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# Chinese Theological Review: 31

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## From the Editor

This volume of the Chinese Theological Review contains articles that continue to emphasize the importance and significance of the further contextualization of Chinese Christian theology in a situation where church membership has expanded and where more than 60 percent of China's population live in cities. The demographic profile of Chinese Christians has changed dramatically in the 21st century. More church goers are now young, educated, urban-based and more cosmopolitan in orientation. Chinese Christian leaders agree that the rapid transformation of China and its people requires greater efforts in the contextualization of Chinese Christian theology.

In his speech "Further Contextualize Christianity in China, Promote the Tradition of Love for Church and Country, and Run the Church well in the New Era" delivered at the double celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Three-self Patriotic Movement and the 40th anniversary of the founding of the China Christian Council on September 23, 2020 in Shanghai, Rev. Xu Xiaohong, Chair of the TSPM, recalled that the organization's establishment in 1954, had paved the way for union worship among churches across the country, the promotion of church unity and the dismantling of denominational differences. This movement freed the Chinese Church from the control of western, denominationally based missions. Another important milestone was the formation in 1980 of a national ecclesial organization, the China Christian Council, at the Third National Conference of Chinese Christianity. Since then, the CCC and TSPM have developed a dual-council model of

governance that has served well the interests of Chinese churches. Rev. Xu went on to summarize the journey taken by the CCC&TSPM in the institutionalization of a post-denominational, uniting church in China, the problems and challenges it has confronted and how the TSPM will continue to play a role in making churches stronger, better understood and accepted in Chinese socialist society. This has necessitated deepening theological thinking in seminaries and churches as well as encouraging churches to play a more active and visible role in society, so that there will be a shift from a “Christianity in China” to a “Christianity of China.”

In his speech “Continue the further contextualization of Christianity in China and enhance the church’s adaptation to socialist society” delivered at the 40th anniversary celebration of the China Christian Council, Rev. Wu Wei, CCC President, recalled the difficulties encountered in church restoration after the “Cultural Revolution” in the 1980s. Christians all over the country encountered huge shortages of meeting places, Bibles and hymnals, the lack of pastors, and the insufficiency of funds for the restoration and rebuilding of churches. Chinese churches have come a long way in the past four decades: the number of churches, meeting points and preachers have rapidly increased, but the greater change, Wu notes, has taken place at the level of church management and institutional improvement. To be well governed, the church has had to establish rules and procedures, comply with legal requirements and improve democratic management.

Another significant milestone highlighted by Wu Wei was the membership of the CCC in the World Council of Churches (WCC) beginning in 1991. This opened up opportunities for Chinese churches to participate in more international meetings, stimulating fruitful exchange visits

among scholars, seminary professors and church pastors. Study in overseas theological colleges broadened the perspectives of a new generation of Chinese clergy all of which have enhanced theological education and research in China. At the same time, he stresses the importance for the Chinese church to nurture a Christianity that imbibes fine elements of traditional Chinese culture, and that is guided by socialist core values and propagated in a way that is appreciated by the people. Wu reiterates that the Chinese Church “will maintain its basic beliefs, core doctrines and liturgy and preserve the inherited, biblically based traditions of the Reformation and the ecumenical church, deeply distilling from within doctrine that which is conducive to social harmony, the progress of the times and the construction of a healthy civilization.”

In her article “Promoting the Further Contextualization of Hymns: Experience and reflections on editing the New Hymnal and its Supplement,” Reverend Cao Shengjie gives a detailed account of the making of the *New Hymnal*, between 1981 and 1983. She guides us through a multi-tiered, complex process involving hundreds of participants and a nation-wide search for “Chinese originated hymns” that could be included in the brand new collection of hymns. As head of the working committee set up by the CCC&TSPM in 1981, Rev. Cao was given the daunting task of compiling a hymnal that could be used in union worship in a post-denominational era. The two principles that guided the committee’s task were to show “mutual respect and inclusiveness” and encourage the “further contextualization of hymns.” In Rev. Cao’s view, “contextualization” had already begun in China as early as the Tang dynasty when hymns of praise had been composed by Syriac monks, among the earliest Christian missionaries to China, incorporating Chinese cultural and religious elements. Three of these



“ancient hymns” were included in the volume. Besides new hymns that were composed, included in the collection were hymns expressed in numerous local dialects or had music based on popular Chinese folk tunes. As an integral part of Chinese spiritual and religious life, the singing of hymns not only provided a way of reaching the Chinese people and spreading the gospel but also offered a medium for local expressions of praise, joy and lamentations. The singing of shared hymns brought a greater sense of church unity. Hymnals, in effect, functioned as basic “theological textbooks” that could be appreciated and better understood in the multi-lingual, multi-cultural and multi-religious milieu of Chinese society.

Gao Feng’s article on “The Basic Project of Christian Contextualization: Attempting a Chinese biblical theology and hermeneutics in the new era through an interpretation of Chinese church history” explains why the theological interpretation of the Bible is an essential and fundamental part of the process of further contextualizing Christianity in China. Perspectives and attitudes towards the Bible and how it should be interpreted were handed down by early missionaries, many of whom held conservative and fundamentalist views so that for many generations of Chinese Christians in the 19th and 20th century, there tended to be a conservative view of the Bible and acceptance of its “inerrancy.” Gao posits that without a good knowledge and understanding of church history and the multiple layers of western-centric interpretations of the Bible, church canon and doctrines, it would be difficult for Chinese Christians to develop an approach to interpret the Bible in the present political and socio-economic context of China. He believes the first step to be taken would be to adopt a “theological interpretation of the Bible,” recognizing the “openness and publicity” of such a process and to acknowledge that it

involves the interpretation and reinterpretation of Scripture, in different historical and cultural contexts.

Chen Yilu's article "K. H. Ting's Theological Thoughts enlighten the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity" provides interesting glimpses and insights into the life and work of Bishop K. H. Ting, and his leadership and contributions during two significant transitional periods of Chinese contemporary history. The first was the era of transition from a Republican China to a Socialist China and the second was from the end of the Cultural Revolution, to the era of "Reform and Opening up." Chen points out that in both eras, K. H. Ting was concerned about the relationship between socialism and Christianity. In China, he had been influenced by the progressive ideas of Y. T. Wu and while working with the World Student Christian Federation in the 1940s and early 1950s in Geneva, he had met many socialist intellectuals. Chen Yilu focuses on three major aspects of Bishop Ting's Theological Thought that he believes have laid sound foundations for the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity. In the New China, Bishop Ting was particularly concerned about the adaptation of Christians to socialist society. Advocating an inclusive approach, he highlighted the concept of the Cosmic Christ. His emphasis on the idea that "God is Love" affirmed that God's love is all encompassing and extends to Christians and non-Christians alike. According to Chen Yilu, Ting's advocacy of the "Harmonious Co-existence of Christ and China," was meant "to correct prejudices against China and against non-believers," representing theological reflections in a "non-Christianity centered world."

Chen Yongtao, in his article "Incarnation – The Word of God and the Further Contextualization of Christianity in China" notes that the introduction of Christianity through western missions to China had led to "cultural alienation"

among Chinese Christians so that the contextualization of Chinese Christianity is a necessary process “requiring the Chinese Church to imbue it with substantive content through positive and active thinking.” He stresses the importance of *Tao* 道 in understanding what the Incarnation means for the Chinese. Given the fact that Chinese culture is ethically rather than theoretically-oriented, for Chinese Christians, Jesus Christ, the revealed Word (*Tao*) of God, is not so much an object of theoretical thinking as it is an example to be followed and emulated. In the Chinese Bible, the Chinese character *Tao* 道 is used to translate ‘Word.’ For Chen, a Christology of the Tao will extend our understanding of God’s Word to the practical and ethical realms where religious faith and ethical life can be integrated. Secondly, as the written Word of God, the events of Exodus and Easter provide focal points of biblical faith, representing the liberating nature and inclusive character of God’s Kingdom, on which the development of Christian theology should be based. According to Chen, the third form of the Word of God is the Church’s proclamation which is inseparable from the social, cultural, political, and economic context in which the Church exists. Chen says that how the Church proclaims God’s Word in “a ruptured world and wounded society, and whether the Church heals the wound or makes it worse, is the subject that one must reflect upon in the process of proclaiming God’s Word.”

In her article on “Cultural elements in the construction of a Chinese Christology,” Wang Jiawei further discusses the relationship between theology and culture from the perspective of the Incarnation and analyzes the cultural factors present in the construction of Chinese Christology. She refers to the work of Chinese theologians on Christology in the 20th century, including the contributions of Bishop K. H. Ting, Rev. Chen Zemin and Rev. Wang Weifan. Given the

ethnic, cultural, religious and regional diversity in China, she believes that Katherine Tanner's pattern of "style" can help in "seeking a common ground while reserving differences," in bridging the gap between believers and non-believers, and constructing a civilized and harmonious society centered on socialist core values. Wang Jiawei believes that in the process, the Christology of the Chinese Church will combine the inherited, universal classic doctrines, with an integration of theology and culture, "in order to construct a more comprehensive, inclusive Christology with a Chinese cultural style in the 21st century."

In this issue, we have included an informative presentation on "Keeping faith and transforming tomorrow: Impact, challenge and opportunity of COVID-19" delivered by Lin Manhong at a webinar on "Women, Faith and Diplomacy: Keeping Faith and Transforming Tomorrow" organized by the Asia Committee on Religion and Peace (ACRP). It provides some interesting details about women's responses to COVID-19 in China in 2020. Also included is the 2020 report of the CCC&TSPM on its work for the year giving updated information on new accomplishments in its "eleven ministries" despite the difficulties posed by the pandemic. The responses of Chinese churches to the challenges of the pandemic have been inspiring.

The purpose of the CTR has always been to inform and engage Christians overseas in the theological thinking and ministries of the CCC&TSPM which have grown in scope and outreach over the last two decades. When the CTR was begun in 1985, it was Janice Wickeri who was entrusted by Bishop Ting with the challenging task of being translator, editor and production manager for the Review. She has done this faithfully and professionally for thirty-five years, shaping the CTR into an invaluable repository documenting the transformation of churches in China and the theological

reflections of Chinese Christians. I am in great awe of what Janice Wickeri has been able to do single-handedly in keeping up with the information flow and production of the Review over thirty-five years as well as ensuring its uninterrupted circulation to seminaries, educational institutions and ecumenical partners around the world. Both the CCC & TSPM and FTESEA have expressed their deep appreciation for Janice's contributions in letters that are shared in this volume.

It is a great honor and privilege for me to be the new editor of the CTR. I have accepted the task with great trepidation and will be working closely with FTESEA and CCC&TSPM in ensuring that there will be continuity in the production of the CTR. I am extremely grateful for the support given in this task by Lin Manhong and the great team from the CCC&TSPM and NJUTS.

Last but not least, I wish to mention the increased focus on further digitization for the CTR. It is hoped that more readers and researchers can have better access to issues of the Review by having online versions available at the FTESEA, Globethics and Amity Foundation websites. At the same time, being aware of the digital divide and the difficulties of access to the internet in some places, the FTESEA has decided to continue printing a limited number of hard copies for some seminaries and individuals. Inquiries concerning this can be sent to: [ctreditor@gmail.com](mailto:ctreditor@gmail.com)

Theresa C. Carino, editor  
Manila

## **Further Contextualize Christianity in China<sup>1</sup>, Promote the Tradition of Love for Church and Country, and Run the Church well in the New Era**

坚持中国化方向，弘扬爱国爱教传统，办好新  
时代的中国教会

中国基督教发起三自爱国运动70周年总结

XU XIAOHONG 徐晓鸿

Today, we are gathered here to solemnly celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM).

To have this gathering is not easy. The COVID-19 pandemic that broke out at the beginning of the year was fierce and unprecedented. It was “a major public health emergency marked by the most rapid transmission and most extensive spread of infection, and the most challenging forms of control and prevention since the founding of the

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<sup>1</sup> The further contextualization of Christianity in China, (基督教中国化 *ji du jiao zhong guo hua*), hereafter referred to as “further contextualization,” has its foundation in the Bible, commits itself to the Christian core beliefs and inherits the traditions of both the universal church and the Reformation. Rooted in the fertile soil of Chinese culture, further contextualization aims to accomplish the fundamental shift from “Christianity in China” to “Chinese Christianity” which is adaptive to the socialist society with an integration of the socialist core values into the Church’s faith expression and social practices, bearing witness to the gospel in Chinese contexts. Although “the Sinicization of Christianity” has appeared on many occasions as an alternative translation including in some articles in the previous issues of CTR, it is not preferred by the Chinese Protestant Church as the official term in English.

People's Republic of China (PRC). From mid-June onwards, heavy and widespread rainfall in southern China triggered serious floods in the Yangtze River Basin. Faced with countless odds and challenges, the Chinese people, including Christians, through hard work and tremendous sacrifices, and under the strong leadership of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core, eventually overcame all obstacles and difficulties, achieving great success in epidemic control and prevention and in flood control and mitigation.

We wish to express our deepest condolences to families of martyrs and compatriots who died in the tough struggle against the pandemic and floods!

In the past 70 years, China's development and achievements have attracted worldwide attention. Under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), the people of all ethnic groups across the country have overcome obstacles and forged ahead, achieving the great leap of the Chinese nation from "standing up," "getting wealthy" to "becoming strong." In the past seven decades, under God's guidance, the Chinese Church has always held high the banner of "Loving Country and Loving Church," walked with the Party and the people, heart to heart, and made tremendous achievements.

At present, we are at the historical intersection of the "Two Centenary Goals." It is a critical period for the Chinese Church to promote the further contextualization and adaptation of Chinese Christianity to socialist society. Let us hereby review the achievements and experiences of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) gained over the last 70 years, and unite in our efforts to advocate a well-functioning Chinese Church in the new era, enhancing the spiritual legacy of "Loving Country and Loving Church" and realizing the vision of further contextualization.

On behalf of the National Committee of CCC&TSPM, I would like to extend a warm welcome to all leaders, guests and colleagues! I would like to pay our deepest respect to the memory of church pioneers such as Mr. Wu Yao-tsung (Y. T. Wu) and Bishop Ting Kuang-hsun (K. H. Ting) who initiated and furthered the Three-Self Patriotic Movement! I would like to pay deep tribute to our predecessors who have been committed to the TSPM! My heartfelt thanks go to all brothers and sisters, and friends at home and abroad who have shown continuing care, understanding and support to the TSPM.

## **Part One: Review of Past Achievements**

Seventy years ago, the Three-Self Reform Movement initiated by Mr. Y. T. Wu and other pioneers enabled the Chinese Church to achieve independence and self reliance. This great initiative, a crucial step in the further contextualization of Christianity, changed the development trajectory of the Chinese Church, laid the foundation for her adaptation to socialist society, and cleared the obstacles for a well-functioning national church. On September 23, 1950, *The People's Daily* published the full text of "Direction of Endeavor for Chinese Christianity in the Construction of New China" (commonly known as the "Three-Self Manifesto") as well as an editorial. The publication of the "Three-Self Manifesto" marked the start of the Chinese Church's journey in becoming self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating, bringing along Christians onto the path of loving Church and loving country and becoming a positive force in the construction of New China.

"While hard and long is the path, persevere and we will get near." Looking back over the past seventy years, the Chinese Church has gradually moved towards the goal of becoming well-governing, well-supporting, and well-



propagating, with the achievements of the TSPM manifested mainly in the following stages:

1. *Resolutely Follow the Three-Self Patriotic Path and remove the foreignness of Chinese Christianity*

The founding of the PRC in 1949 completely changed China's tragic modern history of being poor, weak, and bullied for more than a century. Under the leadership of the CCP, the Chinese nation embarked on a magnificent path towards great rejuvenation.

We cannot deny that missionaries have, in the past, made positive contributions to the Chinese people, but most of them held a strong sense of the superiority of western values thereby transforming and eliminating the sense of mission in Chinese culture, causing severe estrangement, contradiction and conflict between Christianity and Chinese society. The Chinese church became an "offspring" of foreign missions, and was perceived as a "foreign religion" by the Chinese people. The most outstanding contribution of the TSPM has been to remove the label of "foreign religion" from Christianity and change Chinese people's perception of it. This has completely freed the Chinese church from the control of foreign forces, and the self-governing, self-supporting, and self-propagating Chinese Church is now firmly governed by those who love our country and our church,

2. *Assist in the Implementation of the Party's Religious Policies and Safeguard the Legitimate Rights and Interests of the Chinese Church*

Since the establishment of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (National TSPM) in 1954, the local Christian Three-Self committees have dedicated

themselves to assisting the government in implementing the Party's freedom of religious belief policy and religious regulations in accordance with the law. Wide ranging field research of grassroots churches and TSPMs were launched to identify and understand the existing issues in church development. Contact with relevant local government departments was enhanced while various channels were established to facilitate the participation of Christians in the political process, to raise their concerns, and to safeguard the rights and interests of the church and its members.

Much work has been done not only in helping churches restore their properties and assist in the implementation of relevant policies, but also in offering advice and counsel in the process of revising the Constitution, laws and regulations concerning religions, making the Chinese Church a positive force in uniting believers, maintaining religious harmony and social stability.

### 3. *Adhere to the Biblical Teaching of Unity, and Establish a Unique Governance Model*

The TSPM freed the Chinese Church from the control of western denominational missions and promoted the way for United Worship among churches across the country. At the Third National Conference of Chinese Christianity held in 1980, the China Christian Council (CCC), a national ecclesial organization, was established, leading Chinese Christian unity into a new phase. In a spirit of labor division and cooperation, the CCC and National TSPM served together as "useful vessels" for the wellbeing of the Chinese Church. The CCC&TSPM formulated and revised the "Church Order of Protestant Churches in China" which laid a solid foundation for the Chinese Church to become a "uniting church," and guaranteed the accomplishment of Chinese Church unity in terms of institutions and regulations.

This year marks the 40th anniversary of the CCC's foundation. In the process of implementing the Three-Self principles, Chinese Christianity has gradually formed a CCC&TSPM governance model that suits China's national and religious conditions.

On the one hand, it continually guides the clergy and the lay in raising political awareness, upholding the patriotic tradition, fulfilling social responsibilities, and promoting the adaptation of Christianity to socialist society. On the other hand, it proactively serves churches and believers, playing the role of guiding, regulating and supervising the work of churches, and promoting a healthy and orderly development of the Chinese Church, so that more people are willing to hear the gospel and bear witness to Christ. This unique governance model has gradually matured in the context of Chinese society and churches, and the spirit of the TSPM has gradually been internalized and embedded into the structure and growth of the Chinese Church.

#### *4. Carry Out Church Ministries and Promote Harmonious and Healthy Development*

The TSPM is dedicated to building a well-functioning Chinese Church and promoting various ministries in accordance with the Three-Self Principle. According to incomplete statistics, there are currently 38 million Christians in China, 60,000 churches, over 14,000 ordained ministers, 22,000 full-time preachers and 22 seminaries. More than 85 million copies of the Bible have been published and distributed since the Reform and Opening Up.

In the last 70 years, the Chinese Church has focused on establishing and improving rules and regulations, leveraging the strengths of Christianity and guiding believers in

being salt and light in various social services contributing to poverty reduction. Christians join in community engagement in response to public health crises, and work in health care, elderly care, disabilities assistance, targeted poverty alleviation, disaster relief, education, public facilities construction, environmental protection and other fields.

5. *Deepen the Construction of Theological Thinking and Lay the Theoretical Underpinning for the further contextualization of Christianity*

In order to change the situation whereby Chinese Christianity has long been overshadowed by western theological thinking, to develop a clearer understanding of God's unique leadership of the Chinese Church, and to promote the adaptation of Chinese Christianity to socialist society, the CCC&TSPM convened a plenary committee meeting in Jinan in 1998. The adoption of the resolution "On Strengthening the Construction of Theological Thinking" was a milestone for consolidating the achievements of the TSPM, deepening its meaning, and rooting Christianity in the soil of Chinese culture.

In 2012, CCC&TSPM formed a theological thought construction preaching team, and designed a 2013-2017 five-year plan outline for the preaching team, envisioning a formulation of Chinese Christianity's own theological system and providing theoretical underpinnings for the wellbeing of the Chinese Church in accordance with the Three-Self principles and the further contextualization of Christianity in China.

6. *Strengthening Fellowship with the ecumenical movement and enhancing the International Influence of the Chinese church*

Sticking to the Three-Self principles, the Chinese Church has no affiliation with foreign churches, but being an independent church does not mean seclusion and stagnation, but the building up of Christian ties, developing amicable exchanges, and establishing cooperative partnerships with churches and Christian organizations from all over the world on the basis of mutual respect, equality and friendship, and mutual sharing.

In friendly exchanges with others, the Chinese Church shares China's policy on religious freedom with the ecumenical movement, bears witness to the progress and development of the Chinese church and society, and makes positive contributions to non-governmental exchanges. Churches in mainland China also further exchanges with those in Hong Kong and Macao on the principle of "non-affiliation, non-interference, and mutual respect". We also strengthen friendly exchanges with churches in Taiwan and overseas Chinese churches. We resolutely safeguard the sovereignty of the country and the church, and oppose the use of the Christian religion to infiltrate China and undermine the Three-Self principles. In the 70 years since the TSPM was launched, its trajectory and accomplishments have enriched the universal character of the church. By sharing our experiences and bearing good witness to the diverse development of the church world wide, it has also strengthened the confidence of some Asian, African and Latin American churches in taking an independent path. The Chinese Church will actively participate in the ecumenical fellowship with a more open attitude and play its due role.

The TSPM advances with the times and tries to pursue progress and renewal. In 2000, the CCC&TSPM held a meeting to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the Movement, and published “Stride into the New Century with One Heart, Loving Country and Loving Church”. At its 60th anniversary in 2010, the TSPM published “Inheriting the fine legacy of Love for Country and Love for Church, Undertake the Historic Mission of the TSPM in the New Era.” The Movement’s mission is to continuously explore ways and means for Chinese Christianity to better adapt to socialist society, and clearly adhere to the path of further contextualization of Christianity in China.

In this new historical stage, how should Chinese Christianity understand the social responsibility and historic mission of the TSPM in the new socialist era?

How do we build a well-functioning Chinese church commensurate with the situation of our motherland, with its own identity and in accordance with the three-self principles? These are the concerns that Chinese Christians should reflect upon and directions they should diligently pursue.

In 2014, when celebrating the 60th anniversary of the TSPM, the CCC&TSPM formally proposed “the further contextualization of Christianity in China”. Four symposiums have successively been held since 2014 to promote this.

The “Outline of the Five-Year Plan for the Further Contextualization of Christianity in China (2018-2023), was formulated and implemented in 2017 in order to deepen the construction of theological thinking in the new era, promote the harmonious and healthy development of the church, bring into play Christianity’s positive role, practice the core values of socialism, and continuously expand the breadth and depth of adapting to socialist society and helping to clarify the basic meaning, significance, goals and tasks, as well as specific measures and organizational

guarantees in furthering contextualization. It is pointed out that further contextualization is Biblically based, committed to core beliefs, inheriting the traditions of the universal church and the Reformation, and rooted in the fertile soil of Chinese culture, in faith and social engagement, to practice the socialist core values, spread the gospel and witness for Christ, and build a well-functioning church.

Whether it is the initiation of the TSPM, or running the church well according to the Three-Self Principle and strengthening the construction of theological thought, these are all aimed at building a contextualized Chinese Christian Church rooted more deeply in Chinese culture and adapted to the conditions of Chinese society in the era of transformation, moving from being a “Christianity in China” to becoming a “Christianity *of* China”.

## **Part Two: Reflecting on our experiences**

To realize further contextualization has been the common aspiration and vision of different generations of Chinese Christians. At the start of the 20th century, some fore-runners among Chinese Christians advocated self-reliance and indigenization. However, because of the absence of a single main body representing the Chinese Church and the lack of strong support from the majority of Christians and those from different walks of life, their influence and achievements were extremely limited.

It was not until the initiation of the TSPM in 1950 that the Chinese Church truly embarked on independent development, taking a firm step towards the further contextualization of Christianity in China, receiving strong support from the Party and the government, and winning the approbation of both believers and the people. Adhering to further contextualization is not only an inevitable choice in running the church well in accordance with the Three-Self

Principle, but also the high expectations of the government and people for Chinese Christianity.

The United Front Work Conference held in 2015 and the National Religious Work Conference in 2016 regarded “adhering to the path of further contextualization of religions in our country” as an important task. In the report to the 19th National Congress of the CCP, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that it was necessary to “fully implement the Party’s basic policies on religious work, adhere to the further contextualization of religions in our country, and actively guide religions to adapt to socialist society.”

Adhering to the path of further contextualization of Christianity in China not only means practicing independence and self-governance in terms of institutions and regulations, but more importantly signifies promoting political awareness and the construction of theological thought, so that the Chinese Church can adapt to socialist society. Based on the history and progress made since the initiation of the TSPM, we have summarized three insights.

1. *The TSPM is progressive, integrating the patriotic and spiritual power of Chinese Christians*

Patriotism is the heart and soul of the Chinese people. When the TSPM was launched, it declared the patriotic stance of Chinese Christianity, and demonstrated that Chinese Christians had full confidence in the infinitely bright future of the PRC under the leadership of the CCP. This is a political movement that originated from within Christianity. It always takes, as its own responsibility, to elevate patriotism and social responsibility among Chinese Christians. Using the earth-shaking changes in Chinese society as a vivid teaching resource, we are dedicated to deepening patriotism and public awareness among Christians, uniting and guiding them to stand in solidarity with our country and people to realize our common vision.



We have always clearly realized that the harmonious and healthy development of Chinese Christianity benefits from the development of our country and the implementation of the Party's freedom of religious belief. In the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, inheriting and carrying on the spirit of patriotism is the deepest driving force for adhering to the direction of further contextualization and uniting Christians to participate in economic construction and work with our people to realize the great rejuvenation of our nation. Consciously supporting the leadership of the CCP, bravely assuming civic social responsibilities, and practicing the core values of socialism have become the ideological consensus and daily practice of more and more Chinese Christians. It is especially notable that in this year's response to the COVID-19 pandemic and the fight against floods, Chinese Christians have made more than 200 million yuan worth of donations. Chinese Christians firmly stand in solidarity with our people through working together and helping one another in the face of disasters. This reflects the elevated spirit of Christian patriotism and enriches the patriotic meaning of Christianity in the new era.

The TSPM united all Christians willing to run the church well in accordance with the principles of independence and self-governance and in keeping with gospel truth. We eliminated sectarian disputes and realized unity in worship. Whether it is "to build a Chinese Church led by the Chinese people ourselves" or "from the Three-Selfs to the Three-Goods;" whether it is to "strengthen the construction of theological thought" or "promote the further contextualization of our Christianity," the TSPM has always adhered to the mission and goal of running the church well and to "join and knit together" Christians in various places. In order to run the church well, the TSPM promoted the establishment of the China Christian Council to highlight its

ecclesial nature. The TSPM, which is now both political and ecclesial, is a progressive force in promoting Chinese Church development, and is deeply loved by God and the people.

2. *The TSPM is innovative, constantly exploring ways to adapt Chinese Christianity to socialist society*

The Chinese Church has been carrying out internal reforms for 70 years, winning recognition and praise from all believers. From the perspective of church development, results have been good. In the process of constantly seeking to adapt to social development and the needs of the times, the innovative nature of the TSPM enables the Chinese Church to show its robust vitality and endows her with a source of power. The launch of the TSPM is itself an innovation, enabling the Chinese Church to resolutely eliminate the imperialist power and influence upon Christianity, to resist imperialist aggression, and maintain world peace and justice. The innovative nature of the TSPM lies in endorsing the leadership of the CCP, sharing in weal and woe with the nation, living in harmony with the other religions of our country, and guiding Christians to actively participate in the great undertakings of our country in its Construction and Reform period.

The innovation of the TSPM is reflected in the promotion of Chinese Christianity to form a unique CCC&TSPM governance model, which has become an important organizational guarantee for Chinese Christianity to adhere to the Three-self Patriotic Principle, deepen the Movement, and adapt to socialist society. In recent years, the CCC&TSPM has been constantly adapting to the new situation and new requirements, exploring the development path of the Movement in a new era, and focusing on areas such as updating institutional rules, doing business in accordance with laws and regulations, cultivating church

talents, pastoring and serving believers, and consolidating united worship, participating in social services, strengthening exchanges and links with overseas churches. We have charted a new path in church governance, offering a Chinese solution and a Chinese model for the construction of church polity in the ecumenical movement.

Theological development that encourages Chinese Christian theological thinking to grow roots in Chinese culture is one embodiment of the TSPM's innovativeness.

From the initiation of the TSPM, to the construction of theological thought, and to the movement for the further contextualization of Christianity, the TSPM has continued to innovate with further contextualization as its most fundamental motivation and goal so as to see the adaptation of Christianity to socialism. The CCC&TSPM explored and improved the new model of "training, demonstration, preaching, and promotion" on theological thinking by its preaching team. On the basis of inheriting the essence of faith and promoting fine traditions, it reflects the spiritual pursuit of Christians in the new era, and interprets the gospel message on the basis of Chinese culture, consolidating the theological foundation for Christianity's adaptation to socialist society, enriching and improving the theological system with Chinese characteristics and in coherence with the requirements of the times, and promoting the renewal of Chinese Christianity.

### 3. *The Movement has a long-term nature, further strengthening the mission of contextualizing Chinese Christianity*

"Hundreds of boats compete with one other, and those who strive will become first". Today, the task of the TSPM remains unfinished. It is a long term goal of the TSPM to forge ahead to realize the Chinazation of Christianity in the

new era of socialism and it is the direction of the TSPM in the new era. We must try our best to unite Chinese Christians who love our country and love our church to work together to build a church that upholds Christ and preserves unity; a church that is loyal to the truth of the Bible, rooted in Chinese culture, and has a contextualized Chinese theology; a church that has the courage to assume social responsibilities and to bear witness to Life through how we live it; a church that belongs to the communion of saints and that makes unique contributions to the ecumenical movement.

The Movement freed Chinese Christianity from the influence of colonialism and imperialism in the past, and truly realized self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation. It provided valuable practical experience for theological reflection and laid a good foundation for the further contextualization of Christianity. Past experiences have shown that only by continuing to adhere to the Three-Self Patriotic Principle, continuously responding to social expectations, and working together with the people of our country, can Chinese Christians better adapt to the development of socialist society and truly run the Chinese Church well. Only by running the Church well can the positive role of Christianity be better appreciated, and more beautiful testimonies of the faith of the Chinese Church be shown to the world.

### **Part Three: Problems and Challenges**

The 70-year history of the TSPM has shown remarkable results for all to see. As our country enters the decisive stage of building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way, and socialist modernization is accelerating, Chinese Christianity has also been undergoing profound transformation and changes. With a stabilizing numerical growth and fast changing demographic structure of the

believers, the Chinese Church is entering a transitional period.

The numerical growth of believers has stabilized while the change in the demographic structure has accelerated. The Church is in a period of transition: shifting from focusing on quantitative growth to the pursuit of improving the quality of faith, from focusing on personal testimony to constructing theology, from emphasizing the expansion of church ministry to actively integrating into it social services, and from focusing on self-growth to seeking to learn from churches in the ecumenical movement.

There is currently a misunderstanding in the church that the Three-Self task has been completed and the Three-Self Principle is outdated. In the new era of socialism and with the new situation of Chinese Christian development, we need to guard against the phenomenon of downplaying or deserting the Three-Self Principle in the churches, continue to pursue the legacy of “Loving Church and Country,” firmly grasp the Church’s direction, raise the quality of personnel training, strengthen the ideological firmness of young leaders, and guide believers to stay firmly committed to their faith and political and national policies. It is clear that the TSPM must seek the healthy development of the church, contribute to social harmony and stability and face up to the following problems and challenges under the current new situation.

A weak institutional framework makes it difficult to effectively play a bridging role.

At present, our country is vigorously promoting the modernization of the national governance system and capabilities, and the development in social governance has raised requirements in the standards of church governance. For over 40 years of Reform and Opening up, the CCC&TSPM governance model of the Chinese Church has played

an irreplaceable role in improving church governance through the processes of legalization, democratization, and standardization.

However, it is undeniable that some local level CCs&TSPMs still suffer from relatively weak institutional structures. They are behind in upholding regulations, have an inadequate grasp of policies, are limited in theological vision, insufficiently connected with and lacking in supervision and service to local churches, and lacking in a system of democratic governance. This situation needs to be improved, and the awareness of the rule of law needs to be strengthened. The lack of institution building has made it difficult for them to effectively play bonding and bridging roles, thus weakening church cohesion.

1. *The overall shortage of talents in the church becomes an obstacle to running the church well*

Since the Reform and Opening up, Christianity in China has developed rapidly, but the training of clergy has been relatively slow. Many factors such as rapid economic and social development and social transformation have led to a shortage of “talented” personnel in the churches. Although the Chinese Church has enhanced its capacity building through various means, at this stage, there remains a huge gap in the ratio of clergy to believers.

The curricula and theological education system of the Chinese Church need urgent adjustments in order to promote further contextualization, run the church well based on the Three-Self Principle, and to meet the social development needs and demands of the era. There has to be increased professionalism of teachers, and the expansion of channels for talent development. In order to promote research and interpretation of Chinese Christian classics,

beliefs and doctrines, there is an urgent need to increase the number of talented personnel with good Chinese cultural knowledge and high theological attainments.

In the information age, foreign infiltration, heresies and cults have spread with the rapid development of the Internet, posing challenges to clergy. At the same time, local churches have not always been able to make proper or good use of talented personnel. These problems need to be given attention. On the whole, the training, employment, and social security system related to personnel development in Chinese Churches lags far behind the needs of social development in the new era. The shortage of trained church personnel severely constrains running the church well in accordance with the Three-Self Principle.

2. *The existence of unregistered meeting points hinders the visible unity of the church*

For 70 years, the TSPM has always regarded unity and service in the body of Christ as the goal and requisite of running the church well. As long as faith is orthodox and law-abiding, the CCC&TSPM shall engage with others in service and in unity. The reason why there are unregistered meeting points in our country are complex. Some are the product of external influences and historical legacies while others derive from previous denominational differences. There are also factors such as increasing social differentiation, the influence of postmodernism, the unreasonable spread of church sites, poor governance, the lack of cohesiveness, the shortage of pastors in existing churches, and so on.

The existence of unregistered meeting points has brought certain difficulties to running the church well according to the Three-Self Principle. It has affected the work of the TSPM in bringing unity to the body of Christ, and seriously hindered the visible unity of the church. Local

churches should actively provide services for believers in accordance with the Three-Self Principles, and do a good job of uniting and guiding believers at unregistered meeting points outside the CCC&TSPM network.

Meanwhile, we resolutely oppose the use of Christianity as a cover for illegal purposes by any organization or individual. We support the action of the government in banning unregistered meeting points which fall into this category based on the law and for national security reasons.

3. *The increasing infiltration by foreign forces is undermining the achievements of independence and self-governance*

There have been endless ways in which Christianity has been employed as a means of infiltration. There are those who have entered China as tourists, lecturers, investors, or engaged in public charity activities. Others who share the same ethnic Chinese identity and language have used them advantageously to carry out underground theological training and support leaders of unregistered gathering points. Still others use online platforms to proselytize in China. These infiltration activities undermine the three-self principles, and seriously endanger the adaptation of Chinese Christianity to socialist society. They challenge the achievements of the TSPM.

