Anerkennung grundlegender Transformationen (z.B. Technisierung, Globalisierung, Migration, Ökologie), der Bezugnahme auf die Andersdenkenden und Andersglaubenden und im Blick auf die Zukunft der Menschheit.

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