In recent years, criminal activities by foreign forces using religion to endanger our country's national security have been rising, severely undermining regional stability and public safety, and severely endangering national sovereignty and unity. With the growing influence of the China model in the world, Western countries led by the United States hope to continue their dominance of the world order using Western concepts, norms and values, creating disputes to contain China's development, and promoting the so-called "China threat theory" in public opinion. They use



Christianity to play the human rights card, exert pressure on China, interfere in Hong Kong affairs, use Western ideology to assess and interfere in internal Church issues, severely demonizing the TSPM, in an attempt to divide China and make Christianity a tool for westernization.

Therefore, we must always remain vigilant, resolutely resist foreign infiltration, and safeguard the achievements of our churches' independence and self-governance.

4. *The frequent inroads made by heresies and cults, has been damaging to the image of the TSPM*

After the Reform and Opening up, Christianity developed rapidly, and many heresies and cults under the banner of Christianity also emerged. "The Priesthood of all believers" became one of the excuses for them to interpret the Bible and Christian doctrines at will. In places lacking in supervision and where basic beliefs were still weak, the combination of extreme charismatic beliefs and traditional folk feudal superstitions produced some Christian heresies and cults that took root in the countryside.

In recent years, heresies and cults have shown many new features. Some foreign heresies and cults, such as the Shincheonji Church from South Korea, have entered China and established contact with domestic cultic organizations that provide a platform for their spread within our country. The internet has made the spread of heresies and cults even more clandestine, extensive and destructive. The lack of positive publicity and guidance through public media has given these heresies and cults more opportunities to undermine church and society.

Heresies and cults brutally trample on social order, deny the canonicity of the Bible, twist church doctrines and rules, trick believers into "renouncing the faith by paying attention to the deceitful spirits and teachings of demons"

(1 Timothy 4:1), seriously damaging the public image of the TSPM.

Over the years, there have been numerous incidents of heresies and cults endangering personal safety and causing the defrauding of believers for profit. During this year's COVID-19 pandemic, cult organizations such as the Shincheonji Church used the pandemic to proselytize and spread their "doomsday" panic, which undermined social stability and hurt people both physically and mentally.

## **Part Four: Facing the Future**

"The Hero's Pass of the enemy is like a wall of iron, yet with firm strides, we will conquer its summit." At present, although the TSPM has made many achievements, there are still problems that cannot be ignored. In the future, we need to join hands in solving these problems, starting from the "Five Continues," (see below) to further the contextualization of Chinese Christianity, to expand and deepen Christian adaptation to socialist society and move towards a Chinese Christianity that reflects the new era.

1. *Continue to uphold the legacy of Love for Country and Love for Church, and carry forward the Three-Self patriotic spirit*

To run the Chinese church well in the new era, we must continue to uphold the legacy of "Love for Country and Church," and vigorously carry forward the spirit of the TSPM. As important promoters of the Three-Self Principle, CCC&TSPM institutions across the country must continuously improve their own system construction and supervision mechanisms, strengthen institutional development, effectively play the active role of religious organizations in promoting patriotism, and steadily point

the Chinese Church in the direction of a democratic, orderly, healthy development with love for God and love for people. Only in this way can we truly become a strong bridge and bond connecting the Party and government with believers.

The CCC&TSPM in various places across the country should thoroughly study the instructions and speeches of General Secretary Xi Jinping on religious work since the 18th National Congress of the CCP, especially the spirit of the Central United Front Work Conference and the National Religious Work Conference; earnestly implement the newly revised “Regulations on Religious Affairs” and its supporting regulations; firmly internalize the concept and the mindset of the rule of law. It is necessary to further implement the “Church Order of Chinese Protestant Churches,” the “Pastoral Staff Code of Conduct of Chinese Protestant Churches”, and run the church well in accordance with laws and regulations.

Chinese Christianity must always walk in step with our country and people, continuously enhance national self-esteem, self-confidence and pride, consciously transform patriotic thoughts and emotions into concrete actions that are compatible with socialist society, and consciously support the leadership of the CCP and the socialist system, firmly establish a sense of guarding territorial integrity, resolutely safeguard the unity of the motherland, national unity and social harmony, consciously serve the overall situation of the country’s development, and take the initiative to make a difference in the historical journey of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. In this way, we will continue to write a beautiful chapter on Loving Church and Country in Chinese Christianity in the historical process of realizing the Chinese Dream shared by all the sons and daughters of China.

2. *Continue to deepen the patriotic meaning of the Three-Self, enrich and improve Sinicized theological thought*

To run the Chinese Church well in the new era, we must continue to deepen the patriotic meaning of the Three-Self and take further contextualization as an important direction. We will continuously enrich and improve theological thinking, and empower seminaries and talents to play their respective roles. We must continue to optimize the structure of talent training, strengthening the construction and improvement of the talent echelon, to cultivate talents who are well rounded in spiritual, moral, intellectual and physical abilities. We must pay attention to the continuing education of pastoral staff, and strive to shape them into clerical talents who are “politically loyal, religiously accomplished, morally respectable and trustworthy at critical moments.” To this end, it is necessary to formulate the “Medium and Long-term Plan for the Training of Christian Talents in China,” to promote educational reforms and the development of seminaries and to formulate the “Outline of the Medium and Long-term Development Plan for Chinese Christian Theological Education” as soon as possible.

The TSPM gave birth to the theological construction of Christianity in our country, and provided it with rich research resources and concrete testimonies. Constructing theological thinking is the top priority of running the church well according to the Three-Self Principle. It is the core meaning of the further contextualization of Christianity in China and determines the breadth and depth of the adaptation of Christianity to a socialist society. In the future, we must continue to vigorously strengthen the construction of theological thinking, form interpretations and theological expressions of Christian classics with Chinese characteristics appropriate to the needs of the times, providing a theoretical underpinning for promoting the further contextualization of

Christianity. Guided by the outstanding problems identified, we will start from concrete conditions, draw lessons from historical experience, and consolidate the ideological foundation for the adaptation of Christianity to socialist society, further enriching and improving contextual theology. Meanwhile, we must continue to do a good job in the transformation and popularization of results in theological research, continue to expand the audience, and help Chinese Christians live their lives based on a true understanding of faith, a lively spirituality and positive attitudes. It will further enhance the overall meaning of the Three-Self Movement, enrich and improve the theological construction of Chinese Christianity in the new era, and provide a steady stream of ideological or theoretical support for the Chinese church in the new era.

3. *Continue to adhere to the Three-Self Principle, and strive to do a good job in the various ministries of the Chinese church*

To run the Chinese church well in the new era, we must continue to adhere to the Three-Self Patriotic Principle, consciously resist foreign infiltration, and dare to cast sword against hostile infiltration and destructive forces. We shall be wary of ideological infiltration using Christianity, wary of separatist activities carried out by foreign institutions under the banner of Christianity, wary of church separatist activities in the name of missions, and earnestly safeguard the hard-won independence of the Chinese Church. We must continue to work hard to do a good job in the various ministries of the Chinese Church, and use the concrete results of the healthy development of the Chinese Church to effectively counter all demonizing attacks by hostile forces.

The Three-Self Patriotic Movement is an innovative movement that will be long lasting, stable and far-reaching.

In future, we must continue to remove the imprint on Christianity as a “foreign religion” in our country, strengthen our role as light and salt in society, glorifying God and benefitting people. It is still necessary to continue to establish and perfect the “true self” in theology and promote Chinese Christianity as the authentic “Christianity of China”. We must continue to absorb the excellent legacy of Chinese culture, and root ourselves in its fertile soil, becoming a religion that the Chinese people identify with. We must continue to promote and practice the core values of socialism and work to further Christianity to truly adapt to socialist society.

4. *Continue to expand the Three-Self patriotic base and strengthen the cohesion of the Chinese Church*

To run the Chinese church well in the new era, we must continue to expand the Three-Self patriotic base. Chinese Christianity must further enhance internal unity on the basis of mutual respect, and strengthen the overall cohesion of Chinese Christianity. It must directly face the work of uniting with illegal gathering points, summarize and improve the effective practices and experiences of “church guiding meeting points,” bear one another with love, communicate with one another in peace, enhance mutual understanding through strengthened contacts, and resolve problems through active service. We should make good use of the media platform in the church, and tell the story of Chinese Christian Three-Self patriotism, patiently explain the meaning and goals of the TSPM, effectively eliminate the misunderstandings and doubts of some believers, further expand unity, strengthen cohesion, and promote the unity of the Chinese church as a whole.

Chinese Christianity must continue to expand the base of Three-Self patriotism, continue to dig deeper and sum up

the historical experience of the TSPM, inspire confidence in promoting the healthy and orderly development of Christianity, and further transform it into useful assistance for future work. We must actively seek out existing shortcomings and deficiencies in the development in order to promote the cohesiveness of the Chinese church. We must consciously abide by laws and regulations, carry out Christian activities in an orderly manner, prevent illegal and adverse events, prevent extremely harmful thoughts in Christianity, enhance awareness of resisting overseas infiltration activities, consciously safeguard the independent status of the Chinese Church in the worldwide church, and carry out foreign exchanges in the spirit of mutual respect, equality and friendliness. In this way, we will attract and closely unite Chinese Christians under the patriotic banner of the Three-Self.

5. *Continue to move towards the Three-Self Patriotic goal and actively adapt to socialist society*

To run the Chinese church well in the new era, we must continue to make solid progress towards the goal of the TSPM, strive to achieve the transition of the Chinese Church from the Three-Self to the Three-Good, and continue to adhere to the direction of the further contextualization of Christianity in the new historical period. We shall steadfastly follow the “Planning Outline to promote the Further Contextualization of Christianity,” to actively adapt to socialist society, so that we can witness for Christ in the motherland, run the church well, present a good image of Chinese Christianity, and play an active role in the construction and development of our motherland.

The further contextualization of Christianity in China is an important goal of running the church well according

to the Three-Self Principle. It is the objective requirement for the development of the Chinese Church itself. It is the only way to adapt to socialist society. It is the direction of the future of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. It is the ardent anticipation of the Party and the country and the responsibility of the clergy and the believers. To effectively promote the further contextualization in our country, we must start from the aspects of political identity, social adaptation, cultural integration, and respect for beliefs, firmly and consciously abide by the teachings of the Bible, practice the core values of socialism, carry forward the fine legacy of the Chinese nation, and demonstrate an overall image of Christianity characterized by unity and progress, peace and tolerance. In this way, we truly inherit and elevate the important and promising spirit of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

Dear leaders, guests and colleagues: After seventy years of hard work, the independent and self-governing Christian Church has made it in the annals of history. It is both a milestone and a new starting point. After seventy years of unrelenting efforts, Chinese Christianity has continued to innovate and advance through exploration, and has achieved fruitful results.

Everything in the past is a prologue. In the face of major changes in today's world unseen in a century, the seventy years of cumulative experiences of the Chinese Church will surely help the new mission and new responsibilities given to us in the new era. We will surely integrate Chinese traditional culture and assume social responsibilities, in continuing to tell the story of Chinese Christianity.

Let us hold high the Three-Self banner and abide by the Three-Self Principle, adhere to the direction of the further contextualization of Christianity in China, always keep faith,



hope, and love under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Let us move forward courageously and do our best to build a church with a harmonious and healthy development that wins the favor of both God and people. Let us build our country into a prosperous, democratic, civilized, harmonious and beautiful modern socialist country, and to make new contributions to the realization of the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation!

Rev. Xu Xiaohong is Chairman of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Chinese Protestant Church. He delivered this report at the conference to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches in China, on September 23, 2020 in Shanghai.

## **Continue the Further Contextualization of Christianity in China and enhance the Church's Adaptation to Socialist Society**

(Commemorating the 70th anniversary of the Three-self Patriotic Movement and the 40th anniversary of the founding of the China Christian Council)

**坚持基督教中国化方向，办好与社会主义社会相适应的中国基督教会**

**纪念三自爱国运动70周年、中国基督教协会成立40周年**

**WU WEI 吴巍**

This year (2020) marks the 70th anniversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the 40th anniversary of the founding of the China Christian Council. For Chinese Christianity, these two events are of great significance as they are closely related to two historic changes in our country.

The launch of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in 1950, especially the publication of *the Christian Manifesto*, clearly expressed the aspirations of the vast number of Chinese Christian pastors and believers to support the socialist new China led by the Chinese Communist Party, by completely cutting off all ties with imperialism, and building Chinese Christianity according to the Three-Self Principle. This was an important moment of historical change in China. The key choice made by the Chinese Church determined the way forward and influenced the trajectory of Chinese Christianity.

After the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, Chinese Christians, together with the broad masses of the people, experienced a rebirth from the “Cultural Revolution” that ushered in the spring of reform and opening up. With the implementation of the policy of freedom of religious belief, churches began to gradually recover. In October 1980, the third National Chinese Christian Conference was held. This was the first national Chinese Christian conference to be held after the reform and opening up. Confronted with many challenges, the conference first fully affirmed the great achievements made by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and then proposed that we should continue to adhere to the Three-Self Principles and make the Chinese Church a well-governed, well-supported, and well-propagated church. At the meeting, it was decided to establish a national organization for Christian affairs, the China Christian Council. At the meeting, Bishop K.H.Ting said:

*“After research and discussion, we can see clearly that the national Three-Self organization and the national organization for church affairs are both organizations with Christians as the main body. One is a people’s group composed of Chinese Christians as the people, and the other is a faith group composed of Chinese Christians as believers. If Sanzi (Three-Self) is a patriotic movement of Chinese Christians, then this church affairs organization will represent a patriotic movement of Chinese Christians. Both are patriotic and religious groups.”*

He added: *“The national church affairs organization and the national three-self patriotic organization are parallel, each with its own emphasis. They are like two hands on one body. They are closely cooperative, not one leading the other. With these two organizations, our unity will be even greater.”*

Since then, the China Christian Council has been established, which also marks the official formation of the structural pattern of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches (TSPM) and China Christian Council (CCC). In the following 40 years, Chinese Christianity has experienced a wealth of grace from God, including the earth-shaking changes brought by the reform and opening up of Chinese society, and the healthy development of Chinese Christianity in the past 40 years.

After the “Cultural Revolution”, most church reunions occurred around 1980, with slight variations in different parts of China. The majority of Christians welcomed the reform and opening up with the same joy as the people of the whole country. We deeply realize that “He will not break a bruised reed, or quench a smoldering wick,” (Matthew 12:20). At the time, although many church pastors and believers had suffered in the “Cultural Revolution”, their patriotism and love of the Church had not changed. Church restoration was faced with numerous difficulties, such as the lack of meeting places and Bibles, the shortage of preachers, and the insufficiency of much needed material support in many churches. However, they all enthusiastically agreed to propagate the gospel. While praying devoutly to God, they also actively sought support and help from the religious departments of the government.

Against the historical backdrop of reform and opening up, China’s subsequent social and economic development and its implementation of the policy of freedom of religious belief provided the material foundation and policy support for the healthy development of Christianity in China. Over the past 40 years, Chinese Christianity has undergone many gratifying changes from recovery to growth and maturity.

## **Reform and opening up brought vitality to Chinese churches**

Over the past 40 years, Chinese Christianity has not only made great advances in the number of churches, meeting places, baptized believers, pastoral personnel and theological colleges, but has also made great progress in many other aspects.

In terms of theological education, since the restoration of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary in 1981 the country has seen the establishment of 22 theological seminaries with about 1,200 theological students graduating every year. In addition, training courses and Bible classes organized by churches throughout the country have made theological education and Bible studies popular in Chinese churches. In recent years, in a move to promote its “talent training plan” and raise the level of theological education, TSPM&CCC has begun the offering of doctoral programs in Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. Simultaneous efforts have been made to undertake curriculum development, the appraisal of teachers’ professional qualifications and the compilation of standard teaching materials, so as to improve the quality of theological education and cultivate more outstanding talents for the Chinese Church.

Over the past four decades, the number of churches, meeting points and preachers have increased to a noticeable extent, but the greater change has taken place in the levels of church management and institutional improvement. In the past, many colleagues literally believed that the church was God’s home, left to be governed by God himself. Thus, rules and regulations were regarded as “human tools” which should not be employed, leaving the institutional management of the church in a state of chaos. As the church developed, we gradually realized that if the Church wants to be well-governed, it also needs to establish rules and regulations as well as to embrace rule of law and democratic management.

In 1991, the CCC&TSPM passed *the Trial Rules and Regulations of Churches in Various Parts of China*, and in 1996, *The Church Order of the Chinese Protestant Church* was approved. It was revised at the Standing Committee meeting before the Eighth National Christian Conference in 2008. Another major revision was subsequently made in 2018. These changes indicate the progress that has been made in the institutional construction and development of Chinese Christianity.

China's reform and opening-up has made its overseas contacts and exchanges more frequent and closer, creating conditions for more exchanges with the ecumenical movement. In February 1991, the China Christian Council, representing the Chinese Christian Church, became a full member of the World Council of Churches. After the reform and opening-up, Chinese clergy have enjoyed more opportunities to visit overseas and to attend various conferences. At the same time, Chinese churches have often invited and received overseas church groups and individuals for visits and exchanges in China. Well-known foreign scholars have been frequently invited to give lectures in China. Some clergy have had the opportunity to study in theological colleges abroad, leading to increased knowledge and broader horizons. They project the image and spiritual outlook of a new generation of Chinese clergy, all of which have been positive for theological education and the research of Chinese Christianity. These exchanges enable us to keep abreast of the changes and developments in Christianity overseas. They also enable Christians overseas to understand the development of Chinese churches and China's policy of freedom of religious belief, enhance mutual friendships and eliminate misunderstandings, so that the Chinese Church in the post-denominational period has witnessed the grace of the Lord within the ecumenical churches, and shared well the story of the Chinese Church.

Over the past four decades, Chinese Christianity and Chinese society have become more closely integrated. On the one hand, with the deepening of reform and opening up and overseas exchanges, Chinese people's acceptance of Christianity has grown, and religious belief is no longer simply regarded as superstition and ignorance in people's minds. In particular, Chinese Christianity has always adhered to the principle of loving Church and country, insisting on running Chinese churches independently according to the Three-Self principles. These efforts have gradually changed people's view that Christianity is a "foreign religion" and a part of imperialist aggression against China. On the other hand, since the reform and opening up, the theological seminary has studied "truth, goodness and beauty" outside the church, and the churches have discussed "being a Christian and a good citizen" and "national law and canon" and other related issues, all of which have helped pastors and believers gradually change the perceptions deeply held in the past, on the division between the sacred and the profane, the spiritual and the worldly. This has subsequently led the Chinese Church to progress from only focusing on evangelism to stressing both evangelism and testimonies, as well as glorifying God and benefiting people, being light and salt. With the emphasis on the social responsibilities of Christians, the Chinese Christian Church has begun to participate, as much as possible, in social charity. In accordance with their own conditions, local churches have made attempts and contributions towards caring for the elderly, helping the disabled, supporting the poor, and assisting with medical care. The social service departments of CCC&TSPM have participated in HIV-AIDS prevention, poverty alleviation, drought relief and other social service projects in different regions, and achieved good results. It is a ministry that is based on the Bible, the tradition of the church and the needs of society. In early 2012, six ministries

and commissions of the central government jointly issued the *Opinions on Encouraging and Regulating Religious Circles to Engage in Public Welfare and Charity Activities*, which provided policy guidance for religions to engage in public welfare and charity activities. In China's fight against Covid-19 this year, the churches in China actively donated money and material worth more than 200 million yuan. These changes have not only helped the further integration of Christianity into Chinese society, but also for it to become a positive and progressive force in Chinese society.

### **Chinese Christianity: a Uniting Church with subjective consciousness**

Historically, the last four decades have been the “golden era” in the development of Chinese Christianity. Chinese Christianity has made great progress in terms of theological education, international exchanges, church and organizational construction, social services, Bible publishing and many other aspects. But one of the most fundamental changes that has taken place is that under the banner of loving the country and the Church, Chinese Christianity has gradually formed a relatively integral and mature selfhood.

From the perspective of modern history and Christianity's introduction to China, we can see that Christian churches in old China were established under the umbrella of unequal treaties, with different missionary organizations coming from different countries establishing their own churches, with denominational backgrounds, in China. At the time, as the result of having many denominations in China, there was no independent Chinese Church. People did not have an overall concept of Chinese Christianity, and they thus could not have the subjective consciousness of the Chinese Church. The launch of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the announcement of the



*Christian Manifesto* expressed the will of Chinese Christians to support the new China led by the Chinese Communist Party, to cut off their ties with imperialism, eliminate its influence and establish an autonomous, self-supporting and indigenous Chinese Church. This was the political declaration of Chinese Christians to “stand up,” together with all the Chinese people. It was the first time that Chinese people with Christian faith expressed their wishes on behalf of the group. Through the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and under the banner of loving country and loving Church, Chinese Christians, for the first time, had their own correct political stance, and thus formed an integral body.

The China Christian Council was subsequently established, and Chinese Christianity continued to develop in adherence to the Three-Self Principles. At the “Ji’nan Conference” in 1998, Bishop K. H. Ting proposed that China’s Christianity should undertake the construction of theological thought. Over the past 20 years, around the theme of theological thought construction, churches around the world have actively carried out exchanges, studies and theoretical discussions. In this process, we have both agreements and disagreements in our theological thought, but the greater achievement is that Chinese Christianity has further reached a consensus on the basic theological thought. At the National Conference for Religions, President Xi Jinping put forward the idea that “China’s religions should adhere to the direction of further contextualization.” This is not only the expectation and demand of the Party and government for religions, but also represents the need for the further development of Chinese Christianity itself. In 2018, CCC&TSPM put forth the *Five-year Work Plan for Promoting the Further Contextualization of Chinese Christianity (2018-2022)*, which is of great significance to theoretical research and practical exploration of the further contextualization of Christianity

in the whole country. Co-workers of the regional CC&TSPMs and believers throughout the country actively responded. It has become the direction and goal of local churches to endeavor to explore and build a Chinese Christianity adapted to socialist society. A common political stance and shared direction has helped in the development of a unified church both structurally and ideologically.

The TSPM unites all Chinese Christians under the banner of love for country and love for Church, providing them with a shared political attitude and stance. Since the establishment of the China Christian Council forty years ago, it has been the consensus of Chinese Christians to run the church well according to the Three-Self Principle and strive to build a contextualized Christian Church adapted to socialist society. Through organizational reconstruction, pastoral exchanges, theoretical discussions and other church activities, the CCC&TSPM has united churches and Christians all over the country, on the basis of which they have formed the main body of the Chinese Christian Church with a subjective consciousness of Chinese Christianity. This unified faith group has both a clear political position and distinctive ecclesial characteristics; it has both direction in its efforts and a subjective consciousness. Such a Chinese Christian Church has been formed against the historical backdrop of new China led by the Chinese Communist Party; it is the fruit of reform and opening up in the Chinese Christian community. Reform and opening up has restored the Chinese Christian Church and contributed to its growth and maturity. Christianity, which was once used by imperialism as a tool of aggression against China, has become the religion of the people in a socialist society under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party.

## **Running the church well according to the Three-Self Principle and actively promoting the construction of Chinese Christianity**

Today, Chinese society has entered a new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese Christian Church must be run well as a testimony to God's grace for the Chinese Church in this era.

The 70-year history of the Chinese Christian Church shows us that adhering to the Three-Self Principles and loving church and country has been the path of grace prepared by God for the Chinese Church. Thus, we should, in the future, continue to hold high the banner of loving country and Church, move towards the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity, spread the gospel of Christ and establish the Lord's church throughout China. We should nurture Christianity with the excellent elements of traditional Chinese culture, preach Christian faith in a way that can be appreciated by the Chinese people, and strive to construct theological thoughts with Chinese cultural characteristics; take socialist core values as the guide and take root in the fertile soil of Chinese traditional culture. While maintaining our basic beliefs, core doctrines and liturgy, we must also keep the inherited, biblically based traditions of the Reformation and the ecumenical church, deeply distilling from within doctrine that which is conducive to social harmony, the progress of the times and the construction of a healthy civilization. We should draw and interpret from doctrine that which supports the development and progress of contemporary China and its excellent traditional culture, so as to bear witness to Christ's gift of salvation for the Chinese people. We need to strengthen efforts to cultivate all kinds of Christian talents. The mission of the Church lasts for generations and needs to be passed on from one generation to the next. Having

qualified talents is an important guarantee of the healthy development of Christianity. We should abide by the laws and regulations of the state, bring our work into the orbit of the rule of law, and earnestly implement the rules and regulations of the Church, so as to promote the healthy development of Christianity and enable the Christian ministry to be carried out in an orderly manner. If Chinese Christianity wants to develop in a healthy manner, it must resist the intrusion of heresy. Heresy harms society, people and the Church. We should actively preach the true faith, guide and help believers consciously resist heresy. Overseas hostile forces are prone to taking advantage of Christianity to achieve their goals. We should bear in mind the history of Christianity as a tool of imperialism. We should always stand on the side of the country and the people and adhere to the fine tradition of loving country and the Church.

We thank God for placing us in this great era. At the same time, we should also endeavor to serve and make ourselves worthy of this great era. We pray that God will continue to show grace to the Chinese Church in this new historical period, so that the Chinese Church can become a Christian Church that follows biblical teachings, meets the requirements of laws and regulations, fulfills the expectations of the Party and the government and satisfies the people, while preaching the gospel and testifying to Christ's gift of salvation in the Chinese context.

Reverend Wu Wei is President of the China Christian Council.

## **Promoting the Further Contextualization of Hymns:**

### **Experience and reflections on editing the New Hymnal and its Supplement**

#### **推进“圣诗中国化”的途径**

#### **—编辑《赞美诗（新编）》及其《补充本》的历程与感悟**

CAO SHENGJIE 曹圣洁

There is a consensus that “Christianity is the singing religion,” not only because songs are always associated with Christian worship but also because they are rooted in Christian theology. The human voice is a part of God’s creation, and with it, humans can speak, express their emotions and sing praises to God. There are ample records of this in the Bible: from the ancient hymns of Moses and Hannah, from the Psalms and other wisdom books in the Old Testament, to the New Testament in which Jesus sang with his disciples and Paul made the exhortation to speak to one another with “Psalms, hymns and spiritual songs”. In addition, songs are a part of Church history and legacy: from the earliest Doxology, the compositions of Ambrose, to Gregorian chants, and especially the products of the Reformation begun by Martin Luther. Consequently, the composition of hymns has spread globally, and most Christians can now sing hymns in their own languages. Christian music assumes many forms, including large choral compositions, but the hymn or song of praise is the most basic and popular form which has its own unique sacredness and widespread impact.

In 1981, the Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of the Protestant Churches (TSPM) and China Christian Council (CCC) set up a working group on hymns, which was later renamed the editorial department of hymns (New Edition) (hereinafter referred to as the New Hymnal), composed of four people that included myself, Shi Qigui 史奇珪<sup>1</sup>, Lin Shengben 林声本<sup>2</sup> and Hong Lvming 洪倡明<sup>3</sup>. As the deputy general Secretary of the China Christian Council, I assumed leadership of the group<sup>4</sup>.

At that time, the local churches were resuming their worship, and both the Bible and hymnals were indispensable, but most of these had been lost in the Cultural Revolution. I fully understood the urgency of reprinting them. The Bible could be reprinted according to the old version, but the hymns used by different denominations in the past were not the same. With the practice of union worship, it became impossible to use hymns of one denomination as a general model, and it became urgent to edit a new hymnal.

At the beginning of my work, I was not so clear about what kind of hymnal I wanted to compile. For a while, I simply thought that it would be just a collection of hymns

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- 1 Shi Qigui, born in Suzhou in 1929, graduated from Jinling Union Theological Seminary and taught himself to compose music. He successively served as vice chairman of Shanghai Christian Council and senior pastor of Muen Church. He is the author of *Footprints* and *Shi Qigui's Composition on Sacred Songs*.
  - 2 Lin Shengben, born in 1927 in Xinhui, Guangdong, graduated from Jinling Union Theological Seminary. He studied in the Department of Church Music of China Baptist Theological Seminary under Ma Geshun. He has been the pastor of Shanghai Jingling Church and the editor of *Selected Anthems*.
  - 3 Hong Lvming, born in Shanghai in 1930, graduated from St. John's University. She successively served as deputy director general of Shanghai YWCA and as organist of Shanghai Community Church.
  - 4 Luo Weihong, *Cao Shengjie's Oral History*, Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore press, 2016, Chapter 20.

that believers were familiar with and loved. Bishop Ding Guangxun (K. H. Ting) 丁光训 President of CCC, and Bishop Zheng Jianye 郑建业, General Secretary of CCC, had long-term vision and formulated the basic principles of “Mutual Respect and Comprehensiveness” and “further contextualization of hymns,” which enabled us to identify our goals. These two principles reflect the context and advancing direction of the Church in China.

In terms of “mutual respect,” we have built the church according to the Three-Self Principle and have entered the post-denominational era. The characteristics of the original denominations and the hymns they used have not been totally negated. In fact, based on the spirit of mutual respect, their essence has been absorbed. No further discussion on this will be made here since it is not the focus of this paper.

As for the further contextualization of hymns, we, as Chinese Christians, have our own profound Chinese cultural resources. Just as all Christians can express their feelings for God using their own cultural forms, so can we. What is more, our predecessors have left some works as examples for us, so we should continue to work hard. No one in the editorial department has any objection to this point and all are willing to put it into practice. The numerical musical notation of the *New Hymnal* was published in 1983 and the preface was written by Bishop Zheng himself. He listed “Indigenization of Sacred Music” as the title of a large paragraph. Today, when I read it, I cannot help but admire his sagacity and foresight.

As some hymns were not included in the *New Hymnal* when it was published, and the need of Chinese churches continued to grow, the National CCC&TSPM decided in 2003 to publish a supplementary edition, with Shi Qigui and Hong Lvming and myself as the main editors, and including other

personnel such as Luo Liguang 罗黎光<sup>5</sup>, Sheng Yin 盛茵<sup>6</sup>, Gu Yuntao 顾云涛<sup>7</sup> and Lin Dehua 林德桦<sup>8</sup>. We still follow the established principles on the “Indigenization of Hymns in China.”<sup>9</sup> The *Supplementary Volume* was published in 2009.

## **The Connotation of “Further Contextualized” Hymns (namely Chinese Originated Hymns)**

### *1. “Hymns” have common features that must be observed:*

According to the Encyclopedia Britannica, *hymnos* in Greek originally means “song of praise,” referring to the songs sung by the congregation during Christian worship. The lyrics are rhythmic and segmented, not copied from the Bible.<sup>10</sup> This is focused on its form of expression.

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5 Luo Liguang, born in 1940, studied piano, violin, and national musical instruments since childhood. He has successively served as the president of Jiangxi Christian Council and the senior pastor of Yushui Church in Xinyu City. He is the author of Christian choral songs, such as *Hymns Echoing in the Heart and Biblical Scripture Songs*.

6 Sheng Yin, born in 1933 in Shanghai, graduated from Mateer’s Girls High School, and is a member of China Musicians Association. She has been a pianist of China Central Broadcasting Orchestra and Shanghai Broadcasting Orchestra and translated hundreds of foreign songs.

7 Gu Yuntao, born in 1972 in Suzhou, has a bachelor’s degree in theology from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. He once studied music from a teacher in Nanjing Normal University. He is the senior pastor of the Christian Church in Suzhou High Tech Zone.

8 Lin Dehua, born in Shanghai in 1962, graduated from the Chinese Department of Fudan University and Church Music Department of Singapore Bible College. She has successively served as the editor of the Publishing Department of CCC&TSPM, the teacher of sacred music at Huadong Theological Seminary, and the conductor of the Shanghai Community Church Choir.

9 Cao Shengjie: “Comments on the Supplementary Volume of New Hymnal”, originally published in *Tianfeng*, Issue 12, 2009. Reprinted in *Thinking in Circumstances*, Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 2010, p.247.

10 <https://www.britannica.com/topic/hymnSac>



Saint Augustine once said in his annotation to Psalm 148: “Would you like to know what is a hymn? A hymn is a song of praise to God. If you say praises to God but do not sing them, then your praise is not a hymn; if you sing to God but do not have the heart to praise, then it is not a hymn; if you sing to praise, but the object is not God, the hymn you sing is not a hymn.”<sup>11</sup> The emphasis here is on the praise of God from the heart.

I realize that hymns have the following characteristics:

- 1) It is a song of praise with God as its object. In poetry and music, it sings out the religious feelings of believers, such as praising, thanking, trusting, obeying and praying to God.
- 2) The lyrics of hymns are verses, not exactly verses of the Bible, but must conform to the whole message and basic doctrines of the Bible and reflect correct theological ideas. As such, it actually serves as a theological textbook.
- 3) In hymns, the tunes<sup>12</sup> should be closely matched with the lyrics to produce the effect of piety, solemnity and peace, and avoid expressions of anxiety, senselessness and other negative emotions.
- 4) Hymns are prepared for believers. While mainly used for collective worship, they are also used for individual, spiritual retreats or devotions. The former has an inseparable relationship with liturgy. A good hymn must resonate with the heart of the believer.
- 5) In their composition, both lyrics and tunes are inseparable from the cultural context of the composer,

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11 Quoted from Luo Bingliang: *Comprehensive Discussion on Sacred Music*, Hong Kong: Tiandao Bookstore Co., Ltd., 1994, p. 83.

12 In studying of hymns, some people think that hymns only refer to lyrics, excluding tunes, but good tunes can help lyrics spread like wildfire, and people’s memories of hymns are often inseparable from their familiar tunes. The hymns discussed in this paper include tunes.

so hymns are not always uniform. The hymns of churches all over the world demonstrate multicultural features.

2. *“Further contextualization” is the particularity that Chinese Christians need to consider*

First of all, “Chinese contextualized” hymns should meet the common requirements of the above-mentioned “hymns,” especially on the fifth point. In the process of editing the *New Hymnal*, I gradually arrived at the following understanding:

- 1) It refers to the compositions of Chinese Christians, whether lyrics or tunes. In the *New Hymnal* there are also works of overseas Chinese Christians that meet the editing requirements.
- 2) In addition to their rich spirituality, the lyrics should be written based on the standards of the Chinese language. Historical works include ancient prose, rhymed poetry written in classical Chinese and *Ci* 词. Vernacular works have rhyme and free style, but they should also meet the basic elements of a poem.
- 3) In addition to conforming to the “rules” of music, the melody is best combined with Chinese elements to reflect Chinese style. Using the pentatonic scale is one way, but not limited to it. The adaptation of folk songs is feasible, but should be done cautiously. Harmony in compositions should be appropriate for church use.

## **The history of Christianity in China shows the inevitability of the further contextualization of hymns**

1. *Three representative Hymns in Chinese history*

Based on historical records, Chinese hymns such as “All Heaven Worships in Great Awe” 大秦景教三威蒙度赞 (*New*

*Hymnal*, No. 385) can be traced to Nestorianism in the Tang Dynasty. Jingjiao 景教, or Nestorianism, was introduced and spread in China by Syrian priests along the Silk Road in the Tang Dynasty around 635-845 A.D. Most of its classics were translated using Buddhist terminology. It was destroyed while Buddhism was suppressed by the Tang Emperor, Wuzong. This poem seems to be an old translation of “Gloria in Excelsis” 《荣归主颂》. “Sanwei” 三威 means the Trinity, “Mengdu” 蒙度 means salvation.<sup>13</sup> The original tune cannot be verified. The poem was included in *Hymns of Universal Praise* 《普天颂赞》 published in 1936 and composed by Liang Jifang 梁季芳, who was then a student at the Music Department of Yenching University 燕京大学. In order to preserve history, the *New Hymnal* listed this poem as an “ancient Chinese Hymn”.

Another ancient hymn included in the *New Hymnal* is “Yangzhige” 仰止歌 (No. 386). The author is Wu Li 吴历, a poet and painter of the early Qing Dynasty, whose alternative name is Yushan 渔山 (1631-1718). After his conversion to Catholicism, he became a priest and wrote *A Copy of Mo Jing's Poems* 《墨井诗抄》 and the hymn in question is one of them. The lyrics involve God's creation of heaven and earth, Jesus' redemptive action on the cross, and believers' admiration and imitation of Jesus by “looking up to the mountains.” Qiu Changnian 裘昌年 composed its music using the oblique tone of poetry, giving it the charm of poetry recitation.

Emperor Kangxi 康熙 of the Qing Dynasty cured his malaria by taking western medicine, thus he formed a friendship with Ferdinand Verbiest 南怀仁, a Belgian

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13 For the content of the translation, see Wang Shenyin's original book: *Historical Notes of the Hymns in the New Hymnal*, Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, first edition in 1994, revised edition in 2014, p. 312. The author and writing background of each hymn in *New Hymnal* are introduced in this book.

Catholic missionary and an official of the Bureau of Astronomy. Emperor Kangxi once held a favorable attitude to Christianity. It is said that he wrote an eight-line poem with seven characters to each line in a strict tonal pattern as a gift to Ferdinand Verbiest:

*"When the work on the Cross was accomplished, blood formed a creek; Grace from the west flowed a thousand yards deep. He stepped onto the midnight road, to subject Himself to four trials. Before the rooster crowed twice, betrayed thrice was He. Five hundred lashes tore every inch of His skin. Two thieves at six feet high hanged beside him. The sadness was greater than any had ever known; seven utterings, one completed task, ten thousand spirits weep."*

This is a poem commemorating the crucifixion of Jesus. From the time Jesus was escorted and flogged, Peter denied the Lord three times, two robbers were nailed on either side of him until the time when he spoke the seven last words on the cross. In 1977, the revised edition of *Hymns of Universal Praise* published in Hong Kong<sup>14</sup> selected this poem, entitled "Song of the Cross by Kangxi" 《康熙十架歌》 (No. 170), and music was composed for it by Huang Yongxi 黄永熙.<sup>15</sup> When editing the *New Hymnal*, I saw this poem, but did not select

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14 *Hymns of Universal Praise* was published in 1936 by the Christian Literature Society for China in Shanghai. In 1977, the Hong Kong Christian Literature and Art Publishing House published the revised edition of *Hymns of Universal Praise*, edited by Huang Yongxi. In 2006, it also published a new edition of *Hymns of Universal Praise*, edited by Tan Jingzhi.

15 Huang Yongxi (黄永熙 Heyward W.H.Wong 1917-2003), born in Guangdong, holds a Ph.D. in music education from Columbia University. He has successively served as conductor of the Symphony Orchestra of Shanghai Municipal Council, conductor of Hong Kong Sacred Music Orchestra and President of Hong Kong Christian Literature and Art Publishing House.

it because I could not find its exact source.<sup>16</sup>

The above three poems, which have been preserved to this day, show that since the introduction of Christianity to China, there have been poems praising God, with Chinese culture as the medium.

## 2. *Popular hymns written by early Chinese Christians*

Modern Christianity was introduced from the west, and foreign missionaries translated Western hymns into Chinese based on mission needs. In 1818, after translating the New Testament, Robert Morrison published a collection of 30 sacred poems, the first of its kind since Protestantism arrived in China. Following the signing of the Nanjing Treaty, various denominations entered China in rapid succession, setting up churches and publishing their own collections of hymns. Some of the lyrics were in local dialects, such as Fuzhou 1861's Rongqiang hymn 福州《榕腔圣诗》, followed by Chaoqiang hymn 《潮腔圣诗》 and Xiaqiang hymn 《厦腔圣诗》. Some of the lyrics which were used in Ningbo 宁波 and other places were in Romanized Chinese. Many of these hymns were translated into Chinese from English, but because the missionaries had a limited knowledge of Chinese, and their Chinese assistants did not understand English well nor western music theory, the quality of translation was very poor.

Since it was difficult for Chinese believers to learn Western tunes, some Chinese evangelists began composing their own hymns for the sake of preaching. Some famous poets, such as Xi Shengmo 席胜魔 (1835-1896) in Shanxi

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16 Cao Shengjie: "The Past Exploration on the further contextualization of hymns", *Tianfeng*, No. 10, 2016.

Province, compiled *Xi Shengmo's Hymns* 《席胜魔诗歌》<sup>17</sup>. Among them, "Why We Gather" 《聚会的缘故》 (No. 53) became very popular. The lyrics of the first verse are: "There is a reason for our gathering this time, which is that the Holy Spirit guides the Church forward. Let men and women, young and old, worship the Lord devoutly to receive the Lord's command. The Lord said,

*"I laid down my life for you on the cross. What else are you loath to part with to follow me? Drinking, smoking, pride, and vengefulness? Please say what else are you loath to part with to follow me and enjoy the eternal happiness of heaven."*

Many of these hymns were straightforward and sung to existing folk tunes. Some of them were later included in the *Chinese Hymnary* 《颂主圣歌》 published by the China Inland Mission. Apart from compiling biblical principles into popular words of encouragement, the lyrics impressed me deeply at two levels:

- 1) Most of them are evangelistic poems, which exclude other religions.

For example, there is a song that says,

*"Everyone seeks blessings in his heart, holds the love of heaven and fear of hell, but never reaps satisfaction even while busily traversing the sky. Some chant sutras praying to clay sculptures, others burn incense and worship carvings. Many heretics work in vain and yet cannot teach him true happiness."<sup>18</sup>*

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17 *Xi Shengmo's Hymns*, published by China Inland Mission, printed by Shanghai Commercial Press, 5th Edition, 1918.

18 "Brief Union Ode to the Lord," Hankou: Chinese Sacred Book Society, 1922, No. 62. *Chinese Hymnary*, Hong Kong sermon press, 1961, No. 477.

In another song it says:

*"The three religions of China have been handed down through the ages. Their interpretations have been twisted to serve the power of evil spirits. Confucian sages preach morality but are no match to the heavenly Ten Commandments..."*<sup>19</sup>

- 2) They pay attention to the present life and expose bad habits.

For example, Xi Shengmo's "ten bad" 《十不好》 and "ten best" 《十最好》 (the 77th and 78th hymns of the anthology) depict the harm of opium smoking, persuading people to believe in the Lord and give up opium. I have come across another song entitled "Throwing Girls Away" 《扔女孩歌》. The lyrics are: *"It's a pity that people often throw girls away. Their parents are willing to harm them. They put them in baskets and abandon them in the suburbs, alive. This kind of evil mind needs to be changed."*<sup>20</sup> It is like a motto.

The evangelical efforts of this kind of hymns are worth recalling, and it was also sensible to urge the majority of believers to improve their moral lives. However, the lyrics deliberately opposing other religions were influenced by Western cultural centrism and should not be inherited.

Foreign missionaries have different responses to the use of Chinese tunes in hymns. Some despise Chinese culture and think that "Chinese music is not as complete nor as refined as that of the western countries." They even say that "The tone of Chinese music is probably a kind of play, and it is inappropriate to use it to sing hymns and worship

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19 Hymns of Protestants, Fuzhou congregationist, 1861. Quoted from Sheng Xuanen: "On the History of Chinese Christian Hymns (5)", *Sacred Music Quarterly*, winter 1981.

20 Feng Yixuan: *Poetry of Truth*, Anhui Shouxian, Anhui Zhengyang Inland Mission Society, 1944, No. 39.

God.”<sup>21</sup> However, the missionaries who went deep into the mainland knew that it was not easy for the common people to sing Western tunes. For the sake of mission convenience, they accepted Chinese compositions. Some missionaries, such as Timothy Richard (1845-1919)<sup>22</sup> and William Edward Soothill (1861-1935)<sup>23</sup> appreciated Chinese tunes, collected them, and tried to connect them with western music.

### 3. *The publication of Hymns of Universal Praise in the era of the Republic of China is the most important achievement*

Since the start of the 20th century, there have been numerous collections of hymns published by different denominations. As the trend towards “church independence” became more influential, writing, compiling, and publishing hymns became irresistible to the Chinese. For example, Xie Honglai 谢洪赉 edited *Hymns for Youth* 《青年诗歌》 in 1908 and in 1923, Wang Zai 王载 edited the *Hymns of Sermon Revival* 《复兴布道诗》. Jia Yuming<sup>24</sup> 贾玉铭 wrote *Hymns of Communion with the Holy Spirit* 《灵交诗歌》 at the North China Theological Seminary in 1928. After 1938, he published the *Hymns of Triumph* 《得胜诗歌》 and *Triumphant Hymns of Communion with the Holy Spirit* 《灵交

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21 Edited by Julia B Mateer: *Enlightenment of Western Music Theory*, later added as *Hymnal Score*, 1872, Chinese original preface.

22 Liu Qi: “Mr. and Mrs. Timothy Li and the *Little Hymnal score*”, *Music Research*, 1988, No. 1.

23 Chen Fengsheng: the *History of Christianity in Modern Wenzhou* (I), Taiwan: Huamulan Culture Co., Ltd., 2020, P122-124.

24 Jia Yuming (1879-1964), born in Changle, Shandong Province, graduated from Dengzhou Cultural Association, Shandong Province, and was a pastor. He has successively served as vice president of the World Evangelical Conference, vice chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee of China, and President of Shanghai Seminary of Spiritual Retreat. He is the author of *Theology about God's Word and the Essentials of the Bible*.



得胜诗歌》 in Chongqing. In 1943, he collected the *Voices of the Saints* 《圣徒心声》. He wrote most of the lyrics, but the tunes were borrowed from existing hymns.

In the 1920s, the idea of “Christian indigenization” arose, advocating breaking the barriers of foreign denominations and encouraging the integration of Chinese culture into church music and art. First, the Chinese Anglican Church compiled a trial edition of the collection *Hymns of Praise* 《颂主诗集》 which was aimed for use within its own denomination (from different mission boards). During the editing period, it also launched a competition for the composition of Chinese hymns. When the Anglican Church realized that other denominations also intended to break the chaotic situation of publishing their own hymn books, it issued an invitation to cooperate in compiling a new hymnal. In 1931, the Church of Christ in China, the Chinese Anglican Church, the Methodist Episcopal Church, the Southern Methodist Episcopal Church, the North China Congregational Church, and the Chinese Baptist Convention decided to set up a joint Hymn Editing Committee to edit a national collection of hymns, which was published in 1936 as *Hymns of Universal Praise* 《普天颂赞》. This collection of hymns was called “a collection of national hymns” because the spirit of unity “consciously highlights the identity of the Chinese Church.”<sup>25</sup> Zhu Weizhi 朱维之 praised the completion of *Hymns of Universal Praise* as the greatest contribution of Christianity to Chinese literature after the May 4th Movement, comparable to the translation of the official language (Mandarin) and union versions of the New and Old Testaments before the May 4th movement.<sup>26</sup>

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25 Liang Nachi: *The Birth of a National Hymnal*, Hong Kong: Christian literature and Art Press, 2007, P. 17.

26 Zhu Weizhi: “A Great Loss for Chinese Christian Culture - mourning for Dr. Liu Tingfang”, *Tianfeng*, No. 83, 1947.

The editing process of *Hymns of Universal Praise* was very strict. The Committee had its own branches, such as the text branch and music branch. It limited the number of hymns in the collection (512 at the time of publication), formulated the principles for translating hymns, and made it clear that original Chinese hymns should account for 10 percent (at the time of publication it was 12 percent) of the collection. Liu Tingfang<sup>27</sup> 刘廷芳 was the chair of the editorial committee and the chair of the text sub-committee, and Yang Yinliu 杨荫浏 was the general secretary of the editorial committee.<sup>28</sup>

Liu Tingfang was then the director of the Religious College of Yenching University. He attached great importance to the high translation standards of the hymns, and set up special columns to discuss the editing work of *Hymns of Universal Praise in Amethyst* 《紫晶》 established by him and *Truth and Life* 《真理与生命》, with him as the chief editor. In *Hymns of Universal Praise*, he translated 164 hymns and created 6, accounting for about one-third of the entire collection.<sup>29</sup>

Before editing *Hymns of Universal Praise*, Yang Yinliu had edited the hymnbook *Hymns of Praise* for the Anglican Church, which became the blueprint for *Hymns of Universal Praise* in which there were 15 hymns composed or adapted by him.<sup>30</sup>

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27 Liu Tingfang (Timothy T. F. Liu 1891-1947); Chen Fengsheng: *Poetic Life*, Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 2013.

28 Yang Yinliu (Ernest Y. L. Yang 1899-1984), born in Wuxi, studied Chinese musical instruments as a child. When he became a Christian, he studied western music with missionary Luis Hammond. He served for successive terms as the director of the Music Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Arts.

29 Chen Fengsheng: *Poetic Life*, p. 142.

30 Liang Naqi: *The Birth of a National Hymnal*, p. 101.

Zhao Zichen (T. C. Chao) 赵紫宸 was the most popular poet in the *Hymns of Universal Praise*.<sup>31</sup> He was then a professor at Yenching University and its affiliated religious college at that time. In 1931, he published two collections of hymns: *The Collection of Fellowship Hymns* 《团契圣歌集》 and *The Collection of Hymns for Believers* 《民众圣歌集》. The former was his translation of hymns for the purpose of fellowship at Yenching University, and the latter was completely written for ordinary believers, including rural ones. The words are easy to understand. American missionary Bliss Wyant (1895-1975), whose Chinese name is Fan Tianxiang 范天祥, head of the Music Department of Yenching University, had a special interest in Chinese music. He collected many Chinese traditional and folk tunes, and Zhao Zichen made lyrics for them. Fan Tianxiang made outstanding contributions to the composition of hymns with Chinese tunes, and eight of them were included in the *Hymns of Universal Praise*.<sup>32</sup>

After the reform and opening up, *The New Hymnal* edited by us was put together for the purpose of union worship and inherited the tradition of “further contextualization”. Naturally, *Hymns of Universal Praise* was our main source. Of the 102 Chinese-originated hymns in the *New Hymnal*, 56 were old ones, of which 27 were selected from the *Hymns of Universal Praise*, accounting for about half, and 4 were added to the supplementary edition, a total of 31. Twelve works of Zhao Zichen were selected, namely, Nos. 30, 31, 43, 59, 101, 130, 138, 148, 184, 202, 204 for the

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31 Zhao Zichen (T. C. Chao, 1888-1979), a native of Deqing, Zhejiang Province. Received an Honorary Doctorate in Theology from Princeton University, USA. He was one of the presidents of the World Council of Churches and the Dean of the College of Religion at Yanjing University. A famous theologian, philosopher and poet, he is also known as “the father of Chinese hymns.”

32 Liang Naqi, *The Birth of a National Hymnal*, P. 101.

New Hymnal and No. 133 in the *Supplement Volume*.

When the editorial department of The *New Hymnal* was established, Shen Zigao 沈子高,<sup>33</sup> Yang Yinliu 杨荫浏 and Ma Geshun 马革顺 were invited to serve as advisers to the hymnal committee.<sup>34</sup> Shen Zigao was in the writing committee of *Hymns of Universal Praise*. Before his death, he sent a catalogue to us in shaky handwriting, listing the hymns he felt ought to be included in the *New Hymnal*. In 1982, Cai Wenhao 蔡文浩, a member of the hymnal committee, accompanied me to visit Yang Yinliu in Beijing.<sup>35</sup> By then he was old and frail, but he still talked about his faith in Christ. In the process of editing *Hymns of Universal Praise*, he had divided the collected hymns into three categories: necessary, secondary and acceptable, so as to decide on which to include. He also stressed that one must note the differences in tones in the lyrics and that the functional words cannot fall on the musical accent – an insight that was of great benefit to me.

The believers in union worship not only belonged to the original six denominations but also had different theological

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33 Shen Zigao (T. K. Shen 1895-1982), born in Wuxian County, Jiangsu Province, graduated from Theological Seminary of St. John's University, was a Bishop, and emphasized church etiquette. He was also a Professor of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and Dean of Central Theological Seminary.

34 Ma Geshun (1914-2015), a native of Ganxian County, Shaanxi Province, graduated from the Music Department of Nanjing Central University, and received his Ph.D. from Westminster Choir College, Princeton. The leading chorus conductor in China, he won the Golden Bell Award for his life-long contribution to music.

35 Cai Wenhao (1913-1993), born in Jiangyin, Jiangsu Province, graduated from University of Shanghai and Nanjing Theological Seminary, and was a pastor with a master's degree in Theology from Princeton Theological Seminary. He served as Vice President of China Christian Council, Chairman and President of Zhejiang Provincial TSPM & Christian Council.

tendencies. Therefore, in the *New Hymnal*, the old works in other hymn books should be selected at the same time. Jia Yuming's works are more concentrated. There are five of his hymns in the *New Hymnal*, namely Nos. 55, 58, 64, 129, and 152. From the *Songs* 《诗歌》 compiled by the Little Flock, No. 251 is selected.

## **Selection of lyrics of The New Hymnal and Supplementary Volume**

### *1. Scriptural basis is fundamental*

Many hymns reproduce scriptural teaching in poetry form, for instance, "Sowing Seeds" 《播种比喻歌》 (No. 202, based on Matthew. 13: 1-23), "Neighbor at Our Side" 《邻舍就在身旁歌》 (No. 358, based on Luke 10: 25-37) and "May Thy Divine Life" 《活出基督歌》 (No. 365, based on Philippians 1:20), and so on.

The original first sentence of "May Thy Divine Life" goes "May Thy divine life be manifest in me" 你的生命藉我表扬, was amended to "as disclosed through me" 藉我表彰 which is more in line with the meaning of modern Chinese. "Here on the Cross" 《十架七言》 (No. 74 in *Supplementary Volume*) was originally a translated hymn. It was later rewritten by Gu Yuntao 顾云涛 according to Chinese Scriptures, with a meditative response for believers added in the last line, making it a creative piece with special features.

I have heard criticisms of two songs concerning the conformity of lyrics to scripture.

One is No. 83 "Joyful Tidings" 《欢乐佳音歌》 which was criticized for the line "Joyful tidings.....Jerusalem rejoice, Messiah's King." Some people quoted Matthew 2: 3 to point out that people in Jerusalem were "uneasy" rather than "rejoicing" when Jesus was born. My understanding is that the author associated Jesus' last entry into Jerusalem

(Mt. 21: 1-9) with His birth. Jesus is the Messiah, so his birth is worth rejoicing. The other criticism is of No. 165 “Give to Your People, Lord” 《擘开生命饼歌》. The first two lines read “As once by Galilee others were fed”. It was pointed out that Jesus instituted the Eucharist in Jerusalem, not Galilee. But I think that here, “giving living bread” refers simply to the miracle of Jesus’ feeding the 5,000 in Galilee (Matt. 14:19), rather than the establishment of the Eucharist. This hymn is often sung during the Eucharist, and as its second half describes Jesus giving his life, it leads to the misunderstanding that the lyric is about the Eucharist. What really counts is the symbolic meaning of “giving bread,” which refers to Jesus’ giving up his divine life. As in poetry, the lyrics often make associations beyond time and space, but we should focus more on its essence.

## 2. *Theological orientation as an important principle*

Christian faith is based on the Bible, but its practical implications are explained through theology. Since the launch of the Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement in China, emphasis has always been put on the development of theological thinking that incorporates both the orthodox and the contextual, so as to provide good guidance for believers. The *New Hymnal* attaches importance to this principle.<sup>36</sup>

As seen from the catalogues of *The New Hymnal* and *Supplementary Volume*, praise for the Holy Trinity is at the core of the entire collection, including creation by the Father, the incarnation of the Son. (In the SV, a column on “Jesus’ Acts” 耶稣行迹 that include “Down from the Mount

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36 Cao Shengjie: “Exploring the direction of self-propagation of the Gospel in the editing process of the *New Hymnal*,” originally published in the first issue of *Nanjing Theological Review*, 1984, reprinted in *Thinking in Circumstances*, p. 230.

of Glory” 《山上荣光相辉映》 presents the story of Jesus’ Transfiguration on Mount Tabor and the influence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. There are original works focused on the doctrine of the Trinity, such as No. 9 “Heavenly Lights” 《颂主恩光歌》 and SV. No. 12 “Glory to the Triune God” 《荣归三一神》.

There are fewer works focusing on the Holy Spirit. No. 62 “Holy Spirit is Like the Wind” 《圣灵运行歌》 written by Wang Weifan 汪维藩<sup>37</sup> is one of the pieces that are insightful and profound. Its harmony was arranged by Qiu Yuyuan 邱钰源, a teacher from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, who writes under the pen name “Zhong Guoren” 钟国仁, but his name does not appear in the *New Hymnal*.

From the perspective of contextual theology, No. 45 “Christ the Everlasting Lord” 《基督永长久歌》 is an outstanding piece written by Shen Yifan 沈以藩<sup>38</sup> after the Cultural Revolution. Despite the upheaval from which the Church suffered, God, the Creator and perfecter of the cosmos, has not changed. “God the Father works even now, Christ is also working still.” (Rf. Jn5:17). This line represents the Christological highlight, to which his wife Hong Lvming 洪侣明 gave a resounding melody. No. 248 “Winter has Passed, the Rain is Over” 《与主同去歌》 written by Wang Weifan is based on the love dialogue in Song of Songs. Its first half was written in 1957, while the refrain was added

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37 Wang Weifan (1927-2015), graduated from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, was a professor in this seminary and a pastor. He is the author of *Chinese Theology and its Cultural Origin*.

38 Bishop Shen Yifan (1928-1994) a native of Wuxian County, Jiangsu Province, graduated from the Philosophy Department of Nanjing University, the Research Section of the Central Theological Seminary. He has served as Vice President and Secretary-General of the China Christian Council and Distinguished Research Fellow, Institute of Religious Studies, Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences. The remaining works include *Serving through the Pulpit*, *The Voice of the Forum* and so on.

after the Cultural Revolution, which better conveyed the emotions of the longing and praise for God. Lin Shengben 林声本 gave it an affectionate and moving melody. No. 134 “Now I Come to Thy Holy Temple” 《今到主殿歌》 was written by Pastor Zhang Lingguang 张灵光 from Hangzhou, who experienced hardships and could not help but write a hymn when the church reopened after the Cultural Revolution. The editorial office combined this hymn with another one by him as refrain, producing a great piece of work, singing out to God with the sweetest praising heart.

Ecclesiology in Chinese Christianity is also developing. If Hymn No. 128 “Our Church Now Is Self-Reliant” 《中华教会自立歌》 reflects the yearning of Chinese Christians for independence and church unity in the 20th century, then No. 124 “The Church Realizing the Three-Self” 《教会三自歌》 and No. 127 “We Love the Chinese Church” 《我爱中国教会歌》 depict the new condition of today’s church and the joy of believers. No. 127 has almost become a must-sing song for church groups commemorating the Three Self Movement. The two pieces by Cai Wenhao 蔡文浩, No. 331 “Learning from the Saints” 《效法诸圣歌》 and No. 125 “I Love Christ’s Church” 《教会我所爱歌》 indicate the historical inheritance of the Church, the author’s devotion to the Chinese Church, the affirmation of taking the Three-Self path and the expectation of complete unity – “Christ’s Church is my rock, How I love His Church, Promote ‘Three-Self by God’s grace, Unity In God’s spirit.” These are concise words with rich meaning. “Gracious Lord, We Meet Here” No.136 was composed by Tang Shoulin 唐守临,<sup>39</sup> another member of the hymn committee who was a co-worker of the

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39 Tang Shoulin 唐守临 (1906 - 1993), graduated from Soochow University and was the elder of the Christian Little Flock. He served as Vice Chairman of the TSPM. “Little Flock” is an early self-proclaimed Christian sect which thinks that only the local church they represent is the true church.



“Little Flock.” It is commendable that he said, “So there’s no division, we are one in Thee,” indicating that he supported union worship.

The Chinese church attaches great importance to the cohesion between faith and action and expects believers to become witnesses to God’s glory through making contributions to society. There is thus no shortage of excellent works concerning these issues. No. 350 “Honor God, Serve the People” 《荣神益人歌》 is a prominent piece. The author Shen Mingsui 沈明燧<sup>40</sup> is proficient in ancient Chinese. He wrote the hymn, taking as a theme “In all things I will honor God’s name,” and made it clear that the goal of Christian life is to be “salt and light for Him, through all my days.” In particular, in the refrain, he emphasized that “If any honor have I, it all derives from the Lord,” implying that there should be no personal greed for honor. When finalizing the manuscript with him, I asked Pastor Shen whether the word he used was “planted” 栽成 or “tailor-made” 裁成 in this line. He answered it was “tailor-made,” which meant that all our achievements had been carefully cut and finished by the Lord, the tailor of life. This thought is rich in spiritual meaning. Chen Zemin 陈泽民<sup>41</sup> was very moved by this hymn and offered to compose music for it.

When the theology of reconciliation was promoted, the *Supplementary Volume* included No. 186 “Blessed Are the

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40 Shen Ming Sui (1909-1997), a native of Lingling, Hunan Province, graduated from Central China Union Theological Seminary and was a pastor. He served as Chairman and President of the TSPM & Christian Council in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and was a standing committee member of the Chinese Poetry Society.

41 Chen Zemin 陈泽民(1917-2018), graduated from the University of Shanghai and Nanjing Union Theological Seminary; received an honorary Doctorate in Theology from Central-Philippines University; served as professor and vice president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Search and Witness*.

Peacemakers” 《和睦的人有福了》 by Xie Bingguo 谢炳国<sup>42</sup> and No. 126 “When the Lord Is Welcomed” 《基督化家庭》, No. 129 “To the Yearly Seasons” 《赐福双亲》 by Yang Yinliu. These works all convey the ideal of Christian life within the family and in daily social interactions, demonstrating what it means to witness to a faith that reconciles.

### 3. *Rich in spiritual experience*

Writing hymns should communicate real spiritual feelings, and Chinese Christians have unique experiences in their own contexts. Jia Yuming’s lyrics in No. 152 “The Lord’s Grace Is New Each Day” 《主恩日新歌》 combined elements from “Every morning is new” in the Bible (Lamentations 3:23) and the Chinese idiom “If you can in one day renew yourself, let there be daily renewals”. He used the word “new” 19 times in the song, in a vivid way, including new life, new growth, new ideas, new experiences, new inspiration, new contributions and so on. Yang Lvfu 杨旅复,<sup>43</sup> a member of the editorial board who had taken part in editing a large number of hymns, later composed music for this hymn, giving it an uplifting and beautifully artistic imagery. No. 137 “Joy in Worship” 《礼拜喜乐歌》 and No. 199 “Strolling Alone at Early Morning” 《与主心交歌》 reproduce the scenes of collective worship and individual spiritual

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42 Xie Bingguo, born in 1968 in Wenzhou, Zhejiang Province, graduated from East China Theological Seminary; a pastor. He used to be the Chairman of Shanghai Christian Council and is currently the Dean of East China Theological Seminary. Chief editor of *Sacred Music and Worship* and other books.

43 Yang Lvfu (1916-2014), a native of Zhuji, Zhejiang Province, graduated from University of Shanghai, and studied at Westminster Choir College in the United States. She served as Secretary of Music of the National Christian Council of China and was Vice President of Zhejiang Theological Seminary.

practices of Chinese Christians in the 19th and early 20th century.

“Lord Jesus, When I Think of You” 《每想到你歌》, (No. 251 in the New Hymnal) written by Tang Shoulin depicts the love of believers for the Lord. The third stanza of the first section is “I hope I can be lifted as soon as possible” (深愿我能早日被提). Considering the different understandings of “being lifted (in rapture)” among believers, the author agreed to change it to “see you soon” 早日见你 for clearer communication even though his own interpretation remains the same.

Wang Weifan’s spiritual experience comes from intuitive comprehension. SV No. 160 “Deep, Deep Love of Our Lord” 《主爱深沉》 used, in an analogical way, words like “blue sky,” “sea,” “fine water” and “stream” to express his affection for the Lord, to such an extent that he was willing to become the “spring water” and “autumn rain” for the world.

In the *Supplementary Volume*, seven hymns reflecting believers’ feelings for the Lord’s grace and kindness are placed under the column “Love for the Lord”. SV No. 154 “Change Me, O Lord” 《求主改变我自己》 has its own characteristics. It is spiritually insightful as it seeks God’s help in self transformation rather than seeking change in others when we experience unpleasant encounters in life. There are also 6 hymns placed under the column “Dedication” 虔诚奉献, which mainly reflect the inner voices of pastoral co-workers on the path of serving God. They sigh in times of hardship but are determined to renew their dedication from time to time.

#### 4. *Genre and aesthetics*

Chinese hymns can be classified as classical, vernacular or popular. Classical Chinese poetry pays attention to rhythm

and prosody, while vernacular new poetry is relatively free in style.

Zhao Zichen's works adopt various genres. No. 148 "Golden Breaks the Dawn" 《清晨歌》 has the most popular line "Golden breaks the dawn, comes the eastern sun. Like a man of brawn, Set his course to run" 清早起来看, 红日出东方, 雄壮像勇士, 美好像新郎 describing the beautiful scenery in the morning like a Chinese landscape painting, and it is perfectly combined with the Bible verse in Psalm 19:5. The music that accompanies it, by Hu De'ai 胡德爱, a student from the Music Department of Yenching University, is also very innovative, reflecting the simplest life interests and the spiritual sense of Chinese Christians. This piece had been translated and adopted in the hymn books of foreign churches even before the publication of *The New Hymnal*.

"Creator's Artistic Brush" 《神工妙笔歌》 No.178 by Chen Zemin combines the great scenery of the motherland with God's creation, and encourages "human construction" till the day the eschatological new world arrives. As he had written it in classical Chinese and adopted the form of Chinese zither music, it conveys both vision and a reclusive style.

Sun Yanli's 孙彦理<sup>44</sup> lyrics written in the vernacular are very distinctive. For instance, in No. 309 "Happy Is Our Life" 《生活美好歌》 it says "flowers are blooming, birds sweetly sing, rivers and mountains praise God's great might." Christians do not complain about life, but rather are full of gratitude. The hymn's melodic flow is also smooth and

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44 Sun Yanli (1914-1995), a native of Changzhou, Jiangsu Province, graduated from Nanjing Theological Seminary and was a bishop. He was Chairman of Shanghai Christian Council and later, President of East China Theological Seminary.

touching. Duan Yuzhen 段毓贞<sup>45</sup> wrote No. 151 “Worship God at Morn” 《清早敬拜歌》 and both the music and lyrics, depicting the scene of spiritual meditation in a beautiful natural environment early in the morning, have won universal praise.

Popular hymns also demonstrate the beauty of poetry. No. 369 “Arduous Though Our Work Can Be” 《欢乐服务歌》 is an adapted popular hymn. “Arduous tho’ our work can be, by it God is glorified. Plain our fare, coarse attire, fighting against elements dire.” The image of a Christian laborer emerges from just a few words, the verses are rhymed and the tune is catchy. In the *Supplementary Volume*, No.196 “I am a Drop of Dew” 《我是一颗露珠》 shows the author’s dedication to the Lord through his use of analogies such as “dew,” “young tree” and “little star.”

The *New Hymnal* mainly collected pieces in vernacular Chinese. In order to adapt to the habits of believers, many adopted the meter of western hymns, setting it according to the number of syllables in each line.<sup>46</sup> They are divided into stanzas, and some have a refrain after the verse. The lyrics are not confined to the level tone, but there are efforts to have them rhyme at the end of sentences. Generally, the last words of the first and second lines rhyme, and the last words of the third and fourth lines rhyme as well. Sometimes the last words of the first, second and fourth lines rhyme, but

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45 Duan Yuzhen (1930-2001), a native of Heqing, Yunnan, graduated from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. An elder of Shanghai Jingling Church, she has served as the editor of the Christian Joint Publishing House and the editor of the Publishing Department of the CCC&TSPM and has written many short songs.

46 On the regular notes of hymns, each hymn has meter, i.e. mathematical marks of melody, such as 8, 7, 8, 7, that is, four sentences. The first and the third sentence are eight syllables, thus eight Chinese characters, and the second and fourth sentences are seven words. Some write SM, that is, short meter (6, 6, 6, 6). CM, that is, common meter (8, 6, 8, 6), LM, that is, long meter (8, 8, 8, 8), and others are marked one by one.

this is not always the case. It is easier to chant when the lyrics rhyme well, and the functional words do not fall on the downbeat of the melody.

There are also some lyrics that do not follow the western rhythm. “Gracious God, Our Father” 《慈父上帝歌》 No. 16 is a good example. The free style is quite common in modern new poetry. The refrain of SV No.163 “The Wonderful Love” 《奇妙的爱》 written by Yang Bolun 杨伯伦 from Hong Kong<sup>47</sup> has a very large number of words in the third and the fourth sentences, and it works very well. After the editing of the *Supplementary Volume*, Ma Geshun once pointed out that the forms of new hymns in the mainland remain very conservative. In fact, we do not have to follow the western pattern in order to make a breakthrough.

#### IV. Choice of music style of the New Hymnal and Supplementary Volume

Music itself makes no distinction between the sacred and the secular. Using familiar melodies for Christian lyrics has been a long-standing practice. For example, when Martin Luther advocated congregational hymns, he used secular folk tunes. Wang Xuexin 王雪辛,<sup>48</sup> a former member of the hymn Committee and an author of hymns, divided the nationalization of Chinese hymn music into three stages:

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47 Yang Bolun 杨伯伦, born in 1931 in Xinhui, Guangdong, graduated from St. John's University in Shanghai, studied violin at an early age, studied composition with Ma Geshun, and settled in Hong Kong in 1962. He has served as Chairman of the Board of Directors of the World Chinese Christian Sacred Music Promotion Association. He compiled *A Complete Collection of Yang Bolun's Hymn Compositions*.

48 Wang Xuexin, born in 1923, graduated from Fujian Music College, and once served as artistic director of the Art Troupe of China Railway Second Bureau and music teacher of Sichuan Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Appreciation of Sacred Music* (1996) and *Exploration of Nationalization of Chinese Hymn Melody* (2004).

stage one, filling in words based on the old tunes; stage two, recompose some parts of the old tunes, but maintain the original characteristics; stage three, out of the love and understanding of folk music, draw out its essence and turn it into a new musical language for composition.

The New Hymnal edition absorbed these three kinds of hymns.

### 1. *Writing lyrics for traditional tunes*

A very successful piece, No.195 “Friends of Years with Just One Heart” by Yang Yinliu was a recomposed *Guqin* (古琴) tune “Yang Guan San Die” 《阳关三叠》. This hymn retains the feeling of separation from a friend, but “west of Yangguan there will be no acquaintance” 西出阳关无故人 into “ was revised into “one in the fellowship of love” 天涯团契心心印, which further demonstrated the love shared among Christians. “Nature Glows with Colors Rare” 《真美歌》 No. 13 was originally a *Guqin* tune named “Blissful Songs” 《极乐吟》. By giving it new lyrics, the hymn presents the internal relationship between Christian faith and truth, goodness and beauty. Chen Zemin recomposed the *Guqin* tunes “Three Stanzas of Plum Blossoms” 《梅花三弄》 and “Shi Dan Zhang” 《释淡章》, to provide the melodies for Psalm 100 and 103 respectively, thus producing No. 380 and 381 of the *New Hymnal*. These were well-received by the church.

“My Heart Looks in Faith” 《我有主耶稣歌》, No. 101 is a piece that saw collaboration between Fan Tianxiang and Zhao Zichen, whose tune came from the work song of boat trackers. The tune of No. 138 “Praise Our Father for This Lord’s Day” 《恭敬赞美歌》 was adapted from Buddhist chant. The melody of No. 184 “Praise Our God Above for His Boundless Love” 《收成谢恩歌》 was the music used in a Confucian ceremony. These pieces are all noted as “Chinese traditional tunes” 中国传统曲调 in the *New Hymnal*.

## 2. *Adaptation of folk songs*

To make it easier for believers to learn to sing, it was always a good choice to adapt hymns to folk songs. There are not many tunes adapted from folk songs in the *New Hymnal* with No. 51 “Fair Name of Jesus” 《耶稣美名歌》 being a typical one. It was adapted from the tune “Jasmine Flower” 《茉莉花》 and published in a *Chinese hymn collection* in 1911. The lyrics were written by C. Goodrich (1836-1925), a foreign missionary. No. 30 “Great Are Thy Mercies, Heavenly Father” 《天恩歌》 was given lyrics by Zhao Zichen according to the tune of “The Song of the Hoe” 《锄头歌》. The two songs were entirely based on the original folk melodies without any change at all.

No. 365 “Living Out Christ” 《活出基督歌》 is an innovative piece. The author provided the tune based on the existing lyrics. She was Pei Huizhen 裴慧真<sup>49</sup> a music worker in Guizhou province. She chose the tune of a Buyi minority 布依族 folk song “Hao Hua Hong” 《好花红》, which is consistent with the beautiful image of Jesus Christ in the lyrics. The original song is based on the Yu mode 羽调式 in Chinese music, but at the third line it is changed into Gong mode 宫调式, with a high note 5 added, imitating the sound of echos in the mountains, reaching its climax and then returning to the original mode, resulting in a very beautiful melody. The lyrics of SV No. 91 “United to Build up the Church” 《同心建教会》 was written by Pastor Luo Liguang 罗黎光, who once served as the director of the Hymn Committee. He wrote the song to celebrate the completion of his new church at Yushui District, Xinyu in Jiangxi province 江西新余渝水堂. The prototype of the melody is a folk song

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49 Pei Huizhen, born in Shanghai in 1941, she graduated from Shenyang Conservatory of Music, and is a piano professor at the Conservatory of Music of Guizhou University.



“Da Chun Luo” 《打春锣》 from Yushui District. When the song was adapted, the composer made it 4 degrees higher, and revised the melody a great deal, but the original basic rhythm was kept to maintain the folk song flavor. The above two pieces are of local folk style.

Ethnic minorities in China have their own folk songs with distinguishing features. Christianity has many believers among the Miao 苗, Lisu 傈僳 and Korean 朝鲜 ethnic groups, but the hymns they sang were mostly translations of foreign hymns brought to them by missionaries. I remember Ma Geshun met them once when the choir of Miao Christians visited Shanghai. He praised them for singing the hymns in harmony but when he asked them to sing an ethnic folk song, no one could do it. This shows the neglect of Chinese culture in the missionary past, not to mention encouraging the composition of folk hymns. In the *New Hymnal* and the *Supplementary Volume* there are three hymns written by preachers from ethnic groups, that is, No. 34 “Worship in Truth” 《称颂崇拜歌》, No. 115 “Behold, There Came A Cloud” (tune) 《耶稣升天歌》 and SV No. 185 “People of the Borderland Praise the Lord” 《边疆信徒赞美神》. This field has yet to be developed.

The adaptation of hymns from folk tunes does have the advantage of making it easy for believers to sing, but I think we need to pay special attention to the following aspects:

- 1) Existing folk songs, especially those that are well-received, have specific contents. Though new lyrics are given, they still remind us of the original contents, which is not the desired effect.<sup>50</sup>
- 2) It is essential to examine whether the original lyrics deliver “unhealthy” content.

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50 Cao Shengjie: “Hymns and Theology”, originally published in *Essays on Christian Sacred Music Road*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Chinese Christian Association, 1999. It has been reprinted in *Thinking in Circumstances*, p. 246.

- 3) It is necessary to assess whether its emotional appeal jives with the content of the hymn's lyrics.

3. *The expression of Chinese elements in tunes.*

Of all intervals, an interval of a fifth degree 五度 is the most important one, and *erhu* 二胡 and other Chinese musical instruments are stringed accordingly. In China, the five tones are called *Gong* 宫, *Shang* 商, *Jiao* 角, *Zhi* 徵, and *Yu* 羽, that is, 12356 in musical notation, commonly known as the pentatonic scale. Compared with the western heptatonic scale, there are two halftones missing, that is 4 and 7. Whichever of these five notes is taken as the keynote, will determine the mode of the song. For example, if 1 is taken as the keynote, the song will fall into the Gong mode, equivalent to the western "major." It seems more natural for the Chinese to sing in the pentatonic scale.

Hymns using the pentatonic scale generally deliver a Chinese style,<sup>51</sup> such as No. 135 "Voice of Praise" 《颂主声音歌》 and No. 150 "God, Be Praised at Early Morn" 《早起赞美歌》. Among the existing songs, Yang Yinliu's No. 179 "The Grace of God Unbounded Is" 《心泉歌》 has been popular so far. Among the new pieces, No. 16 "Gracious God, Our Father" is a characteristic piece. The composer used the elements of folk tunes to match the lyrics written by his father. The lyrics are touching, and the tunes are beautiful. You know they have elements of Chinese folk music as soon as you hear them, and they closely correspond with the lyrics, especially at the ending, rising step by step, like praise reaching heaven. The tune of this hymn has been adapted into a contrapuntal score for the choir.

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51 The pentatonic scale is not used exclusively by China, but also by Europe and America. For example, "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing" (*New Hymnal*, #28) is not a Chinese composition.

Chinese tunes are usually smooth and beautiful, with good organization. A typical example is No. 79 “Holy Night, Blessed Night” 《圣夜静歌》 composed by Shi Qigui. Because the lyrics of this song follow the same pattern as that of “Silent Night”, and both tunes match the atmosphere, No. 79 is called the Chinese version of “Silent Night”.

Some of the new hymns have been composed using the pentatonic scale. In order to enrich the tone, the use of the 4th or 7th tones is not excluded, but it is not put on the downbeat and does not affect the Chinese style. One example is No. 103 “Jesus Is My Lord” 《我信主耶稣歌》, a collaboration by Shi Qigui and Lin Shengben, whose tune is calm, and the song filled with piety. Generally, when a song is written, the lyrics precede the music. But this song began with the tune which was then followed by lyrics, showing the firmness of faith. It was included in *Hymns of Universal Praise* (new edition) published in Hong Kong in 2006.

The creative tunes collected by *The New Hymnal* are not limited to the use of pentatonic scales. For instance, the popular hymn No. 127 “We Love the Chinese Church” 《我爱中国教会歌》 does not entirely use the pentatonic scale. It is interesting to note that believers in urban churches often automatically sing the 7 notes in the first line and the first line of refrain as a high note of 1, and the following 4 note as 5.

What we need most now are compositions that can absorb the essence of Chinese music and, combined with the content of hymns, provide a Chinese flavor while at the same time be acceptable to Chinese believers. How to harmonize the tunes while retaining their Chinese charm is a problem to be explored. In the *New Hymnal* many pieces that are supposed to be sung in unison have accompaniment that is based on western notions of harmony and are very similar to western hymn traditions.

#### 4. *Psalms and short verses*

Strictly speaking, the singing of biblical verses does not constitute hymn singing but this is a common practice found in Chinese churches. In the northern and inland rural areas of China, the habit of singing Psalms with folk tunes has existed for a long time, and in some places, they have published such hymn books. Psalm 23, 121, 133 and 150 (NTH No. 379, 382, 383 and 384) were adopted in the *New Hymnal*. They were written by Su Zuoyang 苏佐扬,<sup>52</sup> who notated the songs after listening to his classmates while studying at North China Theological Seminary. Its characteristic features are that the words follow the tunes, and Bible words remain unchanged. Lines vary in length to be embedded in tunes to be sung, which is easy to popularize among believers.

Most of the believers in China used to live in rural areas. Even among those in cities, the overall education level was below average. It was difficult for them to understand complicated lyrics, while simple short choruses were easy to sing. Some short choruses attached to the *New Hymnal* are lyrics of folk tunes, such as No.1 and No. 26. Some are selected from Su Zuoyang's "Short Choruses of Heaven and Man" 《天人短歌》, such as No. 16, 21, 24 and 25. There are also newly composed tunes, such as Nos. 30, 31, 32 and 37.

Chinese Christians love the Bible, and the most popular hymns are short scripture choruses, which use scripture (with some modifications) as lyrics. The advantage is that believers can sing these songs and recite Scriptures easily,

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52 Su Zuoyang (1916-2007), born in Hong Kong, studied Chinese and Western musical instruments from an early age and graduated from North China Theological Seminary in Tengxian County, Shandong Province. He founded the magazine the *Voice of Heaven and Man*, and published the *Short Choruses of Heaven and Man*, and *Hymns of Heaven and Man* with a total of more than 600 songs.

making it a unique form of “Further Contextualization.” After the publication of *The New Hymnal*, the Hymn Committee tried to meet the needs of grassroots churches in 1995 by publishing *Short Choruses of Praise* (new edition) 《赞美短歌（新编）》, with a total of 640 songs. The first 300 pieces are short scriptural songs, 90% of which are works from certain composers, and are highly popular in churches. Ma Geshun published *Rod-and-Staff Choruses* 《杖杆短歌集》 in 1950. The book falls under the category of short scriptural choruses. Its melodic compositions were aimed at matching the scripture used for Ma’s pastor’s sermons.

## Editing and Use of the New Hymnal

### 1. Editorial requirements

*The New Hymnal* takes “further contextualization” as its editorial principle, and its implementation has been reflected in the following aspects:

#### 1) Chinese innovative works account for a high proportion

*The New Hymnal* contains 46 old Chinese originated hymns (marked with \*) and 56 newly collected hymns (marked with \*\*), totaling 102 songs, accounting for almost a fourth of the collection of 400. There are 7 old hymns in the *Supplementary Volume*, and 54 newly collected ones, totaling 61, accounting for about one-third of a total of 200. Having such a high proportion of local compositions has never been done before in the hymnals published in China.

In achieving this goal, it was necessary to collect a large number of works and to enhance their quality. In the editing of the *New Hymnal* and the *Supplementary Volume*, hymns were collected from believers from all over the country through *Tianfeng Magazine* 《天风》. The response was very enthusiastic, with 2,256 compositions collected during the

first round and 2,301 for the second round. Most of the lyrics consisted of the simple retelling of Bible verses or simple confessional statements. Many of the tunes were borrowed from familiar songs, including “March of the Volunteer Soldiers” 《义勇军进行曲》 and “Eight Notices and Three Disciplines” 《三大纪律八项注意》. The selection rate was low. Colleagues in the editorial office did a lot of work to modify lyrics, search for suitable tune compositions or substitute harmonies, and gain the approval of the original authors before publication. On the score book, pieces with only the main melody were marked as the “tune” by the author, while pieces with both tune and harmony were marked as “composed” by the author.

Collecting hymns was a process of gathering the talented composers and encouraging innovation. Pastoral workers had specific interests in writing hymns, and it was incumbent upon those who are gifted to do so. However, talents were not limited to pastoral workers – volunteers who had spiritual pursuits, compositional ability and professional training in music were also qualified. Because of the nature of hymns, the composers’ own understanding of the faith played a dominant role.

In editing the *Supplementary Volume*, no lyrics were found written in classical Chinese, and the tunes tended to be modern and cheerful. For example, No. 123 “Thank God in All Seasons” 《四季感恩》 has a 3/4 rhythm. New songs in the future will keep pace with the times in terms of lyrics and tunes. How to standardize composition in hymns is still an issue to be discussed and practiced.

- 2) The selection of translated works should be based on the actual needs of Chinese churches. We have considered the following three points:

The first is to introduce the treasures that have been widely used by churches all over the world.

“Further Contextualization” does not mean that our church is divorced from the historical and universal church tradition. Therefore, the *New Hymnal* includes many hymns that have historical and regional representation and are universally loved by believers. For example, No. 17 “The Spacious Firmament on High” 《创造奇功歌》 is a piece adapted from Haydn’s *Creation*, and No. 18 “Joyful, Joyful, We Adore Thee” 《快乐崇拜歌》 uses the melody from Beethoven’s *Ode to Joy* in the Ninth Symphony. Ma Geshun’s soprano solo piece in *The Anointed* 《受膏者》 was also adapted to No. 329 “My Soul Extols the Lord” 《尊主为大歌》, and the lyrics were expanded to make it easier for believers to sing it.

The *Supplementary Volume* included No. 14 “How Great Thou Art” and No. 157 “Amazing Grace” and other popular hymns. Also chosen were famous songs from, for example, John Stainer’s *The Crucifixion*, namely No. 76 “Cross of Jesus, Cross of Sorrow” 《耶稣十架》, and the black American spiritual No. 75 “Were You There” 《你在这场吗?》. Hymns favored by overseas Chinese such as No. 77 “Because He Lives” 《因他活着》 and No. 180 “I Know Who Holds Tomorrow” 《我知谁掌管明天》 are also very popular among believers.

Second, the lyrics must conform to the trend in Chinese theological construction.

Guided by the Three-Self Principle, the Chinese church should always take heed of self-propagation and theological reconstruction. While we have inherited basic beliefs, we must also guard against one-sided and extreme theological orientations. For example, there are six hymns about eschatology (No. 116 to 121) in the *New Hymnal*. The message conveyed is not the horror of impending disasters, but that believers should wait for the Lord’s Second Coming with a watchful mind, and for them to be ready, at any time, to meet the beautiful New World to come.

The spiritual life of believers must be combined with their daily social lives. In the *New Hymnal*, there are 18 hymns under the column of “faithful service” 忠心服务. Included are popular ones like No. 351 “Oh Master, Let Me Walk with Thee” 《与主偕行歌》, No. 359 “God Make My Life A Little Light” 《生活如光歌》 and No. 366 “Brighten the Corner Where You Are” 《光照小地方歌》. In the SV, it is emphasized that Christians should care about social injustice, and console and serve people in need. Thus No. 141 “Christ, You Call Us All to Service” 《蒙主呼召服事》 and No. 142 “Where Cross the Crowded Ways of Life” 《生命路程》 were selected.

Christians should love God’s creation and attach importance to environmental protection, but Christians in China have paid little attention to this in the past. Three hymns (No. 135-137) were selected in the *Supplementary Volume* to bring attention to these issues.

Third, the translation should not only conform to the original intentions, but also to the requirements of the Chinese language and be properly matched with the tunes.

Some pieces in the *Hymns of Universal Praise* employ conventional words in ancient Chinese and Buddhist vocabulary, such as “*Shen Ming*” 神明 and “*Miao Shen*” 妙身 in No. 1 “Holy, Holy, Holy! Lord God Almighty,” which caused some controversy. I have made some explanations.<sup>53</sup> It should also be noted that when the Bible was translated into Chinese, words that were borrowed included the Taoist word *Tao* 道 to clarify the meaning of “Logos,” which did not affect the truth of the Bible. Confucian terms such as “honoring courtesy” 顶礼 (*dǐng lǐ*) and “seeking benevolence” 求仁 (*qiú rén*) (see No. 98 “When I Survey the Wondrous Cross”) are the embodiments of traditional culture and should not be regarded as taboo.

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53 Cao Shengjie: “The Past Exploration on Contextualization of Hymns,” in *Tianfeng* No. 10, 2016.



When the *Supplementary Volume* was edited, the Hong Kong Christian Literature Publishing House gave us free use of 64 hymns from *Hymns of Universal Praise*. Their translations were very loyal to the original text, but due to the differences in linguistic usage of Chinese between Hong Kong and the Mainland, the editorial office made modifications to some lyrics with the consent of the other party, and even retranslated some parts. For example, the original translation of the first line of the first and second sections of SV No.72 “What Wondrous Love is This” goes “What wondrous great love, my heart, my heart.” “何等奇妙大爱，我的心，我的心，” which may lead to the ambiguity that great love comes from “my heart.” The English original is “what wondrous love is this, o my soul, o my soul,” which means that my heart laments how wonderful the great love of the Lord is, so the editorial office changed “my heart” to “touch my heart” 感我心. It is not indicated in the notation that this lyric has been modified, because the amount of modification does not exceed one-fourth of the original text, and this principle is explained in the preface to this episode.

“Turn Your Eyes upon Jesus” 《当转眼仰望耶稣》 SV No. 176 was originally published in the *Hymns of Life* 《生命圣诗》, which is widely used by overseas Chinese churches. The translation of the last line of its refrain goes “In the light of the Savior’s glory and grace, things in the world appear as vanity” 在救主荣耀恩典大光中，世上事必然显为虚空，好像一切世上的事都没有意义, as if all things in the world are meaningless. But in fact, its original text was “show strangely dim,” which means that “under the great light of God, things in the world will be eclipsed, which is nothing”. So it seems more in line with the original intention to change it to “appear mediocre” 显得平庸. The word “mediocrity” 平庸 (*ping yong*) is not ideal, but it is used here because it rhymes with the word “mercy” 慈容 (*ci rong*) at the end of the previous line in Chinese.

The coordination between translated words and tunes is also a big challenge. For example, in No. 93 “Old Rugged Cross” 《十架永存歌》, the rhythm of each line starts with two semiquaver notes, except for the third stanza. In the original score, it fits both cases, because the English lyrics in the first stanza are one syllable short, so the two semiquaver notes are combined into one quaver note, and the second stanza is based on two semiquaver notes.

In fact, in Chinese translation, we do not have to follow such a pattern, but hymnals in the past coped with the problem in such a manner, so we did it the same way. Now, whenever I hear the congregation sing these lines, they will spontaneously sing two semiquaver notes, resulting in confusion in the matching of words. I feel very guilty about it. I think that if one word is added to the translation of this line, and the first to fourth stanzas are changed into “extremely humiliating and painful marks” 极其羞辱和苦痛记号, “the true God is kind to me” 对于我却是真神仁慈, “but I still take this cross as my holy one” 但我仍然以此架为圣 and “willing to bear Lord’s cross” 甘愿背负主十字宝架. It will be completely neat, and I hope it can be taken into consideration in future revisions.

### 3) The hymn collection is to meet the needs of the Chinese church.

The Chinese Church always follows the teachings of the Bible and pray for national leaders. In the 19th century, the hymns edited by foreign missionaries included the hymn “God Bless China” 《上帝保护中华》.<sup>54</sup> The same is true of hymn collections in the Republic of China, but most of them

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54 “Hymns for the Lord”, 1871, Fuzhou dialect, 74, quoted from Sheng Xuanen: “Discussion on the History of Chinese Christian Hymns.” *Sacred Music Quarterly*, Summer, 1982.

used the tune of “God Bless the Queen” (from England) at that time, which was very inappropriate. When *Hymns of Universal Praise* was edited, Xu Dishan 许地山<sup>55</sup> composed No. 176, “This Land You Gave Us, Lord” 《神佑中华歌》 which was given a tune by Yang Yinliu based on the original melody. In addition, the *New Hymnal* also adopted the old work of Qi Yingmao 戚瀛茂 from Wenzhou, No. 175 “God Bless All Lands and All Peoples” 《为国求福歌》 and No. 177 “May God Bless China” 《求主福佑中华歌》 by Sun Yanli. The *Supplementary Volume* adopted Yang Bolun’s “God Bless China” 《主佑中华》 (SV No. 115), which was written before Hong Kong’s return to China.

“Lord, While for All Mankind We Pray” 《为国祈求》 SV No. 114 was written by a British in the 20th century. After its publication, it was pointed out that we should not accept the so-called patriotic works of the people who invaded China at that time. We chose this piece because it was commendable for its inclusive nationalism. However, there were other aspects that we failed to take into account. Now, we believe that hymns praying for blessings on our country are best written by Chinese Christians themselves.

World peace is also the wish and prayer of Chinese Christians. “Dedicate a Prayer for Peace” 《献上和平祷声》 SV No. 138 fills this gap. The Chinese nation has always had the virtue of respecting the elderly. The Chinese church holds worship services for the elderly every year, and No. 189 “Honor the Elderly” 《敬老尊长歌》 has almost become a “must-sing” song. After the reform and opening-up, many new churches were built in various places, so the hymns for dedicating churches emerged, such as No. 174 “We Thank

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55 Xu Dishan 1893 - 1941, was born in Taiwan Province. A well-known novelist and essayist in modern China, he graduated from Yenching University, and once taught at the College of Liberal Arts and Religious Studies.

You Father” 《献堂感恩歌》 and SV No. 109 “Giving Thanks to God for the New Church Building” 《感谢我主新堂落成》. In the commissioning ceremonies of seminary graduates and in the ordination ceremonies of pastors, No. 170 “Learn To Be A Good Shepherd” 《学做好牧人歌》 has had a far-reaching influence.

Among believers, the economic conditions have improved, and the number of new houses or relocations has increased. They often hold thanksgiving prayers in their new homes, and thus “Celebrate We A New House Built” (*New Hymnal*, No.196) 《新屋落成感恩歌》 (《新编》第 196 首) and “Our House and Home Are Thine” (SV No. 131) 《安宅歌》 (《补充本》第131首) are fitting for such occasions.

It is a shortcoming that the indices of composers, translators, tune names and metrics have not been offered completely in accordance with international practice. This was due to time constraints for editing: The *New Hymnal* was done in a hurry and with inadequate human resources for the editing of the *Supplement*.<sup>56</sup> However, the index of the tune of the first sentence in numerical notation was added to the *New Hymnal*, which was relatively rare in the Mainland at that time. We follow these indices in the revised *Hymns of Universal Praise* (1977) from Hong Kong. For Chinese people who are familiar with the numerical notation, this retrieval method is very helpful.

Most of the translated hymns in the *New Hymnal* are works of the 20th century. In order to adapt to the familiarity of believers, gospel hymns account for a large proportion. Unfortunately, the awareness of copyright issues was not common at the time in our country. Some modern hymns have been selected in the *Supplementary Volume*, and

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56 He Shoucheng: *The Study Book of Hymnology*. Hong Kong: Christian Literature and Art Publishing House, 2002, p. 240.

we now attach great importance to contacting the copyright owners of the original hymns and obtaining permission to use them. This process is time consuming and causes delays in the publishing time. Some hymns originally intended to be used had to be left out because of high copyright costs. However, I think we must abide by the law, and it is necessary to do so. Fortunately, most overseas church groups are friendly and give us great support.

## 2. *The use of hymns*

Hymnals are compiled for the use of believers. There are countless hymns composed by Christians all over the world, but only a limited number can be passed down over time, depending on the quality of the hymns, and more importantly, whether they are loved by believers and widely sung. To help believers accept them, the hymns should first be used to promote familiarity with them. The Church needs to introduce and consciously promote the hymns. Bishop K.H. Ting once suggested that every time the church worships, it should sing a hymn composed by Chinese believers, but unfortunately, it was rarely done.

It has been more than 30 years since the *New Hymnal* was published, with more than 15 million copies issued in the 20th century. Since the 1980s and 1990s, most churches in China have been using it and teaching hymn singing before worship.

The National CCC&TSPM published and distributed cassette tapes of the *New Hymnal* (later converted into CD-ROM), organized and directed by Ma Geshun and sung by the Shanghai United Choir Group. These served as a good

demonstration. In 1994, Wang Shenyin 王神荫<sup>57</sup> edited and published *Historical Notes of the Hymns in the New Hymnal* 《(新编) 史话》 on the basis of his previous *Textual Research on Hymns* 《圣诗典考》. The items about the new compositions were written by me after the editorial department of the *New Hymnal* had collected material from the authors. They were first published in *Tianfeng Magazine* in order to attract the attention of believers to these hymns.

Xu Mu,<sup>58</sup> who served as a member of the Sacred Music Committee, once taught the singing of hymns in the *New Hymnal*, “one by one,” in Wuma Road Church in Changchun, besides conducting sacred music training in churches in 26 provinces and cities across the country. According to her, believers accept hymns to different degrees. Believers in rural areas and small towns can quickly learn Chinese tunes like “Gracious God, Our Father” 《慈父上帝歌》 as they did a hundred years ago, while for foreign tunes with semitones, such as No. 283 “Jesus, I Come”, 《耶稣我来歌》 in the *New Hymnal*, they could barely learn one sentence in the morning. She thinks that 60% of believers prefer the hymns composed by Chinese people.

With the development of churches across the country, the need for hymns is diverse. Some local churches have introduced overseas hymns in large quantities, or compiled their own collections of hymns for use. It is worth noting that though there are some hymns of praise that are not officially published, they are sung in some grass-roots churches, among which there are some acceptable compositions.

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57 Bishop Wang Shenyin (1915-1997), a native of Gutian, Fujian Province, graduated from St. John's University and attained a Master's degree at Toronto University. He served as Vice Chairman of the National TSPM and was Chairman and President of Shandong CCC&TSPM.

58 Xu Mu, born in 1937, was a soprano, soloist and member of the Chinese Musicians Association.

However, in contrast with those in the *New Hymnal* and its *Supplementary Volume*, the theological ideas and sentiments revealed in some of their lyrics tend to have the following features:

- 1) They place society and people around us in contending positions: A hymn uses the tune of “The Descendants of the Dragon” 《龙的传人》 but changes its title to “Some people say that China’s name is ‘suffering,’ 《有人说，中国的名字叫苦难》 because people are “not looking up to God,” and then asks God to “change this era.” Another hymn titled “Compatriots are not as close as those sharing spiritual affinity” 《同胞哪有灵胞亲》 emphasizes that “blood ties cannot compare with spiritual relations” and counterposes the love among Christians with the relationship between Christians and their relatives and fellow citizens (who are non-Christians).
- 2) They emphasize that one should leave his/her family in order to preach the gospel, disregarding the impact on their lives. There is a hymn entitled “It’s not because I am homeless” 《不是没有家》 which tells the family “not to care about me.” Believers are urged to trust that they are being led by the “Holy Spirit” and “worry not about loneliness because of the company of the Lord “不愁独行主为伴.” Such hymns often feature words like “We have to pay the price in blood and spread the seeds of the gospel all over “我们要付出血的代价，将福音种子撒遍,” even proclaiming that we should “strive hard and dare to die.”
- 3) They describe natural disasters as signs that portend the end of the world. For example, the lyrics of a song “Doomsday is Coming” 末日近了 are: “Famines are getting worse, earthquakes occur more frequently, the world situation is getting increasingly dangerous;

people attack people, countries attack countries, and disasters are getting worse. The end is near, and the revelation of love has become clear. Arise and save your soul, the end is near.” (饥荒越来越厉害了，地震越来越频繁了，世局越来越险恶，民攻打民，国攻打国，灾难越来越厉害了。末日已迫近了，爱的启示已显明了。起来抢救灵魂，末日近了。) The melodies of these hymns are close to folk tunes, so they are more easily spread, but their negative influence is obvious and worrisome.

### 3. *The national also belongs to the world*

The *New Hymnal* has attracted the attention and praise of overseas churches because of newly composed hymns. Some overseas friends, such as Jean Woo, enthusiastically introduced Chinese compositions to churches in the United States at the editing stage, which facilitated exchanges. In 1998, the San Francisco Diocese of the Episcopal Church specially invited Chinese Christians to sing Chinese hymns to their congregants.

In order to make the *New Hymnal* better understood by foreign churches, we cooperated with Hong Kong Christian Literature and Art Publishing House and Lutheran Laymen's League (国际路德会平信徒联盟) in publishing the English-Chinese bilingual version of the *New Hymnal* in 1999. The difficulty of this work was in the translation of the newly composed hymns into English, which required not only expressing the meaning, but also taking care of the rhyme in English and matching it with the tunes. At that time, among those we knew well, no one was competent enough to take



on the venture except Shen Xianying 沈显瑛.<sup>59</sup> Fortunately, Dr. Huang Yongxi 黄永熙, the translation consultant, took the lead and sought the help of several former missionaries to complete this great project. It is said that some translators rested in the Lord not long after the project was completed.

In the 1980s and 1990s, overseas churches or publishing houses contacted us for copyright, asking for translation, reproduction, reprinting and adaptation, or singing our compositions on important occasions. According to incomplete statistics, 12 songs in the *New Hymnal*, accounting for more than one-fifth of the 56 new compositions were chosen to be used, including “Christ, the Everlasting Lord” 《基督永长久歌》, “God be Praised at Early Morn” 《早起赞美歌》, “Holy Night, Blessed Night” (Silent Night Song) 《圣夜静歌》, “Gracious God, Our Father”

《慈父上帝歌》, Winter Has Passed, The Rain Is Over 《与主同去歌》, Birthday Greetings We Bring You 《生辰感恩歌》, Creator’s Artistic Brush 《神工妙笔歌》, Holy Spirit is Like the Wind 《圣灵运行歌》, Neighbor at Our Side 《邻舍就在身旁歌》, Honor God, Serve the People 《荣神益人歌》, Open My Eyes, O My Lord 《求主开启歌》, and We Sing His Praise, Our Maker God 《欢乐颂扬歌》.

The churches or publishing houses requesting copyright are from the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, Canada, Singapore, Hong Kong China and Taiwan China. The earliest request was made by *Sound the Bamboo* (CCA Hymnal) edited by the Christian Conference of Asia. The *Huaxia Shengshi* 《华夏圣诗》 based in Singapore in the 1990s was also a frequent user. Chinese works are found in the hymns published by the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the United Methodist Church of America. In 1987, the

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59 Shen Xianying (1907 -1993), graduated from Shanghai Mateer’s Girls High School and was a piano teacher. In the bilingual edition of the *New Hymnal*, 10 hymns were translated by her.

World Chinese Christian Sacred Music Sunday chose to use “Gracious God, Our Father” 《慈父上帝歌》. The Lausanne World Evangelical Conference held in 1989 chose “Christ the Everlasting Lord” 《基督永长久歌》。In 1995, when the Council for World Mission held its 200th anniversary commemorative meeting, it chose to use “Winter Has Passed, The Rain Is Over” 《与主同去歌》.) “Dedicate a Prayer for Peace” 《献上和平祷声》 in the *Supplement* was introduced by Qiu Weizhen 邱维真,<sup>60</sup> a member of the editorial board, and it attracted the attention of German churches. All these show that Chinese-style hymns are welcomed by Christians all over the world.

#### 4. Retrospect and Expectation

When China’s reform and opening-up brought about the revival and development of Chinese churches, the publication of the *New Hymnal* met an urgent need. In promoting the further contextualization of hymns, we can only talk about the role of connecting the past with the future. After all, its achievements were limited and its shortcomings obvious. Compared with the compositions of the older generation, there is a gap in the quality of lyrics and tunes. Some music experts have commented that “Based on the existing Chinese works, the melodies are still not beautiful enough, and the artistry is far from that of most western hymns.”<sup>61</sup>

After the publication of the *New Hymnal*, the National CCC&TSPM underestimated the needs of local churches, and

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60 Qiu Weizhen, born in Shanghai in 1952, is a senior middle school teacher. She studied in the Normal Department of Shanghai Conservatory of Music and the Music Department of Shanghai Normal University and studied music education in Germany. She is the conductor of the Shanghai Community Church Senior Members Choir.

61 Chen Xiaolu, *The History of Christian Music*, Beijing: Religious Culture Publishing House, 2006, p. 619.

the Chinese Christian Hymnal Committee (once renamed the Commission on Sacred Music) stopped promoting more compositions. It has been suggested that Christian musicians should be sent to churches in the inland and border areas to learn about Chinese-style hymns that have been accepted by the churches, and to gain familiarity with folk music, so as to draw nourishment from them and facilitate composition. It is a great pity that this has not been done.

Most of the hymns in the *New Hymnal* are elegant. However, there are not enough of those with simple and popular words. Before the editing of the *Supplementary Volume*, there was no examination and study on the use of the *New Hymnal* for remedying its drawbacks. Moreover, after its publication, it was not promoted in a planned way, resulting in its low utilization rate in churches all over the country and failure to achieve the expected results.

It is important to know what kind of hymns are most often sung by large numbers of Christians in China. These should not only meet the needs of worship and reflect the spiritual experience of Chinese Christians, but also be loved by believers, providing them a guide to live a healthy church life. This should be taken seriously by the whole church. Today, some seminaries have established departments of sacred music, hoping not only to improve at the level of practice, but also to be attentive to the composition of new hymns.

I earnestly hope that China's Christianity will attain greater progress in the composition and use of hymns in the process of "the further contextualization of Christianity in China."

Rev. Cao Shengjie is a former President of the China Christian Council.

## **Exploring Biblical Theology from a historical perspective can lay the foundation for a Chinese Contextual Theology in the New Era**

**基督教中国化的基础性工程：试从教会史层面  
论新时代中国化释经神学**

**GAO FENG 高峰**

The newly revised Church Order of the Chinese Protestant Church and the Five-Year Plan for Promoting the Further Contextualization of Christianity in China (2018-2022) 《中国基督教教会规章》和《推进我国基督教中国化五年规划纲要（2018-2022）》(referred to as “the Plan”) show the theological self-awareness of Chinese churches and their path of action in the new era. Basic doctrine constitutes the essence of the Church’s faith; the openness of biblical interpretation keeps theology advancing with the times, and the publicity of biblical interpretation allows the Church to bear ethical witness. In the twenty-first century, while adhering to the basic doctrine and canon, we must respect the tradition of the Chinese Church in “exalting the Bible” 高举圣经, establish a system of theological and biblical hermeneutics that are compatible with socialist society, draw lessons from the history of biblical interpretation, focus on the openness of biblical truth, pay attention to the publicity of Christian theology, and contextualize the reinterpretation of the doctrine and church canon for Chinese Christianity.

Not only is this the way for the Chinese Church to survive and thrive but it is also the ardent hope and call of the

Party and the government. It is also an inevitable path for the Church to take in integrating with fine Chinese cultural traditions and developing a “Chinese Christianity.” By grasping the fundamentals of the theological interpretation of the Bible (hereinafter referred to as TIB,) the Church’s political identity, social adaptation, cultural integration and unity in the post-denominational era can enable it to become established, as “a tree with roots and a brook with a source.”

However, the top-level design and appeal must be implemented in the specific construction of the church’s theological interpretation of the Bible, so we must focus on the ethical direction, theological basis and the exegesis of specific scriptures for the contextualized TIB, so as to facilitate contextualization at the pulpits of grass-roots churches and establish the Chinese Church’s selfhood in exegetical theology. This article attempts to briefly discuss this topic from such aspects as church history, the history of biblical interpretation, theological hermeneutics, and the guiding role of the socialist core values in TIB.

## **1. The role of TIB in the process of further contextualization of Chinese Christianity**

- 1.1. Contextualized exegesis is the source of the Church’s vitality
  - 1.1.1 Consciousness of the theological interpretation of the Bible in the Chinese Church

Chinese churches have always had the tradition of “exalting the Bible.” “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16-17 NRSV). Christianity is a religion so much rooted in the scriptures that it is even described as a ‘religion of

the book.’ The diversity and unity of theological thinking in the Bible endorses the fact that theology is always contextualized, reflecting the dynamic, living relationship between God and humans as well as the survival law of faith groups, and furnishing the theological basis for future generations to reinterpret the Bible. Theology, in effect, is the interpretation of scripture, canon law, religious traditions, and religious experience in response to the survival needs of the church.<sup>1</sup> All theological doctrines are some kind of hermeneutics—studies and practices in attempts to interpret and govern church survival. Biblical exegesis has always been fundamental to both the Jewish and the Christian faith. The purpose and attribution of all theological interpretations is to explain and comprehend the living conditions of the Church in its context. In other words, to explain what is revealed in the Bible means to make sense of human existence.<sup>2</sup> Since doctrines, canons and creeds are all contextualized, TIB is crucial and makes it even more important to interpret and reinterpret the Bible. The Chinese Church is acutely aware of the significance of TIB and theological hermeneutics, beginning with the theological mass movement of the 1950s to the Reconstruction of Theological Thinking advocated by Bishop K. H. Ting 丁光训主教 in the 1990s and present attempts to further contextualize Chinese Christianity—all these reflect a theological self consciousness.

The theological interpretation of the Bible is based on biblical theology. Readers are encouraged to harness the achievements of rigorous biblical research (including hermeneutics in its general sense) to interpret the Bible

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1 Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, *Systematic Theology: Task and Method*, vol.1, Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991, 13-14.

2 Rudolf Bultmann, *The Presence of Eternity*, Westport: Greenwood Press, 1975, 1-11.

from a certain theological point of view, heeding not only God's actions in history but also God's will in today's society and culture.<sup>3</sup> Therefore, there is a close relationship between the theological interpretation of the Bible and disciplines such as theological hermeneutics. Biblical interpretation is the source and a fundamental component of theology, while theological views in turn affect the interpretation of the Bible.<sup>4</sup> For more than seventy years, Chinese churches have grown up together with the New China, and the sinicized theological interpretation of the scriptures is both a topic in theological theory and an ethical practice of the Chinese church. Thus theological interpretations of the Bible with Chinese characteristics is not only an agenda for developing theological theory, but also a necessary ministry of the Chinese Church.

"The history of the Church is also a history of the interpretation of the Bible by the Church, and the studies of biblical interpretation consist of the experiences and consensus of the Church accumulated in exegetical history."<sup>5</sup>

This consensus, that is, hermeneutical theology, is more important than the specific interpretation of a certain passage. The consensus formed by the Chinese Church in her own context is crucial to the survival of the Chinese Church. The interpretation of Chinese theology is to rally the consensus of the Chinese Church in the new era. Theological interpretation of the Bible is the communal thinking of Chinese Churches and Chinese theological interpretation is the accumulation of Chinese churches' biblical interpretations in the new era. The exploration of

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3 See Kevin Vanhoozer, editor-in-chief, *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation*, Hong Kong: Chinese Bible Association Ltd., 2014, 21.

4 Ibid., 744.

5 Li-chen Tsai, *Who Says that the Letter Kills—A Hermeneutical Study of the Paradigm Shift*, Taipei: Campus Study Press, 2014, 3.

TIB is also closely related to the establishment and unity of church fellowships which are critical to the building up of institutional and doctrinal selfhood in the post-denominational era, and realizing the contextualization of Chinese Christianity. It has been pointed out by Bishop Ting that, “The Bible unites us.”<sup>6</sup> A correct view of the bible is vital for the reconstruction of theological thinking in the Chinese Church. The key point of a holistic biblical view consists in recognizing the diversity and complexity of the ideological world and the faith testimonies embodied in the biblical canons as well as the complexity of church life and tradition. The Church therefore should, under the principles of rationality and diversity, maintain a proper relationship between God and humans and bear witness that is God-fearing and neighbor-loving. The history of the Church and Christian thought shows that the diverse and unified interpretation of the Bible is an important prerequisite for the unity of the Church. For more than two thousand years, there have been many different opinions and interpretations of the Bible in Christianity. However, the Bible has withstood misinterpretation by various heresies and survived the comments of scholars from all sides. Therefore, the study of the biblical view, especially the various interpretative approaches in the history of the Church in the past two thousand years is itself a significant theological research topic.

The Bible itself also reflects the process of constant adjustment in Hebrew theological thinking. Jews were the earliest recipients, witnesses and interpreters of the Bible while Christian theology has developed new interpretations and understandings. In the twenty-first century, the theological interpretation of the Bible is confronted with

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6 Quoted from Chen Yilu: “The Trilogy of Chinese Christianity Towards Unity,” *Nanjing Theological Review*, no. 2, 2019.



pluralism and ambiguity arising from religious and cultural dialogues. The biblical view of history can illuminate the present and future theology of biblical interpretation. Therefore, the topic “Perceptions of Biblical Tradition” should be studied by taking into consideration the history of Jewish thought and the history of the development of Christian theology, especially the history of the Chinese Church and her thinking. The history of Christian thought and church history consists of the history of the constant understanding, re-understanding and re-interpreting of biblical truth. All kinds of controversies and even wars in history, can be traced to the theological interpretation of the Bible concerning concepts of God, church, Christology, the Holy Spirit, creation, soteriology, eschatology, humanism and Christian ethics,

Both the New and Old Testaments reflect what was part of the culture of the times when these biblical texts emerged. Culture is the comprehensive embodiment of people’s way of life. The interpretation of the Bible is also a part of culture. The createdness of human beings convinces us that the peculiarities of Christian culture should not be regarded as simply the product of a particular social group that is self-sufficient and lives behind closed doors. History has proven that Christians continue to maintain social interactions with non-Christians whose ways of living and boundaries with Christians are fluid and permeable; thus Christian culture should be interpreted in a wider cultural context. What unites Christians is not the basic common beliefs, but a project of cultural construction—that includes academic activities and the practices of daily Christian life.<sup>7</sup> Therefore, biblical theology and exegesis have turned out

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7 Kathryn Tanner, “Cultural Theory,” in John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (eds) *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, 541 .

to be a history of interaction between Christians and non-Christians, that incorporates the intermingling of sacred and secular elements. To contextualize the interpretation of the Bible in the new era is the more urgent task and path of survival for the Chinese Church.

### 1.1.2 Theological interpretation is the way for the church to survive.

Church history attests to the fact that establishing a proper system of contextualized theological hermeneutics is the way to survive for faith communities. The doctrine, canon and creeds of the catholic church very accurately define the nature of Christian faith and the identity of the Christian Church, and are the universally recognized standards of Christianity. However, we should also see that these rules of faith, in essence, are theological interpretations of the Bible by the ancient catholic Church, in the context of Greek philosophical thinking and language used around the Mediterranean region in the Greco-Roman cultural context. These reflected the living conditions of the Church, the relationship between Church and state, and the Church's ethical responses at the time. It was essentially a public theology in the context of Greco-Roman or Westernized Christianity, that later developed a Constantinian ecclesiastical theology and church-state relations whose strengths and weaknesses are well known. That is to say, the Church does not have to be the power center of society. As a marginalized group, it can be more like the Israelites, taking on the responsibility of being the servant of Jehovah and being light to the world.<sup>8</sup>

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8 Liu Zhenpeng: "Exploring Yoda's Jeremiah Model—Reflecting on its ethical significance and its 'public' significance," *Journal of Mountain Road*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Baptist Theological Seminary, no. 1, 2013.

In early church history, both Orthodox Christian churches and heretical sects expanded their influence through churches activities, especially preaching and charitable activities. Marcion, a wealthy shipowner traveled to Rome and donated large sums of money to religious groups, attracting large audiences similar to those of the Gnostics and the sorcerer Simon. Therefore, our investigation of heresy in early Christianity cannot be confined to the purely speculative field of “theological controversy,” but must extend to include the living conditions and social context of the entire faith community. The issue of “orthodoxy” and “heresy” faced by the early church is in essence the battle for survival and space between the apostolic succession as testified in the Bible, particularly by the New Testament canon, and the heresies, along with extremist ideas. By examining church history, we can draw the conclusion that heresies and some “divergent” factions, which go to extremes in doctrinal debates within orthodox churches, often abandon the most reasonable kernel of the faith proclaimed by the Bible, witnessed and practiced by the apostles: that is, cosmopolitanism, a balanced approach to creation and redemption, the relationship between this life and the afterlife, and the testimony of Christians’ faith, hope and love in the present life. This balanced and open-minded core of the faith in the early church is the fundamental reason why Christianity survived the harshness of the Roman Empire and continues till this day, becoming the world religion with the largest number of believers and the greatest influence, something which heresies have failed to do for they flourish for a while and finally disappear or make a face-lift and reappear in another way. Heresies and radical thinking were rife in early Christianity, even more numerous than the number of famous apologists at the time. This is both a theoretical and practical issue that must be given great attention in the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity.

## 1.2. Contextualized theological interpretation of the Bible in China: the basic project in the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity

Speeches by Party and government leaders have clearly depicted the real situation of Chinese religions including Christianity, and emphasized the positive significance of actively expounding doctrines and scriptures so as to promote the adaptation of religions to socialist society. General Secretary Xi Jinping clearly stated: “The Party is the core of leadership in our various undertakings. The ancients said that ‘six rivers share the same wind and the nine continents share the same experience.’ In contemporary China, without the leadership of the Party, this cannot be done.”<sup>9</sup> In the new era, theological interpretation of the Bible in Chinese Christianity must make theological reflections in accordance with the conditions in China. To carry out theological interpretation that adapts to socialism in the new era is the ardent hope of the Party and the state, which regards the theological interpretation of the Bible from the loftier perspective of national economy and people’s livelihood, and as the major foundational project for the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity. This is to elevate the theological interpretation of the Bible to the level of the “political” 讲政治, which requires Christians to assume social and political responsibilities as citizens and members of civic groups.

Christians and church groups must theologically analyze and view the world beyond the four walls of the church and take into account all worldly factors as the raw materials for our theological interpretation. This is the

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9 Xi Jinping: “The Leadership of the Communist Party of China is the Most Essential Feature of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” *Qiushi*, no. 14, 2020.

“here and now” 此在 of Chinese Christians and churches. The focal point of the creeds universally recognized by the catholic church lies in Christology, especially the debate over the divinity and humanity of Christ. The Apostles’ Creed, the Nicene Creed, the Chalcedonian Creed, and Christian denominations’ emphasis and adherence to various doctrinal canons are the precious legacies of theological hermeneutics left to us by history. However, we should also note that the apologists, church fathers and Christian philosophers, after the “Logos Doctrine” of John’s Gospel, used Plato’s dualism, absolutism in Greek philosophy, and Aristotle’s philosophy of “substance” and “form” to theologically interpret the Bible. The theological interpretation of the Bible intentionally or unintentionally obscured the dynamics of the “living God” believed in by Hebrews (including Jews of the New Testament era, and even Jesus Christ himself), such as the “human nature” of God in the Old Testament, who likes to set up tents and walk with people on earth. And to transform the “living Word” of the Gospel of John into “the ruler of the universe” under whom is a strict system of ecclesial hierarchy and social class barriers that demarcate the sacred and the secular. The standard image of God became that of a ruler who is immutable, immovable, ruthless, omniscient and omnipresent. Man’s social class and human agency became either solidified or were compelled to be pursued only inwardly—this was the social and theological cause of the emergence of spiritual practitioners such as Thomas À Kempis, and Madame Jeanne Guyon in the Middle Ages. Using these philosophical factors to explain the way of the living God as revealed in the Bible, the Word in the human world and the incarnate life of the Word, leads to the separation of the divine and the human. This, coupled with the overemphasis on the concept of “original sin,” ontologically exacerbates the human sense of incompetence and alienation from God.

However, the guiding ideology of socialism in the new era is to integrate the best elements in traditional Chinese culture, emphasize human agency and advocate that “happiness comes from struggle.” To turn the blueprint into reality and carry out the reform to the end, will call for the spirit of struggle, which does not rush into fantasy, does not make false promises, and does not hesitate to take substantive steps to complete the task. Heaven rewards diligence and makes changes with each passing day.”<sup>10</sup> Emphasizing the core values of socialism is the contextualization of Marxism in the twenty-first century. This is the spiritual heritage of China in the new era and the main theme of the times. This spirit and its ethical effects can be fully integrated with the covenant-keeping, self-improving, civilizational, harmonious, and patriotic values spawned from the practice of a Godly way of life in the Bible; and in terms of the effectiveness of ethical actions, they can be fully combined by Chinese Christians. Therefore, Chinese Christianity in the new era desperately needs to give birth to its own theological interpretation of the Bible. The contextual interpretation of the bible and hermeneutics mentioned in this article is not only the speculative theology of scholars in the study, but also an invitation and an active call for the transformation of theological interpretation within and without the Church, focusing on the “here and now” of the Chinese Church: “We should constantly promote the harmonious development of party, religious and class relations, and relations between compatriots at home and abroad ... Religions should keep taking new steps to adapt themselves to socialist society and enhance the political, ideological, theoretical and emotional identification with

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10 Xi Jinping, 2018 New Year Message, *Xinhua* News Agency, December 31, 2017, <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/shipin/spfts/20171231/1325.shtml>.

the Communist Party of China.<sup>11</sup> This is a clear reminder for the Church to correctly analyze and determine the relationship between traditional biblical exegesis and the actual context, and to respond to and even assess the theological direction of biblical interpretation brought to us by Protestant missionaries in the past two hundred years. “Tradition ... does not report ‘naked facts’ ... In all traditional forms, it is virtually impossible to distinguish between historical events and symbolic interpretations.”<sup>12</sup> This reminds us that it is very important to decide on the angle from which to view history. The historical heritage of theology and church can only be truly inherited if it is used by us. Biblical interpretation, history and tradition are not only circular arguments of semantic philosophy, neither are they the review of Origen’s interpretation of the Bible on the wings of Neo-Platonism, nor a repetition of the interpretation of the Antiochene School according to Judaism and Aristotelian philosophy. Instead, it is necessary to establish methodologies for the Church’s existence—a method of theological thinking, theological interpretation, and ethical and cultural actions in the church context, and to directly explore the Bible, explore Jesus Christ and directly explore the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The Church Order of the Chinese Protestant Church (Revised Edition) has added the Confession of Faith which is only the beginning; “The Plan” can be regarded as a preliminary response to the call of the Party and the government for theological interpretation and transformation. However, the project of biblical interpretation and translation that has

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11 Wang Yang: “Speech at the Symposium on Celebrating the 70th Anniversary of the Founding of the People’s Republic of China on the United Front on September 11, 2019.”

12 Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Vol, 3), Trans, Lu Shengen, Tainan: Southeast Asian Theological Seminary Association, 1988, 382 .

been started can now be seen as a key step in realizing the transformation of theological interpretation. It conforms to and inherits the law explicit in the modern history of the Chinese Church and her thoughts, to search in them for the rationale for a theological interpretation of socialist society with Chinese characteristics in the new era. The theological interpretation of the Chinese Church in the new era is not only the spiritual mission of the Church, but also the political responsibility of every Christian as a citizen.

### 1.3 Establishing the theological selfhood of the Chinese Church in scriptural interpretation

Since its introduction into China, Chinese Christianity has been adhering to the interpretive tradition of the Reformation. “Religious reformers do not object to the thoughts of the church fathers,” but rather advocate that the Bible should be interpreted in the context of “evolving church life.” In the era of the Reformation, and also within the “reformed churches,” different countries and regions had different contexts. Martin Luther realized that the Germanization of Christianity in its liturgy, church institutions, and church-state relations, is in a sense a political theological practice representing the interests of the overwhelming majority of German citizens. In the new era of socialism, the further contextualization of the theological interpretation of the Bible is the way of survival for Chinese Christianity. Further contextualization is not only the objective requirement of the development of Chinese churches but also the ardent expectation of the Party and the government. Therefore, Biblical exegesis should reflect the publicity of theology, dig deep into church doctrine and canon for what is conducive to social harmony, and interpret them to meet the development requirements of contemporary China and to remain consistent with fine



traditional Chinese culture. The further contextualization of Chinese Christianity establishes its foundation on the Bible, adheres to basic Christian beliefs, inherits the tradition of the catholic church and the Reformation, takes root in the fertile soil of Chinese culture in faith and social practice, implements socialist core values, spreads the gospel, witnesses to Christ and runs the church well in its context.<sup>13</sup> Chinese culture is rich and diversified; further contextualization does not require Christianity to change its basic beliefs. In China's broad cultural tradition, the further contextualization of Christianity does not require radical abandonment of the excellent western cultural elements in it but rather an active opening up and mutual absorption beyond the East and the West, which is a dynamic renewal and revival across the times.<sup>14</sup>

The "Word in the world" embodied in the Old Testament and the "Word become flesh" in the New Testament are always a spiritual mystery that can be recognized but can never be absolutely comprehended by the finite world and human beings. Even the Chalcedonian Creed, which is regarded as one of the important confessions of the universal church, only makes a confession about the connection between the divinity and humanity of Christ in a way similar to the contemporary dialectical theology: "one and the same Christ, Son, Lord, only-begotten, to be acknowledged in two natures, inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably; the distinction of natures being by no means taken away by the union, but rather the property of each nature being preserved, and concurring in one Person and one Subsistence, not parted or divided into two

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13 See the "Five-Year Plan for Promoting the Further Contextualization of Christianity in China (2018-2022)" in *Chinese Theological Review* 29, 6-26.

14 Ibid.

persons, but one and the same Son, and only begotten, God the Word, the Lord Jesus Christ.”<sup>15</sup> The debate about divinity and human nature is essentially the debate over the sacred and the secular in the interpretation of the Bible. However church leaders in the Chinese cultural context, upholding the principle of seeking truth and being pragmatic, have well interpreted the creeds, doctrines and tradition from the perspective of ecclesiology and the theology of biblical interpretation. Church leaders such as Mr. Wu Yaozong (Y. T. Wu) 吴耀宗 and Bishop K. H. Ting attached great importance to the relationship between “the sacred and the secular” in theological thinking as well as the “human” factor in theology: “The most crucial thing in a changing world is Christians’ self-discovery and perfection. Because of the attention paid to humans, the relationship between divinity and human nature is dialectically manifested, highlighting the spiritual world of ‘human-believers,’ thus removing the fog that often exists in religious discussions and making them full of vitality and change.”<sup>16</sup> The “human” here is not only an individual person, but also the totality of human living conditions and various social relations. The theology generated from this is a theology that is timely and appropriate to the context. The theological ethos of Old Testament prophets, wise men, priests and other theological elites, as well as the rational interpretation of faith traditions and the renewal of theological thinking adapted to the times by the Lord Jesus and apostles in the New Testament, provide models for establishing the theological selfhood of Chinese churches today. Bishop

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15 The Chalcedonian Creed, in *Christian Creeds*, Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 2004, 26.

16 K. H. Ting, “Preface to the Chinese Translation of Oxford Christian History (illustrated edition)”, in John McMulle (ed), *Oxford Christian History*, Guiyang: Guizhou People’s Publishing House, 1995.

Ting emphasized the adjustment of theological thought, in which the most direct and effective approach is to let theology guide the interpretation of the Bible; Professor Chen Zemin 陈泽民 claimed that “theology is a study of human beings”.<sup>17</sup> 神学就是人学 This is a significant starting point for us to observe in the call for the transformation of the Church’s theological interpretation of the Bible in the new era of Chinese socialism. Theological exegesis is the technical interpretation of the bible, and this in turn guides the direction of technical interpretation. The ecclesiology, Christology, doctrine of God, pneumatology, creationism, and practical theology of Chinese Churches should be based on the theological interpretation of the Bible. We can say that the transformation in the theological interpretation of the Bible represents the changes in the church’s context; in other words, transformation is the key to survival for the church.

Chinese churches have always had the tradition of “exalting the Bible.” But how is this done? What is the relationship between the interpretation of the Bible and the context of the Church as well as Chinese culture? What is its relationship with the theological reconstruction in the Church? The key to exalting the Bible consists in how to interpret and treat it, that is, “treat the Bible with a serious attitude and promote a correct view of the Bible.”<sup>18</sup> Therefore, “holding the Bible up high” is not equivalent to bookish biblicalism nor does it imply reading the Bible in isolation, ignoring and belittling the interpretative tradition of the ancient catholic church and even regarding biblical

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17 Chen Zemin, *Search and Witness: Selected Works of Chen Zemin*, Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 2007, 56 .

18 Cao Shengjie: “Ding Guangxun’s Anthology—Promoting Research on Self-propagation” in *Collection of Articles of the 10th Chinese Christian Assembly*, Shanghai: TSPM & CCC, 2019 .

interpretation as the theological imagination of individuals. Theology cannot be divorced from the Bible and basic doctrines, which provide the reins to one's own thoughts. All these are crucial for the preachers of grass-roots churches, teachers and students of seminaries in their involvement in the further contextualization of Christianity and the reconstruction of theological thought. Bishop K. H. Ting stresses that "the biblical view is very important as a master switch. If the biblical view is wrong, many incorrect ideas and negative thinking will arise."<sup>19</sup> As early as in the early 1990s, Bishop Ting had mentioned the limitations in the theological vision and scope of thinking of the Chinese Church in areas such as church institutions, biblical views, historical views, and ethical issues concerning international peace and social justice, women's liberation, and environmental ethics; "we think very little or have blank minds on these issues."<sup>20</sup> These assertions by Bishop Ting highlight the significance of the biblical view, and at the same time provide motive force and direction for research on this subject. Quoting the Bible within the context of Chinese society, Bishop Ting used the doctrines to expound on the truth that Christian faith is compatible with socialist society. He also interpreted political identity, cultural integration and social adaptation by using biblical teachings and Christian experience. The biblical view is the soul of specific interpretative acts and the spiritual practice of the Church. We should learn from historical experience, respect the spirit of faith traditions, hold high the biblical view and the theological interpretation of the Bible, as well as the approaches advocated in the

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19 K. H. Ting, "Speech at the 50th Anniversary of Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement", *Nanjing Theological Review*, no. 4, 2000, 4.

20 K. H. Ting, "Preface to the Selected Works of *Nanjing Theological Review* (1952-1992)," Nanjing: Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, 1992, 2.

reconstruction of theological thought, and endeavor to integrate the rigorous, historical study of interpretation with the spiritual needs of the churches so as to support the theological thinking of the Chinese Church. Our Bible consists of the New and Old Testaments. Bishop K. H. Ting once analyzed the shift and transformation of Christian theology in biblical interpretation in New China based on a study of the articles published in Nanjing Theological Review 《金陵神学志》 and Tianfeng Magazine 《天风》杂志: “Missionaries who come to China tend to be fundamentalist in their beliefs, so that evangelicals and fundamentalists have a great influence on Chinese churches today ... Chinese Christians’ understanding of the Bible is not static. The Chinese Church is now free from the shackles of western churches and is facing the new reality in China, which has pushed us to make adjustments in theological views. This has made a tremendous impact on how Chinese Christians treat the Bible.”<sup>21</sup> This remark has in fact illustrated a significant shift in Christian theological hermeneutics in the New China. The Bible is important, and the interpretation of the Bible is even more important, however, with regard to Biblical hermeneutics, the theology of interpretation is the most essential of all. Next year (2021), the socialist society with Chinese characteristics in the new era will usher in one of two centennials: “the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China” and the major task of “building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way” (全面建成小康社会), both of which will bring new opportunities and challenges to the Chinese Church. We must also continue to “make adjustments” and transformations in hermeneutic theology, focusing on the openness of biblical truth and the openness and publicity of the theology of interpretation, harmonizing the relations

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21 K. H. Ting, *On the Bible*, Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 2000, 32 -33.

between doctrine and biblical interpretation and guiding the theological interpretation of the Chinese Church with socialist core values.

## **2. The transformation of theological interpretation in the new era**

### **2.1. Pay attention to the openness of biblical truth**

Textually speaking, the biblical canon is a closed book but it is also a book bearing the 'lively and vivid' Word of God. Hence, the truth of the Bible is open to churches of any age. We should not despise or blur God's real actions in specific time and space as recorded in the Bible neither should we take the western church as the center nor Platonism as the scalpel to reduce the complicated biblical world into the doctrines and dogmas of a certain local church or particular denomination. Instead, the recorded history of the Israelites and the early church should be regarded as a set of mirrors for looking at individual lives and church survival today. Biblical texts are unchanging but biblical views and theological interpretations of the Bible have undergone several regional and theological paradigm shifts in history, from the interpretations of early Christians to the Jews in Palestine, to those of the Roman Empire around the Mediterranean coast, to Carthage in North Africa, to Rome on the Apennine Peninsula, to Antioch on the east coast of the Mediterranean, and further afield to the Persian churches in the east; from the interpretation of Western European churches in the Middle Ages to the interpretation and theology of the local churches in the various ethnic-states of the Reformation, and so on. But the theme of God dominating human history and walking with humankind remains unchanged. The purpose of discussing these changes and transformations in the history of interpretation

is to break down Western-centrism in Christian tradition and realize the further contextualization of theological thought and hermeneutical practice in China.<sup>22</sup> Taking history as a mirror, Chinese Christians can begin with Chinese academic and cultural traditions as well as national interests, and proceed to apply Chinese national feelings and values to understanding the Bible so that the Bible's truth may "become flesh" in China.

The year 2019 marked the centenary of the publication of the Chinese Union Bible 中文和合本圣经. One hundred years of union and one hundred years of interpretation reflect the close relationship between the modern interpretation of the Bible in the Chinese Church and the changes that have taken place. Previous generations of patriotic Chinese Christian leaders have already begun the process of contextualization and further contextualization of biblical interpretation in China. As far as the Protestant churches in the New China are concerned, in the twentieth century, although Chinese churches and seminaries had different views on biblical criticism and various theories of scriptural interpretation, they generally upheld the principle of "seeking the common ground while reserving differences" in biblical views for the common goal of building up the Chinese church. Chinese churches no longer view theories such as "the Documentary Hypothesis" as a scourge, nor do they fall into the trap of believing in the inerrancy of the bible, or pay any attention to the "one-book doctrine" of the Bible, which is in essence "spiritual interpretation" or "allegorical interpretation" or "verbal inspiration" that contends it is sufficient to read the Bible without referring to the biblical commentaries. Generally speaking, after the

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22 Gao Feng, "Building the Chinese Churches by Adhering to the Direction of Further Contextualization of Chinese Christianity," *Nanjing Theological Review*, no.1 (1996): 9.

founding of the People's Republic of China, the interpretation route of Chinese churches, represented by the efforts of Mr. Wu Yaozong and Bishop K. H. Ting, has seen changes from the fundamentalist, eschatological and narrow view of theology brought by missionaries to one that is adaptive to socialist China and contributive to the unity of the Chinese churches, regardless of whether their former theological viewpoints were fundamentalist, modern or evangelical.

Most of the early missionaries who came to China held revivalist ideas. They brought with them conservative missionary ideas and biblical views to the Chinese Church, leaving at home the new perspectives and knowledge of the Bible and Gospel which had emerged in western churches and society during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The truth is that they had no time to pass on the latest and enlightened Christian thoughts to the Chinese; at the same time, because of their conservative background, they did not accept these new achievements in biblical research produced in their own countries and did not use new biblical views in their missionary activities in China. Therefore, what Chinese Protestants received at the beginning was a relatively narrow and conservative view of the Bible. However, with the growth of the Chinese Church and the passage of time, some new views and interpretative methods of the Bible gradually influenced the Chinese Church, especially through the work of scholars such as Wu Yaozong, T. C. Chao 赵紫辰, Xie Fuya 谢扶雅, Li Rongfang 李荣芳, Tang Zhongmo 汤忠谟 who had studied in Europe and the United States or in the theological seminaries of mainline denominations. These devout Christian scholars all meant to apply the biblical and Christian truths to national cultivation and social transformation during that period. Naturally, there were also scholars with no overseas experiences, like Wu Leichuan 吴雷川, who shared similar ideas. Nevertheless, in modern times, the interpretative approaches of some



missionaries have intensified the narrow-mindedness of theological interpretation in Chinese churches, and continue to have a great influence in grass-roots churches.<sup>23</sup> “Chinese churches, especially those at the grass-roots, are influenced by relatively conservative theological concepts and they one-sidedly emphasize the spirituality and transcendence of the Church. There are many examples in this regard. This concept will create many problems that will affect the Chinese church’s ability to effectually preach the gospel and establish a church that will bear effective witness in today’s context. This kind of ideology can be found in the Bible but it does not represent the complete gospel nor holistic biblical teachings. With this kind of ideology, Christians may ignore their social identities, roles, responsibilities and obligations as social individuals and citizens.”<sup>24</sup> Emphasizing the social responsibilities of Christians is the specific response to conservative and one-sided beliefs that emphasize personal salvation as opposed to caring for others or society. It also clarifies that Christians are both spiritual and social beings, are both citizens of God’s kingdom and citizens of the state, and are both believers in the church and members of society.

From this point of view, the contextualized theological interpretation of the Bible is also the most fundamental task in effectively resisting heresy. All heresies are distorted in regard to the publicity of theology. Early Christian heresies distorted Christology, misunderstood the relationship between God and humans, and held philosophical biases. In the history of the Church, Christology has often been a source of schisms, producing sects and heresies, and

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23 This is based on field investigation among undergraduate and graduate students of the seminaries as well as the pulpit ministries of the grass-roots churches.

24 Gao Feng: “Introduction to the Church Order of Chinese Protestant Church”, *Nanjing Theological Review*, no. 3-4, 2014.

contributing to sectarianism in the Christian world. In addition, the common feature of heresies has been their fallacy in theological interpretation.

## 2.2. Pay attention to the publicity of TIB

The openness of TIB lays the theological basis for Biblical hermeneutics, while public theology in Chinese churches in the new era is the implementation and application of this theological underpinning. The basic content and task of theological interpretation goes beyond technical, textual interpretation of the Bible.<sup>25</sup> The purpose of theological interpretation is to build up the Church using scripture. The worldview, outlook on life and values revealed in the Bible have been accepted by a large number of people all over the world, and even imperceptibly regulate their social, economic and political life. This history and reality in itself shows the publicity and universality of the theology in the Bible and reflects the pursuit of human spiritual and secular life and the general law involved. The Bible itself is a theological interpretation of the world, especially in interpreting the sense of faith fellowship and individual survival. "Globalization forces theology to respond in time, because God is in globalization, and we can meet God in globalization and observe God's creation and redemption."<sup>26</sup> Standing and looking up at the sky, or going back to the chamber to pray, is to draw spiritual strength, and to trace the historical trajectory of the Incarnation, the Word (*Tao*) becoming flesh in the human world and to expand the living

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25 Kevin J. Vanhoozer (ed) *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 21.

26 Max L. Stackhouse, "Public Theology and Political Economy in a Globalizing Era," in William E. Storrar and Andrew Morton (eds), *Public Theology for the 21st Century: Essays in Honor of Duncan B. Forrester*, London: Continuum, 2004, 179-180.

space of the Church in its context. Because the Christian religion is a kind of “culturally, morally, and service-oriented religion that reflects the ultimate concern of humankind”, the Bible is not only an authoritative religious scripture that guides Christian belief and behavior, but is also an important product of human culture, that at the same time continues to exert an influence on human culture ... Frederick Engels attached great importance to the study of the Bible in his explorations. Regarding the historical facts of early Christianity, he wrote three important papers based on biblical resources. In his book “The Peasant War in Germany,” he described the division of the Church, in turmoil at that time, and studied how theological radicals represented by Thomas Müntzer explained the Bible in order to join in the mass struggle.<sup>27</sup> That is to say, the Church must always identify with the progressive, peaceful, patriotic and just forces. This includes the theological interpretation of the Bible that agrees with the new socialist era in all aspects of history, politics, culture, and society, starting from the main theological themes of creationism, soteriology, doctrine of humanity, and ecclesiastical theory, and fully demonstrates the publicity of the theological interpretation of the Bible in the Chinese church in the new era. Although public theology has been criticized by some, it serves to remind the Chinese Church to heed the social context of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, making the theology of interpretation refined politics. The paramount politics for the Chinese Church is to maintain its political identity with the Party and the state. Chinese churches are taking action: we pay attention to the social services of churches,

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27 K. H. Ting., *On the Bible*, CCC&TSPM, Shanghai: 2000, 27-28.

ecological protection and the current Covid-19 pandemic.<sup>28</sup>

Then, if we agree with or appreciate this way of interpreting the Bible, will we lose the identity of the Church and her “four natures,” and lose the identity of believers as the “people of heaven”? This is not going to happen. This is in fact the important mission and goal of shaping the cultural identity of Chinese Christians in the new era. Take for example the theological interpretation of ecclesiastical discourse. We can explain it from the aspect of public theology and the openness of hermeneutics just as the Incarnation is declared in the Old Testament as “the Word (Tao) in the world” and in the New Testament as “the Word in human life” — which essentially have the same meaning — God’s tabernacle is on earth.

The Byzantine Church inherited the views of the early Greek church fathers, especially the views of the Church of Alexandria, which was not so much a theory of the sacredness of the Bible as it was a theology of the mysterious presence of the divine Word in the scriptures as well as the divine truth determining the whole motive force of biblical interpretation. At the same time, the Holy Spirit writes the scripture and regulates every detail of the scripture towards the goal of salvation.<sup>29</sup> This kind of “divine presence” is of great significance for considering the “four natures” of the Church in context, attaching importance to its participation in the world. The four attributes of the Church defined by the Nicene Creed and other confessions originating from the

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28 For example, Wu Jianrong et. al. : “Thinking under the epidemic”; Yan Weizhong: “Wisdom War Epidemic,” *Tianfeng*, no. 7, 2020; Zhang Peisheng and Li Xinnong: “Try to look at the problem of suffering from man’s creation—from the theology of suffering in Job,” *Nanjing Theological Review*, no. 2, 2020.

29 See Paul M. Blowers, “Eastern Orthodox Biblical Interpretation,” in Alan J. Hauser ed., *A History of Biblical Interpretation*, Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2009, 173.

Bible are essentially theological interpretations of the Bible in the Greco-Roman cultural context. This is the tradition of the ancient catholic church by which the Chinese Church establishes herself. How are we to “create new ideas within the existing framework?” In fact, the Bible itself is a series of responses to the contexts of the biblical world. The first eleven chapters of Genesis record the origin of life, the origin of men and women, the origin of sin and falsehood, and the nature of the world after the fall ... This diversity in the Bible will not cause conflicts in our beliefs but rather will better reflect and convey the complexity of life ... Faith is trying to meet God, who is behind the Bible, and hence create meaning.<sup>30</sup>

As far as the Chinese Church is concerned, it is implied that the Church should examine the meaning of the Word in the world in the new era, meet God in the new context, follow the example of the Incarnate Jesus Christ in the Bible, integrate into the real world and struggle with fellow citizens. In this dynamic process, the Church’s “four natures” no longer have the metaphysical speculative color of Greek philosophy but are like the ethical practice advocated by the Chinese Church today. This is also consistent with the thinking of modern theologians such as the social gospel of Walter Rauschenbusch, the openness of theological anthropology of Wolfhart Pannenberg, David Tracy’s religious pluralism and possibility of multiple interpretations and Kevin Vanhoozer’s advocacy of being a responsible reader.<sup>31</sup> That is to say, it is necessary to reflect the publicity of theological interpretation of the Bible in context and be a responsible interpreter, responsible not

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30 Huang Houji, *Crossing Text: Bible, Life Situation and Theological Interpretation*, Hong Kong: Dehui Culture Book Co., Ltd., 2014, 135.

31 See Kevin Vanhoozer, *Theological Hermeneutics*, Taipei: Campus Study Press, 2007 .

only to the faith tradition but also to the Bible, to the country as well as to the people. We should pay attention to the openness of the Church and the world of Christian thinking. On the basis of the successful experience of the older generation of Chinese churches, we should open our eyes to the new era of Socialism with Chinese characteristics and practice the openness and publicity of theology.

### 2.3. Contextualized Theology of Biblical Interpretation in the New Era: Integrating Theological Openness and Publicity in the Context

The openness of biblical truth determines the openness of biblical theological interpretation. In expounding the truth of the Bible, Bishop Ting has long pointed out the importance of the integration of soteriology and creationism, which is conducive to establishing the theological and cultural identity of the Chinese Church in a pluralistic society. However, the reality is that the basic work such as the translation and introduction of Christian classics, and the Chinese contextualized interpretation of faith and doctrines have yet to be effectively implemented. In some places, the promotion of contextualization has been mechanically and awkwardly reduced to restoring bygone ways, bordering on the vulgar.<sup>32</sup>

In this respect, older generations of Chinese theologians and church leaders have set an example for today's churches. For example, the Life Society 生命社 in the 1920s emphasized the relationship between the identity of believers and the destiny of the country. The predecessor of Life Society was the Peking Apologetic Group, 北京证道团 which was established in 1920 and was composed of a group of Christian intellectuals such as Wu Leichuan. On the

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32 See "the Plan." in *CTR No 29, 2018*.

one hand, the group was dedicated to demonstrating how Christianity could adapt itself to the spirit of the times; on the other hand, it endeavored to reform the church in terms of its internal problems in areas such as the confession of the faith, organization, system and liturgy. They set up a journal: *Life Monthly* 《生命月刊》 which later merged with another journal and was renamed *Truth and Life* 《真理与生命》. At the beginning of 1921, T.C. Chao, Wu Leichuan and Wu Yaozong jointly published the article “Why should I read the Bible and how should I read it” 我为什么要读圣经, 用什么方法读圣经 in the sixth issue of the first volume of *Life Monthly*. The starting point of T. C. Chao in reading the Bible was “to get life”; for Wu Leichuan, Bible reading was “for saving himself and others,” while Wu Yaozong was motivated by “the noble personality of Christians and the admirable cause of Christianity.” T. C. Chao claimed that the Bible is “the book of life, I read the Bible to get my life, and I want to benefit myself and save the nation from this life. I, who am an incapable boy, dare not give up reading.”<sup>33</sup> T. C. Chao who had the experience of studying theology overseas was influenced by Friedrich Schleiermacher to see the Bible as a text of various religious experiences that evolved throughout history and, in the process, presented various religious experiences adapted to the current contexts, so T. C. Chao brought evolutionary theory into his theology and exegesis.

He used the “historical critical method” commonly employed in modern hermeneutics to read the Bible, and at the same time adopted the “Friend-making Methodology,” 尚友法 to spiritually interact with the sages, Jesus and God in the Bible. Overall, T.C. Chao tended to propagate the spiritual order of the Church which originates from the characteristics of the Christian social gospel that advocates

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33 Liang Hui et al., “How Christians Read the Bible in Modern China,” *Research on World Religions*, no. 3, 2005.

transforming society through personal salvation.<sup>34</sup> For Wu Leichuan, he said: "Before I became a Christian, I read the Bible so that my faith might be established. After becoming a Christian, I know that Christians should not only improve their spiritual practice, but also pass on what they believe to others; If you don't study the Bible, everything has no foundation. Therefore, in order to save myself and others, in the past five years, there has been no interruption in my efforts to read the Bible."<sup>35</sup> His experience of reading and interpreting the Bible is typical of an old-style intellectual who believes in Christianity. He believed that the truth in the Bible can transform society and ameliorate people's livelihood, and that the value of the Biblical message lies in its practice and social utility.<sup>36</sup>

Wu Leichuan proceeded from the standpoint of nationalism and social practice to absorb and interpret the Bible, such as the dedication and devotion of Jesus which is in fact a response to the criticism of many Chinese that Protestantism had brought not only the doctrine and "gospel" but also violent insolence, exclusion and pain to the Chinese people in the past one hundred years. The "New Culture Movement" 新文化运动 and later on the "Anti-Christian Movement" 非基运动 were the intensive outbreaks of such sentiments.

Wu Yaozong was greatly moved on reading Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. He felt that in Matthew Chapters 5, 6 and 7, "every word in the three chapters is authoritative and every word touches the very depth of my heart."<sup>37</sup> In

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34 Li Xiangping, *Sociological Research on the Sinicization of Christianity*, Beijing: Religious Culture Press, 2016. 69.

35 Liang Hui et al., "How Christians Read the Bible in Modern China", *Research on World Religions*, no. 3, 2005.

36 Ibid.

37 China Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee, ed, *"Recalling Mr. Wu Yaozong"*, Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 1982, 19.



the 1930s, he proclaimed the doctrine of love 惟爱主义. However, after seeing the cruel aggression of Japanese imperialism, he instead preached the “social gospel” and the war of resistance, arguing that “religion and life should never be separated” and believed that the Bible is of great help in building a just, peaceful and loving society. At the same time, among other factors, because of his studies overseas at a modern seminary, Wu Yaozong opposed the idea of “biblical inerrancy.” He also had a favorable impression of materialism and communism; He surmised that since no one has ever seen God, only the good deeds of man before God can convince others that he himself is someone who believes in God.

Therefore, the older generations of theologians and church leaders attached great importance to the biblical passages concerning the relationship between faith and the world, church groups and society, that is, the passages reflecting “the Word in the world” and “the Word become flesh.” They believed that the openness of the Church’s theological interpretation of the Bible was the only way to establish the Church’s identity, and maintain its survival and development. These thoughts also served as the theoretical forerunners of the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity today. “The church exists as a community. Only when the church exists for others can it be called a church ... It must participate in the social life of this world ... It must tell people from all walks of life what life is with Christ and what ‘being for others’ means, “The Church does not refer to a building, nor an organization; it refers to the relationship among people.”<sup>38</sup>

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38 Sera Terry, “Resurrecting Hope,” in *The Boston Globe Magazine*, July 17, 1994 . Quoted from Li Xiangping, 127.

### **3. The vision of Chinese contextualized theological interpretation of the Bible**

#### **3.1. The theological premise of the theological interpretation of the Bible**

From the angle of hermeneutics, the Bible is not merely a treasure trove of Christian standards or doctrines at the epistemological level, but a treasure trove of God's grace, and a treasure trove of records about the way god's people survived. It is also the source and treasure trove of theological ideas witnessed by the early church in different contexts. At the core and soul of the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity is the further contextualization of theological thought. Only when theological thought is sinicized can Christianity, in its genuine sense, be further contextualized in China. Reinforcing biblical research, establishing a correct view of the bible and a hermeneutics in accord with the context will lay the foundation for the further reconstruction of theological thought. It is necessary to nurture biblical scholars in preparation for new Biblical translations or for compiling Bible commentaries. The vitality of the further contextualization of theological thought in China comes from the theological interpretation of the Bible. The Church Order of the Chinese Protestant Church (revised edition of 2018) clearly illustrates the Chinese Church's view of the Bible and the relationship between tradition and the Bible: "The Bible has been revealed by God and written down by human beings through the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. The Bible is the highest authority in matters of faith and is the standard for believers' lives. Through the leading of the Holy Spirit, people in different times and places all can gain new light from the Bible. The Bible should be interpreted in accordance with the principle of rightly interpreting the

word of truth. It should not be interpreted arbitrarily or out of context. Anyone who holds personal authority above that of the Bible is wrong.”<sup>39</sup>

“Because of differences in culture, history and social context, churches throughout the world have developed diverse theological interpretations and faith practices.”<sup>40</sup>

The Bible must always be the basis, whether it is in preaching the gospel, setting forth basic beliefs or in the formulation of theological thoughts and concepts; otherwise, any faith concept and theological thought will become untenable like “a stream without a source or a tree without roots.”

Therefore, with regard to the relationship between God and humans, we should stress the “createdness of the human” as the perspective from which to investigate biblical views and the history of biblical interpretation. Guided by Bishop Ting’s view that “God is love,” we should strive to bridge the rifts in the Chinese Church brought about by the clash of biblical views. Since “the Bible without theology is like a body without a soul, and a theology without the Bible is like a phantom floating in the wilderness,” what we want to change is the situation in which “the treasures of faith confessions are eliminated from biblical studies,” and “theological doctrines reject the contribution of biblical criticism.”<sup>41</sup> We need to avoid “soulless” theological thinking and establish a stable foundation of biblical theology for deepening and refining the further contextualization of Christianity in China. Theological interpretation (that is, the understanding of the Bible) and the history of

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39 The Church Order of the Chinese Protestant Church, 2018. See *Chinese Theological Review* vol 30, 2021, 3-4.

40 Ibid.

41 Baoling Sun, “Preface” in Daniel Treier: *Theological Hermeneutics of the Bible*, Hong Kong: Tiandao Bookstore, 2010, 7.

interpretation are two inseparable aspects of the same process. Theological interpretation guides the technical interpretation of the Bible and its application. Through the arguments offered in this article, we may recognize that there were many interpretations (of biblical passages) that are now considered ridiculous and even fallacious. Because of the theological thinking and ecclesiological views left by missionaries, it is worth noting that these hermeneutical fallacies and biases in the interpretation of the Bible continue to haunt the Church and society.

As mentioned above, the theology of biblical interpretation, or hermeneutical theology, no longer simply refers to exegetical techniques in the general sense but reflects certain interpretations by groups or individuals regarding the relationship between the gospel and society, reason and faith, spiritual life and knowledge, and between Christians and the world, which are concretely embodied in a sense of social responsibility, ethics and social engagement among Christian individuals or groups. Therefore, theological hermeneutics guides and regulates specific hermeneutic practice.

So, how do we determine the direction of biblical perspectives or theological hermeneutics? Faith traditions, the practical interests of groups and individuals, the worldviews and values of the interpreters, etc., all have a decisive influence on their biblical views; conversely, the specific interpretation of the Bible reflects the hermeneutical theology or biblical views of the interpreters. Therefore, we should not only observe how a theologian interprets the Bible but also explore why he or she interprets the Bible in such a way and observe how he or she puts theories or interpretations into practice. Such interaction between theological presuppositions and hermeneutics fulfills a proper hermeneutic cycle in hermeneutic discussions.

### 3.2. Promote the hermeneutic cycle of theological interpretation

In the history of biblical interpretation, the misunderstanding of philosophical preconceptions behind the theological interpretation of the Bible often leads to theological poverty and bigotry, leading to fierce debates that result in biased doctrinal, speculative views of scripture, radical biblicalism and views that prioritize personal spirituality, and tendencies toward radical allegorical and individualistic interpretation, exerting either a positive or negative influence on the Church, its adaptation to society and culture, and how believers bear witness to the biblical truth. Therefore, we should take history as a mirror, and carry forth the biblical view and interpretation path advocated by the reconstruction of theological thinking and the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity. We need to establish a holistic biblical view with a balanced and holistic understanding of the truths of both the New and Old Testaments, by avoiding the obliteration of the Old Testament, and the disregard for the intertestamental period or the detachment of the New Testament. We must oppose historical nihilism and ignorance of the hermeneutic tradition. We also need to preach about the balance between creation and redemption, the uniqueness of the truth revealed in each testament and the consistency of the truth in the whole Bible, the harmony between biblical studies and theological research as well as the integration of theological thinking with pastoral practice.

The above are related to various theoretical and practical concerns regarding how to view the Bible and its value. Why the Bible should be viewed this way, how to interpret the Bible and why it should be interpreted in such a way is a multifaceted question of theological theory and practice.

To elevate the Church's heritage to the same status as the Bible using ecclesiastical means will deprive lay believers of their right to read and interpret the Bible on their own. When we approach the Bible with simplified rationalism and scientism as the guiding ideology, the contents of the Bible will be treated as a historical source reflecting the religious thoughts of ancient Judaism and the early church. If we treat and interpret the Bible using allegorical exegesis based on mysticism and Platonic philosophy, our reading of the Bible will be constricted by the religious experiences and worldviews of its interpreters. Treating and interpreting the Bible using humanist philosophy leads people to interpret the Bible as a "common text," which opens the door to a modern interpretation of the Bible. When "Biblicalism" is adopted, it is easy to put aside the specific conditions of time and space of God's revelation in the Bible, and thus interpret the Bible in isolation or even out of context. When it is declared that "the Bible is supreme" and biblical criticism is appropriately applied, we still need to raise the question of why "the Bible is supreme." Is the overall spiritual authority of the Bible supreme or is every word in the Bible supreme? There are various viewpoints of the Bible in history, some of which have exerted a vital influence on different Christian denominations and groups to this day, resulting in differences in doctrinal emphases, pastoral practices and liturgy. These differences and disputes have even caused brutal religious wars in history. For example, the understanding of "the Fall" and "original sin," the infinite conjectures of "the Garden of Eden," understanding the Trinity, the divinity and humanity of Christ, the status of the Holy Spirit, the relationship between the Bible and church heritage, between the Bible and personal doctrine and religious experience, between the law and the gospel, and between the Bible and multiple cultures, all these and many other issues have caused dramatic upheavals in history.

No one may argue that any church father or theologian's works have the same spiritual quality as the books of the Bible or can be classified as "the second canon," something that is probably widely acknowledged. The view of the Bible, the recognition of the Bible's supreme authority, and hence how to interpret the Bible given this recognition, are critical for both individuals and church fellowships—theological interpretation is always ecclesiastical and communal.

Admittedly, there has been a disconnection between theology and the Bible in the history of Christian thought since ancient times. Theology that is not founded on biblical interpretation is not convincing nor enforceable. Without the norms and guidance of theological thinking and basic doctrines, the interpretation of the Bible is prone to deviation. So, what is the coordinating standard in keeping a balance between the two? It is the contextualized theological interpretation of the Bible. As far as today's Chinese churches are concerned, it is necessary to adhere to the basic doctrines and guide theological interpretation with socialist core values.

### 3.3. Guiding theological interpretation with socialist core values: several scriptural clusters as suggestions

General Secretary Xi Jinping points out that it is necessary to "adhere to the socialist core value system; cultural self-confidence is a more basic, deeper and lasting force in the development of a country and a nation. We must adhere to Marxism, firmly establish the lofty vision of communism and the common vision of socialism with Chinese characteristics, cultivate and practice socialist core values, continuously enhance our leading power and discourse power in the ideological field, promote the creative transformation and innovative development of excellent Chinese traditional

culture, inherit revolutionary culture, develop advanced socialist culture, remember our origins, absorb the foreign, face the future, and build better the Chinese spirit, Chinese values and Chinese power to provide spiritual guidance for the people.”<sup>42</sup> Socialist core values embody the finest elements of Chinese culture and the broadest political wisdom of the Communist Party of China, in which prosperity, democracy, civilization and harmony are the goals at the national level; freedom, equality, justice and rule of law are the value orientations at the social level; and patriotism, dedication, honesty and friendliness are the value criteria at the level of individual citizens. These values lead every citizen to fulfill his or her duties whether in their national roles, social roles or in personal cultivation. This is highly consistent with the ethical teaching and practice of the New and Old Testaments. In full response to the call of General Secretary Xi, The Plan states that to promote the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity, we must take the socialist core values as the guide and strengthen the “four consciousness” and the “four self-confidences” which should be implemented in the concrete work on theological thoughts, rules and regulations as well as in believers’ faith practice and daily lives, further stimulating the patriotic sentiment of pastors and believers to run the Church in accordance with the law. The Plan calls for deeper study of the Bible for what is compatible with socialist core values. It also sets out the plan to compile easy-to-understand reading materials for the grass-roots churches, pastoral staff and believers, to widely promote them, expand their influence within Christianity,.....and to support original work on biblical interpretation, spiritual formation and art

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42 Xi Jinping: “The Leadership of the Communist Party of China is the Most Essential Feature of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics,” *Qiushi*, no.14, 2020, July 2020.



that integrate Chinese church life, believers' testimonies and social contexts as sources of inspiration, providing assistance in publishing and distribution.<sup>43</sup>

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Bishop K. H. Ting identified four types of scriptural clusters that Chinese churches have paid more attention to in theological interpretation since the founding of the New China.<sup>44</sup> The contextualized interpretation of the bible in the new era and the transmission of its results can enable the application of the socialist core values by every Christian and every church. That is to say, the people around you do not delve into what you believe, but rather look at how you behave and how effective your faith has been. The conservative, closed and even retrogressive way of theological interpretation actually represents an escape from the Christian's social responsibility as a citizen. The only way for the church to develop in the new era is to demonstrate the publicity of theology and identify with the community of shared destiny of the Chinese nation. This has been attested to in the Bible. Then, more than thirty years later, in the context of socialism in the new era, what biblical materials must be theologically interpreted anew to help build the church, honor God and benefit the people? Based on data generated from fieldwork, I would like to try listing the following scriptural clusters to illustrate the direction of the theological thinking of the Chinese Church in the new era. These scriptural passages cover some of the most important scriptures in the New and Old Testaments that can be deeply analyzed theologically.<sup>45</sup>

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43 See "The Plan", *Chinese Theological Review* No. 29, 2018.

44 K. H. Ting, *On the Bible*, 41-48.

45 Main sources of materials: *Tianfeng Magazine*, *Nanjing Theological Review*, *Chinese Theological Review* (English version), Textbooks, Proceedings of the National and Local Christian Conferences, and term papers and graduation papers of undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral students in theological colleges.

- 1) The scriptural clusters reflecting the adjustment and transformation of theological thought. “But seek the welfare of the city.” (Jer. 29:7) According to the situation in which the people are being tried by God, the Prophet Jeremiah promptly reminded them to adjust their theological thoughts and bear witness to the Lord of peace who brings peace to foreign lands. Biblical books such as 1 & 2 Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, which belong to the “Holy Anthology” (also known as “Historical Books”), direct people returning from exile to live by God’s Word and become a worshipping fellowship so that in this way, the fellowship of faith itself can be established. All these passages are conducive towards making adjustments in the theological thinking of the Church, thereby facilitating the spread of the Gospel.
- 2) Scriptural clusters reflecting patriotism and the progress of the times: More of these scriptures are listed here. For example, Chapter 40 of Isaiah praises Cyrus, King of Persia, as God’s anointed one (“Messiah” is translated as “Christ” in the New Testament.) There are also passages that mention obedience to those in power, and passages which speak about God-given wisdom and kindness among the Gentiles.
- 3) There are scriptural clusters reflecting the combination of creation and redemption, and regarding redemption as “new creation” and scriptural clusters related to ecological theology and honoring God’s creation, such as the vision of harmonious coexistence of all things in Chapter 11 of Isaiah. *Tianfeng Magazine* once published an interpretative paper which fully demonstrates Chinese Christians’ gratitude to God for his spiritual

and earthly love and grace of creation.<sup>46</sup> This article discards the allegorical interpretation of Song of Songs which has endured for 2,000 years in Western Christianity and propounds the theological thought of “Being in awe of God’s creation”: “In modern society, in order to develop science, technology and economy, human beings destroy the natural environment both advertently and inadvertently. Nature groans, and the earth has lost its ecological balance, which is leading toward the death of the cosmic ecosystem. Faced with environmental pollution and ecosystem destruction, the survival of human beings and the earth is at a critical juncture. Therefore, it is of great significance for us to reflect on the relationship between humans and nature. After rethinking the Word of God in the Bible, human beings need to reevaluate their position in nature, recognize their own identity and understand their responsibilities.”<sup>47</sup> General Secretary Xi Jinping points out: “Clear waters and green mountains are as valuable as gold and silver mountains.” This idea was written into the report of the 19th National Congress of the

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46 For example, Jiang Yumin: “Analyzing the Relationship between Man and Nature from Song of Songs”, *Tianfeng*, no.9, 2005.

47 Ibid.

CPC Central Committee.<sup>48</sup> Christians and non-Christians under the same blue sky of the motherland are both called by God, who appoints those who are meant to be appointed and respects those who are worthy of respect, and encourages humans to co-create, “庸庸 衹衹, 上帝引逸.”<sup>49</sup> God also helps humans overcome hardships or suffering, “艰难困苦, 玉汝于成.”

- 4) Scriptural clusters regarding establishing a harmonious society, a harmonious church, and encouraging believers to keep their promises and abide by the law: There are many such scriptures and a few are listed here: “the Song of Songs” in 1 Corinthians Chapter 13; the exploration of the doctrine of “rest” in the Bible (especially the related scriptures in Genesis, Exodus and Leviticus) and its application in modern economic society; scriptural verses applicable to the discussion on the relationship between Church and modern socio-

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48 “Clear waters and green mountains are gold and silver mountains” is a scientific assertion put forward by Xi Jinping, then secretary of Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee, during his inspection in Anji, Huzhou, Zhejiang Province on August 15, 2005. It is the main theory guiding China’s ecological civilization construction, providing theoretical support for China’s move towards an ecological market economy, opening up new space and providing new ideas for China’s supply-side structural reform, and providing a new solution for realizing the urbanization model with Chinese characteristics of urban-rural dual civilization symbiosis and balanced development between urban and rural areas. On October 18th, 2017, this theory was written into the report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Comrade Xi Jinping’s important thought of “two mountains” fully embodies the dialectical viewpoint of Marxism, systematically analyzes the relationship between economy and ecology in the evolution process, and profoundly reveals the basic laws of economic and social development.

49 See Kang Gao of the Book of Songs 《诗经•康诰》, <https://www.slkj.org/c/5789.html>.

economic life (relations of faith and wealth); scriptural verses that encourage those with faith in God to serve the people in a priestly spirit; wisdom literature (including Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, Psalms, Song of Songs and James) that reflect the wisdom and love of believers in the “secular” world, including the fear of God in the midst of abrupt changes and confusion of life; scriptures related to the administration of faith fellowships and the construction of church institutions in the Bible; scriptures for the self-care and tending of pastors; verses that attach importance to church festivals and the lectionary; passages that reflect filial piety, care for the poor and vulnerable groups; and biblical passages that provide guidance in the healing of social contradictions in modern society.

The theological interpretation of these scriptural clusters is based on a holistic biblical view and the idea of “Letting the whole Bible speak.” At the same time, in response to the new contexts and new challenges encountered by the Chinese Church in the twenty-first century, it recognizes and practices the socialist core values in thought and action, and responds to the new requirements of the Party and the government, especially the goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. It also reflects the theological shift in the Chinese Church’s biblical interpretation in the new era. It shows that in the twenty-first century, Chinese Christians’ theological vision of biblical interpretation has become broader, and is no longer limited to individual passages of the New Testament nor is it keen on the “spiritual interpretation” of the Old Testament such as esoteric word plays or biblicistic interpretation, but extends theological vision to the whole Bible and the overall complexity of church life:

In employing the theological interpretation of the Bible, while inheriting the legacy of the ancient catholic church, we have consciously adjusted our theological interpretation to keep up with the times and the changing contexts.

We will also pay attention to the role and political responsibilities of the Church in the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

We will endeavor to perfect the construction of the church system in accordance with the Bible and establish the Chinese Church's own ecclesiology.

Based on the achievements of our own hermeneutical efforts, we will expand the publicity and horizon of Chinese theology, using theological hermeneutics that reflect the concerns of the time to interpret the complexity of modern economic and commercialized social life, and derive the unique gospel messages that the Church can share with compatriots.

We hope that under the guidance of the reconstruction of theological thinking and the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity, there will be more scriptural clusters worth exploring and developing.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Both the history of the Christian Church and Christian theological thought reveal that Biblical interpretation and hermeneutics are the products of contextualized responses. In turn, the results of the theological interpretation of the Bible guide the spiritual and social practices of the Church. The openness and pluralism of biblical truth testify to the vitality and richness of God's Word, which is the spiritual foundation for the theological interpretation of the Bible of the Chinese Church in the new era. Guiding the interpretation with socialist core values is the basic project of further contextualization. On this basis, the theological

thinking of the Chinese Church will depend on Biblical truth, draw from the living spring of the Holy Spirit and revitalize the spiritual tradition of the Chinese Church so as to shape her theological selfhood in the doctrines concerning God, church, the Holy Spirit, Christ, creation and redemption.

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## **K. H. Ting's Theological Thoughts Enlighten the Further Contextualization of Chinese Christianity**

丁光训神学思想对基督教中国化的启迪

CHEN YILU 陈逸鲁

### **Introduction**

Bishop K. H. Ting (1915-2012) was a prominent Chinese Christian leader, and just like Y. T. Wu, provided a model of patriotism and love for the church. He was the principal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary from 1952 to 2010. Between 1980 and 1996, he served three terms as Chairperson of the Chinese Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee and as the President of the China Christian Council. At one point, he was also the Vice Chairman of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the Chairman of the China Committee on Religion and Peace (CCRP). Bishop Ting was not only a religious leader, but also a theologian and thinker. The idea of "Theological Reconstruction" in the Chinese church was a concept he began to advocate and promote in 1998. Besides giving us a wealth of inspiration and guidance, the idea has provided an important foundation and resource for advancing the further contextualization of Christianity in China.

### **The Ideological Background of K. H. Ting**

Bishop K. H. Ting's theological thinking had deep Christian roots. He grew up in an Anglican family and was influenced by Anglicanism from childhood. In the Anglican tradition,



state and religion were closely related, reflected very much in the close connection between the Anglican Church and the British state. He also believed that faith was not just a private matter, but one that involved state and society. As he used to say, “theology is a form of refined politics.”<sup>1</sup> The Anglican Church attaches great importance to liturgical worship and values the true, the good, and the beautiful in religion, believing that all these come from God. His Anglican-influenced faith background provided a good basis for him to value service to one’s country, to cultivate the right political identity, and to advocate for the tolerance of religious beliefs, respect for all goodness and the promotion of inter-religious harmony.

Bishop Ting’s theological ideas were derived from two great eras: one was an era of transition from the old to the new in which the Communists worked hard to build a new China. In earlier days, Bishop Ting had worked at the Shanghai YMCA (Young Men’s Christian Association), where he had close contact and connection with the Communists and was deeply influenced by Y. T. Wu, who held a favorable view of the Communists and saw them as a progressive force.<sup>2</sup> Later, he went to Geneva and served as an executive staff of the World Student Christian Federation, where he came into frequent contact with communist intellectuals from Eastern Europe. For the most part, he never hesitated to express his approval of Marxism and the social ideas of the Communists—with the exception of atheism. These encounters led to profound shifts in his religious thinking, including his endorsement of socialist society.

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1 Chen Zemin, “Preface”, in Ding Guangxun, *The Collected Words of Ding Guangxun*, Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 1998, 1.

2 Ding Guangxun, “The Advanced Mr. Wu” in *On the ‘Three-Self’ and Church Construction*, and the Theological Thought Construction, Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 53.

The second era marked the transition from the end of the “Cultural Revolution” to the era of “Reform and Opening-up.” In 1980, Bishop Ting presided over the Third National Chinese Christian Conference<sup>3</sup> and was selected as the third chairman of the Chinese Three-Self Patriotic Movement Committee and the founding president of the China Christian Council. With the spring breeze of the “Reform and Opening-up,” he cooperated with the Communist Party and the People’s Government in implementing religious policies, restoring and advancing the cause of Chinese Christianity, which was in need of rejuvenation. He deeply appreciated the sincerity of the Communist Party and the government in implementing the policy of the freedom of religious belief and was determined to lead Chinese Christianity into the great era of “Reform and Opening-up,” to become part of the Chinese people, and to run the Chinese Protestant Church as an integral part of Chinese society. Bishop K. H. Ting was determined to walk alongside the Communist Party, the People’s Government, and the people so as to consciously adapt Chinese Christianity to socialist society.

In 1993, Comrade Jiang Zemin, who was then General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, articulated “three sentences” about religious work at the National United Front Work Conference: conscientiously observe the policy of freedom of religious belief; strengthen the administration of religious affairs in accordance with the law; and actively guide religions in adapting to socialist society. Bishop K. H. Ting felt deeply about the importance of “actively guiding religions to adapt to socialist society.” The center of gravity in his thinking shifted and he felt that the focus of Chinese Protestantism must be to consciously adapt to socialist

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3 Ding Guangxun, “Retrospect and Prospect” in *On the “Three-Self” and Church Construction, and the Theological Thought Construction*, 9.

society at the level of theological thinking. His thoughts became more mature after years of deep pondering. In August 1998, he delivered a speech entitled “The Call to Renovate Religious Ideas” at a meeting of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) on Nationalities and Religions in Xi’an.<sup>4</sup> This “call” stirred up multiple waves of responses with a single stone. Within religious circles, Bishop K. H. Ting had taken the lead in proposing that religions in China, including Christianity, should consciously and actively adapt to socialist society, especially at the level of religious or ideological thought. The religious community should move from merely acting in accordance with the requirements of the Party and Government to become active responders and conscious actors.

From the perspective of Chinese Christianity, this “call” of Bishop Ting, on the one hand, was made to consolidate the achievements of the “Three-Self” movement; on the other hand, like a prophet, he had perceived that with the progress of “Reform and Opening-up” and the development of globalization, hostile forces from the West would infiltrate China’s religions in various ways, and might gradually “de-contextualize” them. I still remember Bishop Ting once saying, “The challenges are greater than the opportunities” and this was the reality. The key to preventing and resisting such a process to “de-contextualize,” was to strengthen the reconstruction of Chinese Christianity, by starting with theological thought. By consolidating the foundation, we could resist “de-contextualization” and advance the “further contextualization of Chinese Christianity.” Although Bishop Ting had retired from the leadership of both the CCC and TSPM (*lianghui*) he was still recognized as the ideological

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4 Cao Shengjie, *The Oral History of Cao Shengjie*, Shanghai: Shanghai Bookstore Press, 2015, 22.

leader and theologian because of this important idea. In November 1998, the “Collected Works of K. H. Ting” was published, and in the same year, the joint meeting of the National Committees of the CCC&TSPM was held in Jinan. This meeting decided to promote theological reconstruction. Bishop Ting personally “steered” the whole discourse on theological reconstruction and led Chinese Christianity to adapt to socialist society at the level of theological thought.

### **The Main Content and Inspiration of Bishop K. H. Ting’s Thought**

As a former student of Bishop K. H. Ting and one of his successors in the work at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, I deeply appreciate the significance of his theological ideas concerning the further contextualization of Christianity in China. His theological thoughts are not slogans or catchphrases but are interpretive and practical. Through the study of doctrines and the scripture, Bishop K. H. Ting has explored and interpreted how the Christian faith has been adapting to socialist society, providing a model for us to follow and establishing one of the paradigms for the further contextualization of Christianity in China. Bishop Ting’s Thought is profoundly rich with three aspects standing out as the most prominent:

#### *The Cosmic Christ*

Bishop Ting’s article on “the Cosmic Christ,”<sup>5</sup> explains one of his most important ideas. His main point is that the greatness of Christ is cosmic as He is the Creator of the

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5 Ding Guangxun, *The Collected Works of Ding Guangxun*, Nanjing: Yilin Publishing House, 1998. This book is actually an “anthology of Ding Guangxun,” which contains only some of his articles, not all of them.

universe, and has created all things with love. Therefore, we cannot understand Christ only through the perspective of denominational beliefs and doctrines, but should understand His work in the larger social context. He noted in his book, “When we recognize the great love of Jesus and that He is the Christ of the whole universe, we are able to know that God is the loving One of the universe and the loving Creator, just as Christ has revealed.”<sup>6</sup> This idea of Bishop K. H. Ting comes from the book of Colossians: “He [The Son] is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, things visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or powers—all things have been created through him and for him. He himself is before all things, and in him all things hold together” (Col 1:15-17, NRSV); “To them God chose to make known how great among the Gentiles are the riches of the glory of this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory. It is he whom we proclaim, warning everyone and teaching everyone in all wisdom, so that we may present everyone mature in Christ” (Col 1:27-28, NRSV). It is easy for believers to understand and accept this idea as it comes from the Bible; additionally, it has been influenced by Western process philosophy, represented by the theories of Alfred North Whitehead and Teilhard de Chardin. In particular, Teilhard de Chardin was a Catholic paleontologist who believed in the theory of evolution and was friendly to China. Most Christian intellectuals in the West are familiar with Teilhard de Chardin’s ideas so it was not difficult for Bishop Ting’s theological view of the “Cosmic Christ” to be understood in Western Christian circles. After 1981, whenever Bishop Ting visited and lectured in churches in the West, he would speak about this idea. The antithesis of the “Cosmic Christ” is the “Christ of the Church.” Historically,

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6 Ibid., 110.

Christology has been a source of church divisions resulting in numerous denominations, sects or cliques. The "Christ of the Church" was something that could easily be misunderstood and lead to exclusivism.

Why did Bishop K. H. Ting carry on a discourse on "the Cosmic Christ?" He did so because church and doctrine have always been central in the Western world and in Christian tradition, leading to the exclusion of many progressive things and ideas. He wanted people to take a broader view of the Christian faith, to affirm all that is true, good, and beautiful in the world, including all that is good in the Communist Party and New China, to affirm all the good deeds of the people, to help Christians in the West correct their prejudices against China, and finally to help Chinese Christians correct their prejudices against non-believers. According to Bishop Ting, we should not stand in the way of unity between believers and the people on the grounds that "believers should not be yoked together with unbelievers," nor should we deny all that is true, good and beautiful among non-believers by simply saying that "those who believe in Jesus will go to Heaven and those who do not will go to Hell." Instead, we should accept each other in love and harmonious coexistence, promote unity, and contribute together towards social development. His high degree of confidence in the socialist system was well manifested in his "Cosmic Christology." Bishop K. H. Ting was exemplary in "speaking positively about religion in China," which he had been doing since 1980. The value and significance of this "Cosmic Christology" lies in the fact that it is a theological reflection on a non-Christianity-centered world, just as it is also a reflection and construction of a new Christology.

### *God is Love*

“God is love” is the second important proposition held by Bishop K. H. Ting. In 2004, his earlier works in English, *Love Never Ends* was re-published, with some new additions, by the Cook Group under the title “God is Love.” This is another one of his powerful and influential thoughts.

In his book, he mentions that “God is love, and His loving nature makes Him love all His created children,” and “because of His loving nature, God does not want His will to be fulfilled by giving orders that must be obeyed.” Rather, through “education, training, discipline, salvation, and sanctification, He wants to create countless new human beings who are both self-aware and self-respecting, who could fully cooperate with Him and with others, who are able to share His will and His way, and have communion and fellowship with Him, the highest point in His vision of creation.”<sup>7</sup>

This thought of Bishop Ting was drawn from the Book of Jonah. Jonah was a prophet of Israel who was convinced that God would punish the Gentiles. Jonah saw God as a tyrant who would destroy the entire city of Nineveh, a city of Gentiles. However, God revealed himself as a loving God who gave people the opportunity to change for the better and that he would not callously destroy humankind. Bishop K. H. Ting perceived that Chinese Christians held a similar view of God, regarding him as a tyrant who loved to punish people. For instance, in the early days of the founding of New China, there were some Christians who were so deluded that they even prayed to God to stop the PLA from crossing the Yangtze River, or to drown the PLA in a tidal wave, just as God had drowned the Egyptian army in the Red Sea. When

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7 Ding Guangxun, “God is Love” in *Collected Writings of Ding Guangxun*, pp. 54-58.

in 1998 there was a huge flood caused by the Yangtze River, resulting in a crushing disaster; some Christians argued that it was God's punishment for the Chinese people. Bishop Ting immediately attempted to correct their misconceptions, by pointing out that "God is Love," not a tyrant who liked to punish people, and that disasters were not necessarily God's punishment, but opportunities for people to learn and progress, thus people should look at things dialectically. This view of God is of great importance. "God is Love" requires Chinese Christians to take "Love" as the starting point for understanding society and the world, and to set "Love" as the ultimate goal in practicing the teachings of Jesus, to practice Christ's teaching of "loving your neighbor as yourself," to love our country, people and culture, and to "build up the Church in love." In 1986, Bishop K. H. Ting focused on a single topic: that the Church should build itself up in love."<sup>8</sup> All the work of the Church should be aligned with the truth that "God is Love." Whether the Church could stand with the country, the people, and society depends on the view of God that she embraces. By believing that "God is love," it would be quite natural for Chinese Christians to love both country and the Church.

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8 This is a speech delivered at the closing ceremony of the Fourth National Chinese Christian Conference in Beijing on August 23, 1986. Cf., "The 'Three-Self' and Church Construction, and the Theological Thought Construction," 129-138. Bishop Ding expressed a very special ecclesiological idea in this speech, which also guided the direction of his work for the next ten years (he retired from leadership in 1996), that was from striving to building, and this speech changed many Christians' view of him, and improved their impression of him.



*The Theology of "Harmonious Coexistence"*

The third important theological thought of Bishop K. H. Ting is the theology of "harmonious coexistence,"<sup>9</sup> in which he argued that the pattern of Chinese theology should not be represented by a circle with only one center, but by an ellipse with two centers. These two centers are represented by two "C's", which means "Christ and China" coexist and do so harmoniously. Bishop Ting believed that Chinese Christianity had gradually moved away from the "Mediterranean Pattern" (which represents the Greek and Latin patterns of early Christianity), and into the Chinese context and culture, consciously identifying and uniting itself with the Chinese people. Not only should Chinese Christianity break out of the Mediterranean mould, but should also eradicate the Western colonial pattern, and move from the "three-selves" (self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation) to the "three-wells" (govern well, support well, and propagate well), be "salt and light," consciously serving Chinese society. To this end, Bishop Ting advocated and promoted the founding of the Amity Foundation to serve Chinese society better.

Bishop Ting was particularly against creating a contradiction between "believers and unbelievers" among people. He argued that if too much emphasis is placed on the saying that "those who believe in Jesus will go to Heaven and those who do not will go to Hell," without preaching the full Gospel, Christianity might become more and more alienated from the people, create "ill feelings" or lead to an "either/or"

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9 Professor Woodrow named this thought as "restoration." He said that "Bishop Ding Guangxun proposed the idea of 'restoration' and 'theological reconstruction'". Cf., Woodrow, "The Theology of Harmony: Searching for the Roots and Development of Chinese Christian Theological Thought from the 'Southern Wei and Northern Zhao'", Hong Kong: Sanlian Bookstore, 275.

extremist model and become marginalized as a clique. Given this situation, he even proposed to “dilute the doctrine of Justification by faith.” Of course, he did not mean to oppose the Christian doctrine, but was against holding a negative view that excluded other people and other religions, disregarded the existence of the true, the good, and the beautiful outside of the Christian world, and provoked strife and conflict to the detriment of stability, unity, and social harmony.

Bishop Ting believed that Christians are patriots, messengers of peace, and conveyors of the need to “glorify God and benefit people;” therefore, we Christians should learn to get along with the Chinese people, coexist harmoniously with them, expand our unity and influence, so that we can spread the great love of Jesus Christ and proclaim the good news of reconciliation.

These are the three important theological thoughts of Bishop K. H. Ting: he always quoted from the Bible based on the reality of Chinese society, using Christian doctrine to interpret the truth that the Christian faith is compatible with socialist society.

Bishop Ting advocated theological reconstruction in order to adapt Christianity to the development of contemporary Chinese society. Although the term “Further contextualization of Chinese Christianity” had not been put forth in his time, his theological thought had long been and was always based upon the teachings of the Bible and his experience as a Christian in interpreting what it means in regard to political identification, cultural integration and social adaptation. The thoughts of Bishop Ting are deeply theological, insightful and enduring, and have been inspirational and helpful to current efforts in promoting the further contextualization of Christianity in China.

In his speech at the 2015 National Conference on United Front Work and another important speech at the

2016 National Religious Work Conference, General Secretary Xi Jinping pointed out that “we must actively guide religions to adapt to socialist society, we must adhere to the direction of the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity, must improve the level of the legalization of religious work, must take a dialectical view of the social role of religion, must stress on exerting the influence of religious figures, and we must guide religions to industriously serve to promote economic development, social harmony, cultural prosperity, national unity and the reunification of the country.” General Secretary Xi’s speeches were given from a high and comprehensive perspective pointing out the direction for the development of Chinese religions. For Christianity, we should build on past achievements and strive for new progress on adhering to the “Three-Self” principle, inheriting Bishop K. H. Ting’s important idea of theological reconstruction, and holding high this thought as an important resource in promoting the further contextualization of Christianity in China.

Between September 22 and 24 in 2015, the National Committees of the CCC&TSPM jointly held a special seminar in Beijing to commemorate the centenary of Bishop K. H. Ting’s birth and the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity, at which many experts and scholars concluded that Bishop K. H. Ting’s Thought is an important resource for the further contextualization of Christianity in China: we should research and learn from his important thoughts and pass them on. According to Professor Zhuo Xinping, “the typical embodiment of the theological thought for the further contextualization of Christianity in China is the ‘theology of love’ which was advocated and constructed

by Bishop K. H. Ting.”<sup>10</sup> This showed that Professor Zhuo Xinping had captured the core essence of Bishop K. H. Ting’s theology. Meanwhile, Professor Philip Wickeri, the author of Bishop Ting’s biography, said, “Bishop K. H. Ting is a practitioner of politics, morality, and scholarship.” “I can say that it is Bishop K. H. Ting who taught me how to play well the two roles of Christian and scholar. For me, the demeanor of Bishop K. H. Ting is like ‘a high mountain with flowing water.’”<sup>11</sup> This showed that Professor Wickeri had captured the essence of Bishop Ting’s “theological mission and goals.”<sup>12</sup>

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- 10 Zhuo Xinping, “Bishop Ding Guangxun and the Exploration of the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity”, *Proceedings of the Symposium on the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Bishop Ding Guangxun and the Further Contextualization of Chinese Christianity*, Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 2016, 114-122.
  - 11 Philip L. Wickeri, “Bishop Ding Guangxun and Chinese Church Construction,” *Proceedings of the Symposium on the 100th Birth Anniversary of Bishop Ding Guangxun and the Further Contextualization of Chinese Christianity* (Shanghai, CCC&TSPM, 2016), 123. Philip Wickeri, an American who was an overseas co-worker of Bishop Ting, was involved in the work of the Amity Foundation, and worked closely with him for 15 years.
  - 12 The mission and goals of theology is a very important concept in the 21st century and politics, morality, and scholarship are necessary elements of the theology of contextualization. Here, “politics” refers to political issues, so that theology has a political task; “morality” refers to moral issues, a subject on which traditional theology puts great emphasis; and “scholarship” refers to academic tasks. All three aspects have been contributed to and exemplified by the ancient Church Fathers. The theological task of the further contextualization of Christianity in China must also include these three elements. Professor Shen Xuanren discusses this very well in his article “Christian Theology and the Pluralistic Meaning of Theology - The Way for the (sic) Contemporary Ecumenical Theology” in Guo, Hongbiao, and Du, Jianwei, eds, *Theological Agenda for the New Century*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong Christian Institute, 2002, 1-24.

According to Professor Duanqi, “As the leader of the Christian church in China, Bishop Ting put great emphasis on the integration of Christianity with contemporary Chinese society, that is to say, he thought mostly about how Christianity could better survive and develop in today’s China, a socialist country, and how it could be accepted by the vast number of non-Christian Chinese people. His theological thought also orbits around this point.” “Indeed, Bishop K. H. Ting’s theological thought is not just theological speculation, it is a distillation and summary based on the reality experienced by Chinese Christians, and a product of the close integration of Chinese Church and society.”<sup>13</sup> The point that Professor Duanqi focused on is that Bishop K. H. Ting’s theological approach is that of practical theology, which is also a theological approach in contextualization,<sup>14</sup> and this is the methodology of the further contextualization of Christianity in China. As for the kind of inspiration that Bishop Ting’s theological thought has given to the further contextualization of Christianity in China, I think I do not need to say much, as the three scholars have made it very clear—if we could work hard in accordance with Bishop K. H. Ting’s “core essence of theology,” “theological mission and goals,” and “theological model and methodology,” the study of the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity will have richer content and meaning.

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13 Duan Qi, “Bishop Ding Guangxun and the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity,” in *Proceedings of the Symposium on the 100th Birth Anniversary of Bishop Ding Guangxun and the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity*, Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 91.

14 The methodology of practical theology is to generate reflections that arise from the encounter between faith and situation, and its mode is practice-reflection-practice. Through constantly practicing and revising, theology becomes a living theology; its theory can be found in Shen Yahong and Dong Jiahua’s “A Brief Introduction to the Methodology of Practical Theological Research,” in Chen Junwei ed. *Theological Methodology*, Hong Kong: Tian Dao Bookstore, 443-468.

## Conclusion

This article was originally written for the “political consultative thematic meeting” of the National Committee of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) on Nationalities and Religions held on November 26, 2019. The title of this meeting was “The Core Socialist Values Guide Religions to Make Interpretations of Religious Doctrines and Rules that Meet the Requirements of the Development of the Times.” Comrade Wang Yang, a Standing Committee member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee and Chairman of the CPPCC National Committee, attended this meeting and delivered an important speech, which was reported by CCTV (China Central Television) for seven minutes. Because of the time limitation, my speech was only six minutes long and consisted of about 2,500 words—I mainly focused on explaining that Bishop K. H. Ting was a model in this area. After this meeting, I felt the need to continue to perfect this speech into a paper, because Bishop Ting’s theological thoughts are of great significance to the further contextualization of Christianity in China. Meanwhile, his thoughts are getting more and more attention in the Western world. Not long ago, I met Mr. David Mehils, the former president of the Cook Group, which published Bishop Ting’s book, *God is Love* (English version). He told me that he had published many books in his life, but he was so proud to have had the chance to publish Bishop Ting’s book. He also said that this particular book has been collected by many prestigious libraries around the world and was being valued and used by more and more people.

Just as Dr. Philip Wickeri puts it, “Bishop Ting was one of the greatest leaders of the church and of the world in the late 20th century. Few church leaders in any country around the world has done as much for their own churches and the churches of the world in the same period as Bishop Ting has

done for the Chinese and world church.”<sup>15</sup> “The theology of Bishop Ding Guangxun is rooted in the Bible, in church tradition, and reason.”<sup>16</sup>

If we use “faith, hope, and love” to view the theological route that has been taken, then we can say that traditional theology focuses on faith—knowing our relationship with God; the theology of Moltmann of the 20th century focuses on hope—that is, the theology of hope; while the theology of Bishop K. H. Ting focuses on love—loving God, loving one’s fellow humans, and loving the Church. We could say that the theology of Bishop K. H. Ting put a powerful exclamation point on the history of theology in the 20th century which is beautiful and significant.

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15 Philip L. Wickeri, “Bishop Ding Guangxun and Chinese Church Construction,” *Proceedings of the Symposium on the 100th Birth Anniversary of Bishop Ding Guangxun and the Further Contextualization of Chinese Christianity* (Shanghai, CCC&TSPM, 2016), 123-124.

16 Ibid.

## **Incarnation – The Word of God and the Further Contextualization of Christianity in China**

道成肉身——上帝之道与基督教中国化

CHEN YONG TAO 陈永涛

According to Belgian sinologist Nicholas Standaert, in the spread of religion, there are two possible phenomena that may occur once the proclaimed religion comes into contact with the local culture: one is that “the incoming new religion may gradually alter the system, modes of thinking or expressions of the original culture, resulting in a deep cultural alienation or ceding; the other is that “the incoming foreign religion, undergoes some changes, taking on a new look in the culture that accepts it.”<sup>1</sup> Standaert believes that Buddhism in Southeast Asia belongs to the first phenomenon, while that in China and Japan belongs to the second phenomenon.

Undoubtedly, after more than 70 years of effort by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), Christianity in China has long since become a religious undertaking independently run by Chinese people. However, due to certain historical and theological reasons, there still exists a certain degree of cultural alienation or ceding in Chinese Christianity today. It is because of this kind of cultural alienation or ceding that the contextualization of Christianity in China is not just a slogan or an expedient measure but a process that requires the Chinese Church to imbue it with substantive content through positive and active thinking.

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1 N. Standaert, *Localization*, Taipei: Guangqi Press, 1993, pp. 30-31



## Introduction

There is a story that in the ancient east, there is an unknown small country, and at the border of this small country, there is a poor village. A beautiful young woman named Xiuhui lived in that poor village. It is said that the Lord was so kind to her that He appeared to her in a dream calling on her to dedicate her life to translating His Word into the language of her own country and spread it throughout the land. At that time, printing technology was not widespread, and in the east, the texts of those classical ancient books of God's Word were those classical manuscripts belonging to the sovereign state. To make things worse, those manuscripts were locked in the treasury of the Hanlin Academy in the capital of the sovereign state. Needless to say, God's mission for Xiuhui was very difficult and it was close to hopeless to complete this test.

In addition to the astronomical cost of translation and printing, it was also a challenge for Xiuhui to find and hire those wise men who were proficient in ancient literature. However, none of this held her back. On accepting this mission, she sold her few possessions, left her hometown, and went to the city alone, sleeping on the streets and begging for a living. She would do anything to raise money to complete that mission. She was willing to undertake any kind of hard work just to earn a little money. The road seemed endless, and it was difficult to explain how painful and burdensome it was to raise money. Nevertheless, as the old saying goes, where there is a will, there is a way. After fifteen years of hardship, Xiuhui finally accumulated a considerable sum of money. With this, the plan to translate God's Word was ready to begin, but just at that very moment, her hometown was hit by a 'once-in-a-century' flood wherein many people died.

Faced with this crisis, Xiuhui donated, without hesitation, all the money she had accumulated over fifteen years. When her hometown finally recovered from that disaster, Xiuhui returned to the city to refinance the translation project. She never forgot her original intention and never abandoned her original aspiration. The mission entrusted by God was always in Xiuhui's heart and mind. Although time flew and she became no longer young and beautiful, stories of her selfless love and steadfast determination spread throughout the land and touched the hearts of countless people. Nine years passed unnoticed and again, people, rich and poor, all donated enthusiastically to Xiuhui's mission. Again, when the funds were enough and translation was about to begin, a plague struck unexpectedly, killing thousands and leaving many broken families. Despite being wornout, the exhausted Xiuhui again donated all the money she had raised over the past nine years without any hesitation. Again, when the disaster relief ended, she returned to the city to raise money and start all over again. Time passed, and in the last few months of her life, Xiuhui finally saw the first fruits of her labor: the first batch of classics in her own language, ready for publication. After her death, her story was eagerly shared. Everyone agreed that Xiuhui had actually completed the translation and preaching work three times over during her lifetime, and the last time could not compare with the brilliance of the first two times.

This story invites us to ponder about the meaning of "God's Word." Whenever we mention God's Word, we usually refer to Scriptural texts or propositional doctrines. It is true that for Christians, the Bible is God's Word. But does God's Word merely refer to the written script? Does not the Bible also tell us that God's Word "shall not return unto the void?" (Isa 55:11, KJV) The Word of God is unheard by deaf ears, but to those who hear wholeheartedly, it is a deafening sound. Therefore, the Word of God is powerful. However, the

Word needs to manifest its power in the process of becoming flesh. Without becoming flesh, the Word cannot be as powerful as it should be. There is only one way that humans can attain God's Word: through the Word becoming flesh. For example, if the commandment of "love thy neighbor" is merely regarded as a golden rule, it is only a paper exercise; only when these three words are practiced in daily life, that is when the Word "love thy neighbor" is put into action and becomes flesh, will this Word of God manifest its power. In other words, the Word of God not only needs to be proclaimed but also to be "lived out." It is impossible for one to identify with God's Word without putting it into practice. The core truth about Christ is that the Word of God is the "Word" that becomes flesh. Lao Tzu says at the beginning of his *Tao Te Ching*: "Truth can be known, but it may not be the well-known truth."<sup>2</sup> Whenever we try to describe this truth, we always end up catching the wind. For like "love", "Word" (or truth) does not exist between the words and lines, but in action. The Word of God will continue to become flesh only if it is put into practice. In other words, the Word of God must become flesh and blood and live fully on earth—only then, can it truly be with us. This is what the truth of the incarnation is about.

## The Dao of God and the Chinese Cultural Context

Therefore, what is God's Word? When we talk about God's Word, we tend to say that the Bible is God's Word that has been written down. The neo-orthodox theologian Karl Barth (1886-1968) was one of the most influential theologians of the 20th century and he developed a much broader concept of God's Word which was accepted by many

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2 This is based on Yuanchong Xu's translation. The word "道" (Dao or Tao) in this line can be translated both as "Word" and "Truth."

involved in Protestant theology. According to Karl Barth, there is a threefold form of God's Word: (1) the revealed Word of God, which is the Word of the person, Logos, that is incarnated in Christ; (2) the written Word of God, which is the testimony of prophets and apostles to the revealed Word of God, that is the Bible; (3) the proclaimed Word of God, which is the actual proclamation of the Church, that is the concrete proclamation and realization of the revealed and written Word of God, that is the Bible.<sup>3</sup> The threefold form of God's Word exists in a cyclical form: (1) the basis of everything is God's self-revelation in the incarnated Christ; (2) the Apostles' lives and witness were authentically and authoritatively preserved in the New Testament texts; initially, they were orally transmitted (that is the proclamation of the Apostles), later on, they were also written down; (3) This apostolic witness repeatedly 'wants' to be an actual 'living voice,' or to be the proclaimed Word of God, so that the incarnated Logos might be understood, and be presented to its fullest extent. Actually, all these three forms of God's Word contain the one and common Word: the incarnated Logos (John 1:14). Thus, according to Karl Barth, the concept of God's Word is larger than the Bible. The Bible is God's Word, but God's Word does not merely refer to the Bible.

First of all, Jesus Christ is the revealed Word of God. For Chinese Christians, Jesus Christ, the revealed Word of God, is not so much an object of theoretical thinking as an example to be followed and emulated. Chinese culture is ethically-oriented, not theoretically-oriented. It does not uphold speculative thinking but focuses on moral teachings. In this respect, it is closer to the Bible and Hebraic thought than to Hellenized and Latinized Christian thought. Therefore,

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3 Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, I /1, Second edition, Edinburgh: T.&T. Clark, 1975, 88-124.

if Christianity is to become Chinese Christianity in the true sense, and to be an integral part of new era Chinese culture, the further contextualization of Christianity in China is the only path. Is it possible to Sinicize the Word of God? What is the significance of Sinicizing the Word of God? How to Sinicize the Word of God? To these questions, faith in the “Incarnation” offers a referential solution.

The Word once incarnated in a particular historical culture and society, became flesh in first century Judea, thus, it could also become flesh in every specific culture and society. Every unique culture could be the bearer of the Incarnation. Faith in the Incarnation enables us to see not only the possibility of the Word of God becoming flesh in contemporary Chinese culture and society but also the necessity of the Word of God becoming flesh in Chinese culture.

As a Chinese Christian, I appreciate very much the fact that in the Chinese Bible, the Chinese character *Tao* 道 is used to translate ‘Word.’ When we say *Tao*, multiple meanings of this word will immediately come to mind: principle, word, way, method, reason, truth, path, and practice, and so on. Jesus Christ is the *Tao* of God, and this *Tao* is to be incarnated in Chinese culture. This is the Christology of the *Tao*, which focuses on demonstrating our unique understanding of Christology. This Christology of the *Tao* will extend our understanding of God’s Word to the practical and ethical realms where religious faith and ethical life could be integrated as necessary. As the Word of God, this Christ is not a ‘theoretical’ Christ; he did not come to cause doctrinal controversies. He is the Lord of life, and He is intimately close to our daily lives. He chose and called us to ‘follow’ Him closely, practice His teachings, and live out His life. He is the Christ who becomes flesh as God’s Word, dwells among us, is with us, and shares our

joys and sorrows. As the Word of God in flesh, He lives in our daily lives. As Christians, our new life with Christ is the manifestation of the Word of God in us.

## **God's Action in History and the Inclusive Character of the Kingdom**

Secondly, the Bible is the written Word of God. As the written Word of God, the events of Exodus and Easter are the two focal points of biblical faith on which the development of Christian theology should be based. Exodus is the event whereby God is "acting in history." God is perceived as the God who frees people from all kinds of bondage and slavery and provides them with a new value system, a new identity. While, the event of Easter implies that the history of Exodus continues to take place today, it also implies that the same Almighty Jehovah is at work wherever this kind of liberating event takes place.

The events of Exodus and Easter also symbolize the inclusive character of God's Kingdom and the realization of God's liberating rule. The proclamation of God's Kingdom by the Church requires the Church to assume its responsibility to the world and to society. Therefore, social care and humanistic care are undoubtedly not excluded from the mission of the Church. Not only that, the social care extended by the Church also goes beyond mere social services such as helping the poor and needy. As Mr. Zhao Zichen (T. C. Chao) believed, the Church should play a leading role in the process of social and cultural reconstruction.<sup>4</sup> The Church, as a spiritual community, is neither to reform society directly, nor to promote political revolutions, but to influence society through proclaiming and witnessing to the

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4 T. C. Chao, "Can Christianity Be the Basis of Social Reconstruction in China?" *Chinese Recorder* 53, May 1922, 316.

spirit of the gospel. Jesus' own teaching and mission have denied the possibility of the Church attempting to reform society directly or participating in a political revolution. As the Word of God, Jesus Christ is not a social reformer, much less a political revolutionary.

The event of Easter is inseparable from the Incarnation. Without the Incarnation, the meaning of Easter would be lost. On one hand, the Incarnation is God's Word becoming flesh. God's Word becoming flesh is not only God Himself entering the world, but also God Himself entering a particular society and culture. Jesus Christ, as the incarnated Word of God, lived in a specific Jewish society. The mission of Jesus on earth was to bring about God's Kingdom, which is a spiritual Kingdom. Jesus did not run away from the society he lived in, but actively involved Himself in it. In particular, He identified with those who were marginalized and vulnerable and wanted them to live better. Theologically, the Incarnation affirms the social dimension of the Gospel. On the other hand, the event of Easter makes the Incarnation a repeatedly emerging event, not just past history. Because of the faith in Easter, Jesus Christ becomes a visible entity in various cultural and historical contexts.

According to the Gospels, there are three points worth emphasizing about the life and teaching of Jesus: First of all, He saw His daily life as a service to God. The Catechism of the Catholic Church interestingly emphasizes that Jesus is a model of ordinary family life, that regards everyday life as a service to God. "By his obedience to Mary and Joseph, as well as by his humble work during the long years in Nazareth, Jesus gives us the example of holiness in the daily life of family and work."<sup>5</sup> This implies that the secular work and responsibilities of Christians are "bounden duties" given

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5 *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Vol. 1), Shijiazhuang: Hebei Catholic Xinde Newsroom, 1997, p. 138.

by God. In other words, the divine and the secular cannot be completely separated. Second, Jesus was with the poor. Just like almost all contemporary systematic theology, the Catechism of the Catholic Church emphasizes that Jesus of Nazareth was on the side of those who were socially marginalized in his own lifetime: that is on the side of the poor, the socially inferior, the sinners, the women, and children. Jesus came from a poor family; most of Jesus's disciples were poor; although God's Gospel is for all, it is easier for the poor to accept the Gospel preached by Jesus. Not only that, but Jesus also brought them spiritual comfort and the hope of God's Kingdom that is yet to come.

Third, teaching about God's Kingdom: At the core of Jesus's teaching is the idea of God's Kingdom. Jesus best expressed the ethics of God's Kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5-7) and the Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6). In addition to proclaiming the eschatological Kingdom that had come, Jesus also made a claim about Himself. The Kingdom of God had come in the ministry of Jesus Christ.<sup>6</sup>

## **Proclamation and the living Word of God**

The Proclamation of the Church is the third form of the Word of God. Through word and deed, the Church proclaims the revealed Word of God and the written Word of God. Because of the Proclamation of the Church, the incarnated Word of God dwells among us, while the written Word of God is no longer "cold text," but the living Word of God, full of power and life. The Proclamation of the Church cannot be separated from the social, cultural, political, and economic context in

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6 Cf. Chen Yongtao, "The Christian Church and Social Care – the Necessity and Rationality of the Social Care of the Church in Light of the Nature and Mission of the Church," in Zhuo Xinping and Xu Zhiwei (eds) *Christian Studies*, Beijing: Religion and Culture Press, 2008, 129-130.



which the Church exists. Therefore, this Proclamation is both cultural and contemporary. Without this cultural and contemporary character, the Word cannot become flesh in our specific lives, nor can it have any influence, which it should, on society and culture.

Unlike the Western cultural emphasis on absolute concepts, what Chinese culture emphasizes is the fact that the Word dwells in all things. The complementary teachings of Confucius and Laozi constitute the main thread in Chinese culture. Confucius says “set your aspirations on the *Tao*.” (*The Analects of Confucius: Shu Er*); “If I can hear the *Tao* in the morning, I would be content to die in the evening.” (*The Analects of Confucius: Li Ren*); “It is people to promote the *Tao*, not the *Tao* to promote people.” (*The Analects of Confucius: Wei Ling Gong*). The *Tao* that Confucius is discussing mainly refers to the basic principle of normal development of society and the basic laws governing a country. The concept corresponding to *Tao* is *Qi* 气 that is, life force or material force. The *Tao* is embedded in the *Qi*, which needs to be discovered and discerned. The later neo-Confucians of the Song and Ming Dynasties put forward the core concept of “Heavenly Principle,” which is a combination of “Heavenly *Tao*” and “Human *Tao*,” emphasizing that the “Heavenly Principle is no more than the ways of people”: in other words, the heavenly principle is not an ultimate entity, but a common way of daily life. Although the *Tao* that was proclaimed by Lao Tzu (Laozi) sounds superlative: “*Tao* can be known, but it may not be the well-known *Tao*. This *Tao* is not a supreme, absolute and ultimate entity that could be separated from all things, but is the everlasting vitality and energy of the life of the universe, which dwells in all things. It is in this sense that Taoism is regarded as pantheistic. With *Tao*, all things live; without *Tao*, all things die: this *Tao* is not the creator or the master of the universe; therefore, Lao Tzu says that the *Tao* “gives them birth and does not

own them, acts and does not appropriate them, is superior, and does not control them" (*Lao Tzu*, 51), "it clothes and feeds a myriad things, yet does not claim them as its own". On the understanding of 'Tao', most Chinese people choose to discuss it from two perspectives: naturalism (Taoism) and secular humanism (Confucianism), so it is said that "Tao models itself after nature" (*Lao Tzu*, 25),<sup>7</sup> and "Tao is not far away from people" (*The Doctrine of the Mean*, 13).

Fundamentally, Chinese culture is a moral culture. Confucianism, as the main body of Chinese traditional thought and culture, is essentially about social morality, that is, the principles of moral education, which focus on guiding people to behave and live wisely with virtue and continually promoting civilizational progress. The aspiration of Confucius was to "cultivate oneself for the benefit of others" (*The Analects of Confucius: Xian Wen*): the essence of his doctrine is to take benevolence as the foundation of human nature and advocating, through the principles of loyalty and forgiveness, the extension of one's love and respect for parents to all people and all things, so as to bring peace in society. In the emergence and growth of Taoism and the introduction and development of Buddhism, both identified with Confucian religious morality. The beliefs in becoming Buddha and bodhisattvas, helped to strengthen the appeal of Chinese traditional morality thereby moderately supplementing Confucianism's religious morality. For example, Taoism stresses that the pursuit of becoming an immortal should "be based on loyalty, filial piety, harmony, obedience, benevolence and faithfulness" (Ge Hong, *Baopuzi: Dui Su*). Meanwhile, Buddhism also defines itself in terms of "the avoidance of evil, the practice of good deeds, and the purification of one's self". By placing "filial piety" as the first

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7 Based on the translation of Lin Yutang, *The wisdom of Laotse* [M]. Greenwood Press, 1979.

of all virtues, both Taoism and Buddhism actually manifest efforts made in the process of their contextualization in China.

Zhao Zichen (T. C. Chao) was an important Chinese theologian in the first half of the 20th century. He argued that there are several powerful tendencies in traditional Chinese culture. Besides the naturalistic tendency, artistic tendency, and Chinese theological experience, there is another tendency of great importance, and that is the ethical tendency. For the Chinese, since man is a human being, there should always be a rationale for being human. "To be human is to be benevolent" 仁者人也: this is the basic principle of humanity. As for the interconnection between people, filial piety is the root, loyalty is to fulfill one's responsibility, and forgiveness is the principle for interacting with others.<sup>8</sup> It was based on this understanding of Chinese culture that Zhao Zichen stressed the importance of integrating Christianity with Chinese culture when he advocated the idea of indigenization or contextualization of Christianity in China.

For the Chinese church, in the proclamation of God's Word, it is necessary to draw lessons from the contextualization of Buddhism. As the proclaimer of the Word of God, the Church should proclaim God's Word not only in its preaching but also in acts of service because God's Word is not a cold, purely rational Word, but a living, specific, warm, and powerful Word of life. Today's world is one that is torn apart just as today's society is also ruptured and traumatized. How the Church proclaims God's Word in such a ruptured world and wounded society, and whether the Church heals the wound or makes it worse, is the subject that one must reflect upon in the process of proclaiming

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8 Zhao Zichen, "Christianity and Chinese Culture" (1927), in *Collected Works of Zhao Zichen*: vol.3, Beijing: Commercial Press, 2007, 271-278.

God's Word. As the proclaimer of the Word of God, the Church should be a healer, peacemaker, and comforter, promoting the whole healing process with the help of the Holy Spirit. The Church is not the master of the world or society: it is the church's responsibility to become the servant of all people and the healer of the world. In any case, the mission of the church is to serve, to become the servant of the world or society, and to strive for the integrity and health of the world. This mission of the Church is consistent with the "spirit of harmony" in Chinese culture. In Chinese culture and the contemporary social context, the Chinese church's proclamation of God's Word should focus on unity rather than division, harmony rather than conflict, and openness rather than isolation. The Spirit of God is the Spirit that brings about unity, harmony, and embraces the whole universe, not the Spirit that brings about division, conflict, and self-isolation. Therefore, as the proclaimer of God's Word, the Church needs to open itself to the Spirit of God.

### **More than just Word, *Tao* denotes action**

Xie Fuya, a 20th-century Chinese religious philosopher and theologian, once asserted that the key for "Christianity in China" to become Chinese Christianity is to have a group of saints that follow Christ's example. He argued that we (Chinese people) should have our own St. Paul, St. John, St. Augustine, and St. Thomas Aquinas. For Christianity in China to become a true Chinese Christianity, it needs to raise up many "Christian Gentlemen."<sup>9</sup>

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9 Xie Fuya. "The Age of Chinese Classics, the Age of Buddhology, and the Age of Christology," in *The Collection of Essays on Christian Thought in Xie Fuya's Later Years*, Hong Kong: Christian Literature Council Ltd, 1986, 124-125. This article is also included in Liu Xiaofeng (ed) "*Tao*" and "*Word*": *Encounter between the Chinese Culture and Christianity*, Shanghai: Shanghai SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1995.

Xie Fuya also asserted that the shape and meaning of the Chinese character *Tao* denotes ‘action’ more than just ‘word.’ He then boldly imitated the beginning of the first chapter of the Gospel of John, which is John’s teaching about the Word, proclaiming, “In the beginning, there was the Cross “✝”<sup>10</sup> the Cross was with God, the Cross was God.” According to Xie Fuya, although the essence of God or God Himself is transcendent and unfathomable, the fact that God is in the “historical Jesus” culminated in “action,” especially in the ultimate action of Christ’s taking up the Cross at Calvary.

In other words, the fact that the Word of God became man is manifested in “action.” He pointed out that,

*“Chinese Christology will not be interested in dogmatic and doctrinal disputes, or in the parallelism of church denominations. It must transcend the major divisions between Catholicism and Protestantism with all its denominations, and it also must transcend the dispute between the so-called fundamentalists and modernists. Our Christology is a search for Jesus Christ, who is fully God and fully human, and a tracing of His life. We will unite Confucius and Jesus to develop a variety of splendid and colorful theologies that are based on this new paradigm...The traditional Chinese scholars had a spirit of ‘taking the clarification of the world as their duty;’ if they follow Christ’s example and get on in the world according to His example, they will throw themselves into the world as countless fireballs, and through the fire of the Holy Spirit, they will cleanse this heinous earthly world of all sins and bring about the coming of God’s Kingdom.”<sup>11</sup>*

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10 Note by author: “✝” is the ancient form of the Chinese word “action,” which is in the form of a cross.

11 Ibid., 125-126.

He also emphasized the moral nature and practice of Christianity. He correctly recognized that the doctrines or schools of Chinese cultural history were not so much a series of theories as actual acts practiced, demonstrated, and exemplified by the masters of these schools. Therefore, unlike in the West, real Chinese Christianity does not emphasize seeking knowledge, but on living in this world and living in peace. Thus, for Chinese Christians, “doing” is much more important and difficult than “knowing.” As a result, Xie Fuya stressed the practice and demonstration of the noble character of Jesus as the way of achieving self-renewal, and influencing society. He said,

*“The pastor of the Church should inspire church members and become a living example for them. In society, and especially in politics, a Christian individual must follow Christ’s example and conduct himself/herself with high moral standards whether in work or in business. As a Christian citizen, he/she should then seek to work together with people of insight to transform world culture, set new ethical standards, counter social decadence, and establish the foundation for genuine world peace and the well-being of all humankind.”*<sup>12</sup>

Consequently, Xie Fuya emphasized the importance of personality education and practice in the life and nurture of

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12 Xie Fuya. “A Chinese layman’s view of the Old and New Testaments” in *The Collection of Essays on Christian Thought in Xie Fuya’s Later Years*. Hong Kong: Christian literature Council Ltd., 1986, 23-24.

believers.<sup>13</sup> He was of the opinion that laypeople should be role models for non-believers, and pastors should be role models for laypeople. In his view, the actions and behaviour of the Church and Christians are more powerful than the preaching of a thousand words. This is a good reminder for the Christian ministry in China.

## Conclusion

The Word of God does not only refer to the revealed Word of God, the written Word of God, but also the Word of God proclaimed by the Church. That 'Word' is not only God's words, but also God's way. As followers of Jesus Christ, Christians should walk in God's way and proclaim God's Word through their own words and deeds and become living witnesses of the Word of God.

Only a truly contextualized Christianity could really take on 'a new look.' The further contextualization of Chinese Christianity is to make the Word of God become flesh in our own culture, in the society in which we live. This requires not only proclamation through our words but also bearing witness in our lives. For Christians, loving God and loving our neighbors are not two different commandments, but two aspects of the same commandment. Our love for God is manifested through our love for our neighbors. As the Bible

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13 According to Xie Fuya, firstly, Chinese tradition is characterized by "people" rather than "God" as in the Jewish tradition. Instead of extolling God's omniscience and omnipotence, Chinese Christian should stress the noble character of Jesus Christ. Compared to proving faith through knowledge, it is better to manifest faith through action. Secondly, the Chinese ethos of "honoring teachers and esteeming truth" should be preserved. Thus, he believes that Christian education ministry is more important than evangelism and sermons, emphasizing the importance of Christian education and pastoral work. Thirdly, as for the traditional Chinese educational method, it is "by example," rather than "by words," the so called "lead by example."

says, if a man does not love his 'brother' whom he can see, it is impossible that he can love God whom he cannot see (1 John 4:16-21). God is love, and the Church should become the vehicle of God's love, bringing the Gospel of God to society and to those in need. In a world of need, the Church must not only proclaim God's will but also practice God's will. This will of God is what God has accomplished in Jesus Christ, what the Holy Scriptures testify to and reveal, and is also the gospel proclaimed by the Church.

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## **Cultural elements in the construction of a Chinese Christology**

### **浅论构建中国教会基督论的文化因素**

WANG JIAWEI 王嘉玮

#### **Introduction**

Christology holds an important place in the history of dogmatics and systematic theology, and is the key to Christian theology because it is closely related to other theological themes such as the doctrine of God, soteriology, anthropology, ecclesiology, sacraments and eschatology. In the first half of the 20th century Chinese Christian scholars such as Wu Leichuan 吴雷川, Y. T. Wu 吴耀宗, T. C. Chao 赵紫宸 and Nai Zin Zia 谢扶雅 dedicated themselves to reflecting on Christology and its contextualization through the combination of faith with the idea of the nation's destiny and traditional Chinese culture. Since the second half of that century, Chinese theologians such as K. H. Ting 丁光训, Chen Zemin 陈泽民, Shen Yifan 沈以藩 and Wang Weifan 汪维藩 have developed the paradigm of a "Cosmic Christology" from the perspective of Incarnation, combining Chinese social culture with the contextual situation of the church in a post-denominational era. Given the vicissitudes and changes of the past century, the focus of Chinese Christology has been different at every stage but the organic combination with Chinese culture has never ceased, and is constantly being deepened and improved. This constitutes the response and announcement of the Chinese Church to the question posed by Jesus Christ to his disciples, "Who do you say I am?"

In this essay, I will first discuss the relationship between theology and culture from the perspective of the incarnation and analyze the cultural factors present in the construction of Chinese Christology. Then, through the interpretation of several representative Chinese theologians' work on Christology with Chinese cultural characteristics in the 20th century, it will demonstrate the close connection between Chinese Christology and its context and culture. Finally, in the conclusion, this essay proclaims that in the process of "the Further Contextualization of Chinese Christianity" 基督教中国化, the Christology of the Chinese Church will inherit the universal classic doctrines, while continuing to deepen the integration of theology and culture. In this way, the Church in China could construct a more comprehensive, inclusive Christology with a Chinese cultural style in the 21st century.

## **Theological Thinking of Incarnation in the Chinese Church**

Incarnation, as an important doctrinal theme of Christology, has long been the center and focus of discussion among theologians and church leaders. Chinese Christians believe in the Nicene Creed and the Apostles Creed, and generally accept the doctrine of incarnation of the Word, expressing their personal understanding and interpretation to others in the form of sermons or articles. In the post-denominational era, Chinese church leaders and theologians such as K. H. Ting, Chen Zemin, Shen Yifan and Wang Weifan etc., have been enthusiastically constructing a Christology that includes incarnation, the unity of creation and redemption, mutual learning between theology and culture and so on, and have left a valuable thought legacy for later generations.

In his writings, Bishop Ting has frequently emphasized the importance and rich connotations of the doctrine of

incarnation. It can be said that it is one of the important theological elements underlining the influence and significance of incarnation toward human beings and the universe. Through the “incarnation of the Word,” Bishop Ting has emphasized the transcendence of God and his attribute of love, that is, God’s love is universal. Additionally, it highlights the cooperation between God and humankind as in the willingness of the Virgin Mary to participate in the co-creative process of incarnation and the “collaborative” relationship between God and human beings, all of which inspires Chinese Christians to actively participate in the construction of the Chinese Church and socialist society.

Firstly, Bishop Ting believes that God’s incarnation in Christ has a far greater impact on human beings than the fall of Adam. The name of God is Love, and he focuses on the work of creation, which is to make human beings participants in creation through redemption, education and sanctification, thereby reaching perfection as free and intelligent co-creators.<sup>1</sup> This reflects a theological approach centered on creationism. In his elaboration of the “Cosmic Christ,” Bishop Ting points out that “Christ has been and is with God, in all the creative work in the universe to this day. He has to do with creation just as much as he has to do with redemption. Redemption is a part of God’s ongoing work of making a world of his design.”<sup>2</sup>

Secondly, the incarnation of the Word manifests the transcendence of God. God’s transcendence indicates that he has the ability to bridge the gap between God and humankind, and the Word of God assumes human nature and becomes human. Humanity is also enhanced by communion with divinity in Christ, enabling people to live

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1 Bishop K.H. Ting, “The Cosmic Christ,” in *God is Love* (Ontario: Cook Communications, 2004), 113.

2 Bishop K.H. Ting, “My View of God,” in *God is Love*, 40.

out the “image of God” and transcend their original selves. He says “God’s Love Transcends Our Sin”:

*We often say that the word Incarnation (John 1:14) is extremely rich in meaning. Incarnation first of all confirms that God is a God who transcends nature, world and history. Without this transcendence, we could not speak of Incarnation. It is this all-transcending God entering in among us that draws us to himself and allows us to gain revelation. People’s concept of God often determines their view of human life. Knowledge of the all-transcendent God leads us inevitably to accept the concept of transcendence and give it meaning for human life. It then becomes a voice at our ear ceaselessly urging us on, urging us not to be content with our surroundings, demanding that human beings transcend the given, transcend the present, ourselves, all evil and darkness, transcend our achievements and even our fate.*<sup>3</sup>

Thirdly, Bishop Ting affirms the co-working of the human and God and the spirit of dedication and complete sacrifice in the preparation for the incarnation represented in Mary, who became the “carrier” of the incarnation. Mary, the mother of Jesus, is the pinnacle and crystallization of the process of preparing the Incarnation.<sup>4</sup> In “Life Should Have a Mission,” Bishop Ting argues that the visit of the angels to Mary is an important sign in the process of God’s creation, redemption and sanctification of the world — God expects people to consciously work with God. “The Incarnation is an event of cosmic significance” and humanity provides collaboration and cooperation in its becoming a reality. Mary became the vessel and carrier of the Incarnation, bringing the relationship between God and humans to a new stage.<sup>5</sup>

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3 Bishop K.H. Ting, “God’s Love Transcends Our Sin,” in *God is Love*, 161-162.

4 Bishop K.H. Ting, “The Message of Christmas,” in *God is Love*, 136.

5 Bishop K.H. Ting, “Life Should Have a Mission,” in *God is Love*, 284.

It follows from this that the mission of the church on earth is also to be the carrier of the incarnation, to bring the “Word in the beginning” among people. “We seek to make ourselves like Mary. In order for the Word to become flesh and show forth among people, we are willing to let it be done to us according to God’s word, without counting any cost.”<sup>6</sup>

From Bishop Ting’s exposition of the incarnation, we find that in the scope of discussions among Chinese Christians and theologians, themes that have been mainly developed include the unity of creation and salvation as well as the relationship between theology and culture. First of all, Bishop Ting and Chen Zemin basically share the same views of creation and salvation. They both emphasize creationism as a theological approach to thinking about related theological topics, so as to make theological views more open and inclusive. Bishop Ting’s creationism is a “continuous creationism,” which indicates that today, God’s creative work for a harmonious world is still continuing. Bishop Ting cites the Nicene Creed in showing that the Holy Spirit and the pre-existence of Christ are to explain the work of creation, redemption and sanctification, which cannot be separated and are the work of the same triune God. In particular, he takes the theology of Teilhard de Chardin 德日进 as an example to illustrate that we should break out of the kind of narrower theological view of salvation centered on belief and unbelief, and transition to a broader vision of God’s creation, redemption and sanctification in the universe.<sup>7</sup> In short, Bishop Ting, in his efforts to develop the idea of the “Cosmic Christ,” believes that Christ has been working with God in the work of creation from the past to the present,

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6 Ibid., 285.

7 K.H. Ting, “Inspiration from Liberation Theology, Process Theology and Teilhard de Chardin,” in *Love Never Ends*, ed. Janice Wickeri (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000), 204, 207.

with Christ having been involved in the creation of salvation, and that salvation is a part of the ongoing creative work.<sup>8</sup> Chen Zemin affirms that God's creation and salvation are coherent and inseparable. Christ is the Son of God and the Son of Man. The incarnated Christ continues creation and fulfills redemption, making believers and receivers of Christ into new people and new creations.<sup>9</sup> Furthermore, Chen Zemin and Wang Weifan have extended their thoughts on incarnation to the realm of theology expressed in culture from different perspectives. Chen Zemin proclaims that incarnation is the most important theological theme because "God, who creates, reveals, redeems, sanctifies, and leads us together into his ultimate glory, is incarnated on earth and lives among us."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, theology needs to be contextualized and indigenized. The incarnation of the Word is the integration of the Gospel with the testimony of daily life, so that the Word is embodied in the life of the 'flesh.'<sup>11</sup> The eternal Word must go through culture if it wants to enter the world. If the Word wants to be spread in China, it must be transmitted through Chinese culture. It is only through culture that the Word really enters the heart of people."<sup>12</sup> The significance and value of the incarnation of the Word is reflected in the development and theology of Christianity, which means that the contextualization and cultural integration of the gospel of Christ is the only way it can take root and germinate in our nation and among ethnic groups. The redemptive function of the gospel is to take

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8 Bishop K.H. Ting, "My View of God," in *God is Love*, 40.

9 Chen Zemin, "What Is Man?" in *Quest and Witness: Selected Writings of Chen Zemin* (Shanghai: CCC and TSPM, 2007), 227.

10 Chen Zemin, "The Protestant Church in China Today" in *Quest and Witness*, 155-156.

11 Chen Zemin, "The Temple and Worship," in *Quest and Witness*, 429.

12 Chen Zemin, "The Questions about Theological Construction in the Church of China", in *Quest and Witness*, 26.

effect through rooting in culture and the transformation of individuals and society through culture.<sup>13</sup> Therefore, Chen Zemin affirms that theological thinking on the incarnation has two focal points: one on God and the other on the human, and the track of the interaction between the two focal points can form an ellipse, centered on the universe, the incarnation of Christ and the fellowship of humankind.<sup>14</sup> The relationship between theology and culture reflected in this model of relationship between God and the human is mutually complementary and inclusive.

Specifically, in the field of practical theology, Chen Zemin tries to organically combine the Christian Gospel with traditional Chinese cultural elements and adopts them in the composition of hymns. In his opinion, the indigenization of hymns is an important way to integrate the Gospel and Chinese culture. Since the early 19th century, Protestant missionaries came to China for evangelical ministry and started the process of cultural integration by learning Chinese, adapting to Chinese native culture, and translating and publishing Chinese Bibles and hymns. The popularization of contemporary Protestant hymns in China in the 20th century went through three stages, marked by the publication of different versions of Chinese hymns: 1) *The Collected Hymns of Community* 《团契圣歌集》 and *The Collected Hymns of the People* 《民众圣歌集》, compiled by T. C. Chao and Bliss Wiant 范天祥 in 1931; 2) *Hymns of Universal Praise* 《普天颂赞》, edited by the Joint Hymn Committee in 1936; 3) *New Hymnal* 《赞美诗·新编》, edited by the Chinese Christian Hymns Committee in 1983. These are all important Chinese Christian attempts to compose hymns in a Chinese way,

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13 Chen Zemin, "Christ and Culture in China", in *Quest and Witness*, 74.

14 Chen Zemin, "Reconciliation with People", in *Quest and Witness*, 173-174.

and they all reflect the possibility, necessity and diversity of cultural integration in Chinese Christian hymns and sacred music.<sup>15</sup> Chen Zemin believed that the further contextualization of hymns would help Chinese Christianity change its image of being a “foreign religion” to one that is a religion of the real Chinese people. In the process of editing the New Hymnal (new edition), between 1981 and 1982, the CCC’s Hymn Committee encouraged Chinese Christians to use Chinese tunes to compose hymns, in order to arouse their sensitivity to Chinese traditional music and culture in worship and in personal devotions.<sup>16</sup> As a sacred music composer, Chen Zemin also drew on elements from Chinese classical music and folk songs. He used Chinese Guqin songs “Three Variations on the Plum Blossoms” 梅花三弄 and “Puan Mantra” 普庵咒 to compose music for Psalms 100 and 103 (compiled in the the New Hymnal as No. 380 and 381). The background music of his masterpiece “Song of Wonderful Brush” 《神功妙笔歌》 is an adaptation of the famous Guqin song “Wild Geese on the Sandbank” 平沙落雁. In addition, Chen Zemin also followed the precedent of subtly incorporating elements of Chinese Buddhist and Taoist music into the composition of Christian hymns. For example, the arrangement of Psalm 103 was an adaptation of the Buddhist “Puan Mantra”. To make it easier for Chinese Christians to accept, he changed the name of the tune to “Puan Song” 普安颂.<sup>17</sup> These works adequately show that Chinese Christian composers of sacred music, such as Chen Zemin, praised God through hymns — songs sung by the congregation — which is a way of daily spiritual devotion and worship reflecting a Christian identity that

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15 Chen Zemin, “The Hymns of the Chinese Church and Inculturation”, in *Quest and Witness*, 434-435.

16 Ibid., 436-437.

17 Ibid., 437,439.



incorporates the essence and style of Chinese culture. The further contextualization of hymns not only demonstrates the interaction between theology and culture from the point of cultural integration, but also demonstrates that Chinese Christians witness to the Christian faith in a unique cultural style.

Wang Weifan has some profound thoughts and analysis on the relationship between theology and culture. “Here the Word Became Flesh” is his representative article.

*Here the Word became flesh. “Here” indicates Nazareth, a small town in Galilee. But when we face the meeting place of infinite space and time, we will find that there are countless “heres” in the world, and each “here” has its unique culture to make Christ become the “flesh” that can be touched and felt. Since the Word exists in eternity, He reveals Himself to generations of all times and everywhere without having to be confined to time and space, including to those who have not yet known His name.*<sup>18</sup>

Here, we can see that Wang Weifan regarded culture as the carrier of Christ, which is consistent with the ideas of K. H. Ting and Chen Zemin. Wang Weifan believes that culture is like a mirror, and each culture reflects a certain aspect of Christ. Just like the flesh of Christ born in the mother’s love of Mary, there is a variety of Christ images in different cultures.<sup>19</sup> There are two forms of Christianity in China in the history of Christian culture: One is the ancient Christian idea of an ever-generating God who creates life, sustains, maintains and expands life, reaching fulfillment and perfection in the salvation of Christ; The second is the

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18 Wang Weifan, “The Word Became Flesh,” *In The Wilderness for Two Decades* (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 2011), 54.

19 *Ibid.*, 56.

tension between the “inner transcendence” of Confucian self-improvement and the “external transcendence” of Christian redemption after the encounter between Confucianism and Western Christian culture in the late Ming and early Qing dynasties, which extends the thinking on how to integrate belief and behavior, mysticism and service, internal merit and sacred virtue, eternity and history. Although Confucianism cannot be matched to correspond with Christian theology as a whole, the spirit of tolerance and inclusiveness in Confucianism is the deep cultural reason for Chinese Christianity to enter the post-denominational period.<sup>20</sup>

In the interpretation of Christian faith based on Chinese traditional culture, Wang Weifan continued to develop the method of exegesis based on Chinese traditional culture after Wu Leichuan, T. C. Chao, Jia Yuming (贾玉铭) and N. Z. Zia. Wang had a solid foundation in sinology, having read Chinese classics from his childhood, such as the Four Books and Five Classics, Tang poetry, Song poetry, ancient prose, and so on, and studied *The Book of Changes* 《易经》 and the classics of Lao Tzu 老子 and Zhuangzi 庄子 after his middle age. These rich ideological resources of cultural classics became a tool for Wang Weifan to interpret biblical texts, building a bridge of dialogue and communication between the Bible and Chinese culture, and making the biblical texts resonate with the hearts of Chinese people. First of all, his books and sermons on the interpretation of Scripture are rich in citations from the classics, and his linguistic expressions have profound meanings. He was good at drawing words for the interpretation of Scripture from the Confucian, Buddhist and Taoist classics, the Hundred Schools of Thought, poems and prose, historical books and novels and other traditional Chinese cultural treasures, creating feelings of

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20 Ibid., 57-58.

familiarity among Chinese readers. Secondly, the foreign culture oriented methodology of “measuring and comparing meaning” 格义法, which emphasizes the interpreter’s subjectivity and local cultural consciousness was also used by Wang Weifan in the interpretation of biblical words, so that people could understand foreign and obscure concepts through local, familiar words.<sup>21</sup> Thirdly, and most importantly, Wang Weifan transcended the perspective of interpreters’ subjectivity to realize the fusion of horizons in different cultural traditions. Wang also applied the ancient Chinese mode of “image thinking” which has intuitive, holistic, holographic and diversity characteristics, to the intuitive understanding of biblical texts, understanding comprehensively through the principles of “advocating harmony and the doctrine of mean” (崇和尚中) and “revering the fundamental and dismissing the specific” (崇本息末), as well as in the holographic way of “humanity reflecting the way of heaven” (人道即天道) and the multidimensional understanding of “even having infinite solutions” (甚而有无限解).<sup>22</sup> In addition, the poems written by Wang Weifan throughout his life reflected his emotions through the objects he described and his experience of searching for faith.<sup>23</sup> These attempts to integrate Christian gospel and theology with Chinese culture all indicate that theological

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21 Song Jun, “On the Approach of Chinese Traditional Culture in Wang Weifan’s Biblical Exegesis,” in *A Watchman Vigilant in Spirit and Pure in Heart: The Study on the Thought and Ministry of Wang Weifan*, ed. Kevin Xiyi Yao and Song Jun (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 2015 ), 158-159.

22 Ibid., 174-181.

23 Su Xile, “The Return of Love—The Search and Return of Belief in Wang Weifan’s Poems,” in *A Watchman Vigilant in Spirit and Pure in Heart: The Study on the Thought and Ministry of Wang Weifan*, ed. Kevin Xiyi Yao and Song Jun (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 2015), 307-341.

thinking on the incarnation continues to take place in the Chinese Church, and that Chinese Christians lay emphasis on the significance of the truth of the incarnation in church life and local culture.

In summarizing the views of the above-mentioned Chinese theologians, we find that they all agree that Christian faith should be expressed in combination with traditional Chinese culture. They do not deny the value of cultures outside of the influence of the church, because some ideas close to the Christian understanding of God exist in various degrees in these cultures.<sup>24</sup> The eternal Word must enter the world through culture, and only through culture can it enter the human heart. If this eternal Word wants to be introduced into China, it must pass through Chinese culture.<sup>25</sup> In terms of theology and culture, I think that the concept of "theology as a part of culture" proposed by Kathryn Tanner, a representative of the second generation of the post-liberal Yale School in contemporary United States, has some significant meaning and great value for the Chinese church in trying to deepen the combination of theology and culture. Tanner holds a postmodern view of culture, which regards theology as a form of cultural activity that becomes a part of culture. As the product of human beings, theology is conditioned by history and social processes and cannot be isolated from the rest of human sociocultural practices. Theology is a human activity with the characteristics of Christian culture and has a place in culture. People are always constructing a life-orienting worldview, as a feature of human culture, and theology is a particular embodiment of "seeking the meaning of life." The rationality of theology

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24 K. H. Ting, "Theological Mass Movement in China," in *Love Never Ends*, 142.

25 Chen Zemin, "The Questions about Theological Construction in Church of China," in *Quest and Witness*, 26.

is reflected in whether it performs these general cultural tasks well, whether it helps people to successfully explore their world and effectively deal with the ups and downs of life.<sup>26</sup> In brief, theology associates Christian messages with the human context and shows the meaning and diversity of Christianity in a general cultural form. Therefore, theology as part of culture is to correlate the Christian message with the universals of human beings, with general structures that exist in human knowledge and action.<sup>27</sup> This is what we commonly call a theological method of correlation. Christian theology should be appropriate to the Christian situation, and discourses of theologians should reflect the particularities of a religion. The method of correlation becomes a procedure to show the connections between theology and certain general cultural characteristics.<sup>28</sup> To define theology from the perspective of culture, theology can be regarded as a kind of cultural construction, and theology is a kind of inculturation, which is also a theological concept and a theology of culture. Especially in the postcolonial era, Christians in Asia, Africa and the global South have embraced cultural integration as a theological issue of particular concern. Inculturation means that the Christian gospel should be interpreted through specific cultural symbols and linguistic order, and in relation to the cultural, historical and social context of the local church community.<sup>29</sup> Tanner mentions the challenge of postmodernism to cultural understanding, which is that cultures are no

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26 Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2005), 63-64.

27 Ibid., 65.

28 Ibid., 66.

29 Jan H. Pranger, "Inculturation as Theology of Culture: Exploring Kathryn Tanner's Contribution to Intercultural Theology," in *The Gift of Theology: The Contribution of Kathryn Tanner*, ed. Rosemary P. Carbine and Hilda P. Koster (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2015), 185.

longer traditionally defined by group identities and have clear cultural boundaries. The application of postmodern thought in Christian culture has three characteristics: Firstly, the characteristics of Christian culture should not be regarded as the product of self-sufficient social groups as Christians still maintain social interaction with non-Christians. Secondly, the way of life between Christians and non-Christians and the boundary between them are fluid and permeable, so Christian culture should be understood in a broader field of cultural life. Thirdly, what unites Christians is not the basic elements of a common faith, but a project of cultural construction—involving academic activity and the practices of everyday Christian life.<sup>30</sup> These postmodern cultural views hold that Christian culture cannot be separated from its social background and must communicate and interact with the diverse cultures of other groups. It is in these mixed circumstances that theology is constructed so that its influence can be extended to more groups. From the post-liberal or postmodern perspective, Tanner argues that when defining Christianity and the identity of Christians, the methodology of sociology and establishing cultural boundaries cannot be the only way. In addition, Christian identity can be defined through finding the intrinsic continuity of Christian belief and behaviors. That is to say, the identity of Christians can be understood as a kind of Christianity with unique cultural style. This approach works from within the culture, finding commonalities in the qualities that bind Christians together

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30 Kathryn Tanner, "Cultural Theory," in *Oxford Handbook of Systematic Theology*, ed. John Webster, Kathryn Tanner, and Iain Torrance (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 541.

and that on which they agree.<sup>31</sup> I think that under diverse social contexts of ethnic, religious and regional culture in China, Tanner's pattern of "style" can help us most in seeking common ground while reserving differences, practising mutual tolerance and respect, and learning from each other in bridging the gap between believers and non-believers, eliminating misunderstanding and conflict, and constructing a civilized and harmonious society centered on socialist core values.

In a word, the Chinese theologians' discourses of the incarnation indicate two key points in the construction of Chinese Church theology (including Christology): (1) It must be rooted in the soil of Chinese culture, absorbing the essence and nourishment of culture, and becoming Christianity with Chinese characteristics; (2) it provides its unique elements which traditional Chinese culture lacks.<sup>32</sup> Wang Weifan proposed that Chinese theology should be a Chinese learning, namely involving Chinese cultural

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31 Kathryn Tanner, *Theories of Culture: A New Agenda for Theology*, 96. Tanner argues that there are three sorts of ways to evaluate this method. The first is to build the unity and continuity of Christian faith and practice through shared beliefs and values. The second is through tradition. The third is that rules play a role in Christian identity consciousness. Tanner prefers the third sort, and on this basis, she takes the cultural style as the embodiment of the post-modern cultural theory. The advantage of this sort is that the rules can not be affected by historical changes, and the rules follow the historical judgments made by Christians about the correct Christian social practice in different times and regions. Tanner argues that style is a term suitable for post-modern discussions of cultural identity when the rules are too flexible to grasp the methodological similarities of the material for Christian identity consciousness.

32 Chen Yongtao, "Let Theology Be a Chinese Learning': Wang Weifan's Chinese Theological Wisdom" in Kevin Xiyi Yao and Song Jun (eds) *A Watchman Vigilant in Spirit and Pure in Heart: The Study on the Thought and Ministry of Wang Weifan* (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 2015), 67-68.

thoughts—something which requires Chinese theology to integrate faith, knowledge and practice. It is a Christ-centered theology, a kind of spiritual practice that includes imitating Christ, worshiping God, pursuing listening and learning as well as living out the faith. There are four important elements of Chinese theology: first, the Bible as the authority and norm; second, the Christian tradition developed over two thousand years; third, traditional Chinese culture; and fourth, the faith experience and practice of Chinese Christians.<sup>33</sup> It is therefore obvious that Chinese theological thinking and Christian identity consciousness should be closely linked to Chinese social and cultural forms. Gao Feng (高峰), the former president of the China Christian Council, explains that the identity of the church in contemporary society should consist of the following: The “Church of China should be built on the foundation of Christian faith, with a deep understanding and practice of socialist core values, integrating into the mainstream social value system in China, leading Chinese Christians to become supporters, advocates and practitioners of socialist core values, and promoting a socialist country with Chinese characteristics.”<sup>34</sup> This requires Chinese Christians to be attentive and to participate in the practice of the whole society while maintaining their commitment to Christian belief, and to work together and cooperate with non-Christians for the progress of our country and society. This is the direction that Chinese Christians will pursue in the process of “Further Contextualization of Christianity.” In terms of theological theories, the proposed Christology with

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33 Ibid., 97-98.

34 Gao Feng, “Constructing the Church in China with Further Contextualization Orientation” in *Jingling Theological Writings: Selected Essays from 1993-2017 (Vol. 2)* (Nanjing: Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, 2017), 181.



Chinese cultural style, especially “Cosmic Christology,” is a theological expression adapted to the current situation of Chinese society.

## **Constructing Christology with Chinese Cultural Style**

Chinese Christianity in modern times has gone through the stages of theological indigenization and contextualization. This is evident in the efforts of western missionaries in translating the Bible and catechism into Chinese, using words and expressions from Chinese traditional culture to explain Christian faith to Chinese people since the Ming and Qing Dynasties. Gianni Criveller (柯毅霖) shows, in his book *Christology in the Late Ming Dynasty*, that the Jesuits in China adopted an approach to adapt to Chinese culture and to advocate Christology comprehensively and correctly. During the time of Matteo Ricci (利玛竇), the Jesuits carefully interpreted the gospel: that is, the doctrine of crucifixion and redemption of Jesus Christ. By the time of Giulio Alenio (艾儒略), they not only comprehensively introduced the mysteries of Christ, but also emphasized the crucifixion of Christ and its salvific significance, responding to many questions from the Chinese people about Jesus at the time. Christology that is rooted in the soil of Chinese culture has been constructed by Chinese Christians since the early 20th century. In this regard, Wu Leichuan, T. C. Chao, Y. T. Wu and N. Z. Zia, by forming the image of Jesus Christ based on Chinese viewpoints in their works, established an approach different from western abstract reasoning that has contributed to a developed Christology with Chinese characteristics, highlighting the person of Christ, interpreting the significance of the incarnation through interaction with Chinese society and culture, as well as consistency between words and deeds. This effort had a profound influence on

later Chinese theological thinking. In the second half of the 20th century, after the Chinese Protestant Church had entered a post-denominational era, church leaders and theologians such as K. H. Ting, Chen Zemin, Wang Weifan and Shen Yifan developed a theory of the “Cosmic Christ.” On the one hand, they had inherited the thought legacy of predecessors and had broken the denominational barriers; on the other hand, they were learning from western theological thoughts while bearing in mind concerns regarding Chinese society and people’s livelihood.

Firstly, under the specific social system and cultural background of their time, Y. T. Wu and T. C. Chao formed their own distinct views of Christology based on their different educational backgrounds and conversion experiences. In his early experience as a leader of the Chinese Fellowship for Reconciliation 唯爱社 and a member of the YMCA, Y. T. Wu grounded his understanding of faith on very practical concerns related to the well-being of the people. His theological thinking laid emphasis on rational understanding and its application in practice, so that he attached great importance to people’s spiritual experience and inner cultivation. In his view of God, Mr. Wu believed in both the transcendence and immanence of God. At the same time, he also believed that the view of God is a profound and universal experience, which is also a consciousness and experience of the phenomenon of love.<sup>35</sup> Thus, Mr. Wu’s understanding of Christology or the view of Jesus is personified in Jesus’ close relationship with God during his lifetime, a relationship established through Jesus’ perception of God. He believed that the life of Jesus in the gospels embodies his love of kindness for human beings, individuals, women, children, sinners, the sick and ailing,

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35 Y. T. Wu, “Jesus Whom I know”, in *Y. T. Wu’s Selected Writings* (Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 2010), 15.

birds and flowers, and that this love becomes the norm in human life. Jesus' consciousness of God was also realized through the transmission of the Jewish concept of God, the pursuit of reason, intuitive revelation and moral struggle.<sup>36</sup> In his beliefs, Mr. Wu does not emphasize the divinity of Jesus Christ nor an analysis and elaboration of character. He believes that a set of mysterious theological thoughts is not easy to grasp, and that Jesus' emergence as the Son of God could be derived from the moral struggle—the deep and profound awareness of love. This God is “omnipresent and closely related to people, a living God who answers those who ask and opens the door for those who knock.”<sup>37</sup> In Y. T. Wu's mind, the attraction of Jesus lies in the moral strength reflected in his personality, “So he (Jesus) perceives a living God who helps him fulfill his personality through the moral struggle; It's morality and it's religion, it is seamless, it is a holistic crystallization of Jesus' faith.”<sup>38</sup> In this way, Mr. Wu considers the sacrifice of Jesus on the cross as a symbol of human salvation, as a kind of victory—on the day of Pentecost, the disciples of Jesus felt that he had not died, his image, his spirit, and the power of life still remained vivid and deep within their hearts, so that the disciples overcame their sins, weaknesses and fears, confronted the social status quo and attacked the forces of darkness.<sup>39</sup> For humans, the remedy is to learn from Jesus, to gain a new understanding of God, in order to fulfill the love of God that Jesus perceived and to avoid being blinded by the sins of the individual and society, because the basic belief in Christianity—the incarnation, means that Jesus is the one who reveals God. What Jesus displays is the principle of being a human, which is a part of the truth of the whole universe:

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36 Ibid., 19-20.

37 Ibid., 22.

38 Ibid., 23.

39 Y. T. Wu, “Jesus' View of God”, in *Y. T. Wu's Selected Writings*, 75.

*This is the truth of life. It is the truth on which human beings live and society is built. It can be applied everywhere, and it will not be confused by all generations. This truth should be God; Jesus manifests this truth, and Jesus should be God.*<sup>40</sup>

Therefore, Y. T. Wu's view is different from the traditional interpretation of Jesus Christ's incarnation and resurrection. He regards Jesus as "a vigorous and indomitable man, who was abandoned by society at that time, but truly represents the way of life without any doubt."<sup>41</sup> This is a great man who expresses and fulfills the innermost voice and desire in the human heart, a man of brilliant personality.<sup>42</sup> Y. T. Wu always underlines the spiritual power of Jesus' life and personality. He does not discuss the divinity of Jesus, which reflects a kind of "personified image" of Christ. This was because the age in which he lived had made him abandon speculative theology in his study. What he cared about was the survival of the nation and the destiny of the people. Y. T. Wu, as a representative of liberal Christian intellectuals, reconstructed the contextualized image of Jesus in responding to the challenges of his time. As Li Wei 李韦 a Chinese scholar argues, "The personality of Jesus is at the root of Jesus' patriotic and revolutionary ideas. In the anti-Japanese national salvation movement, the most valuable element Christianity could provide and that could highlight his qualities most was the personality of Jesus. Under the dominance of this task, the personality of Jesus became extremely secular, or the divinity of Jesus was reduced."<sup>43</sup>

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40 Y. T. Wu, "The Significance of Belief of God toward Life", in *Y. T. Wu's Selected Writings*, 87.

41 Ibid.

42 Ibid.

43 Li Wei, "The Interpretation of Liberal Christian Intellectuals toward the Image of Jesus from the Perspective of Nationalism in the Period of Anti-Japanese War," in *Studies in World Religions*, no.3 (2018): 156.

Zeng Qingbao 曾庆豹, a professor of Chung Yuan Christian University in Taiwan 中原大学, also points out that because Jesus' personality pursued justice and love, Christians in those days mainly supported the political and economic reforms that existed in Chinese society at that time. Y. T. Wu believed that although the means and methods were different, the Christian stance in this regard was the same as that of the socialists. He represented a view of "revolutionary Christianity"—a "Chinese liberation theology" that described Jesus as a "revolutionary carpenter," "proletarian," "the oppressed," "the liberator," and so on.<sup>44</sup> It was this kind of social and political responsibility exhibited by Y. T. Wu that became representative of Christian intellectuals in China, showing an approach in thought and belief that was different from western theologians. As Yan Xiyu 严锡禹 puts it, "Concerning real life, concerning the history of society, this was Y. T. Wu's theological temperament, which was also the theological temperament of Chinese theologians of his generation, and which now must also become the temperament of Chinese theology, as a tradition of Chinese theology."<sup>45</sup> In his later years, K. H. Ting stated that he had also thought about the divinity of Christ when he was a theological student, but now it was more important to affirm that God is Christ-like and that God governs the whole universe through Christ's love than to confess the divinity of Christ.<sup>46</sup> As N. Z. Zia summarizes, "The Western Christology that emerged from Hebrew and Greek civilization is the theology or philosophy of Christ. However, the Christology

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44 Zeng Qingbao, "Revolutionary Christianity and Chinese Modernity: A Review of the History of Thought," in *The Further Contextualization of Modern Christianity* ed. Zhao Xiaoyang, Guo Ronggang (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2015), 96.

45 Yan Xiyu, "The Experience of Jesus: The Research of Y. T. Wu," (II) in *Jinling Theological Review*, no. 3 (2008): 200.

46 Bishop K.H. Ting, "My View of God," in *God is Love*, 43.

that is about to emerge in China, which has been predicted to be in labor, is the practice of “‘learning’ to follow Christ.”<sup>47</sup>

T. C. Chao, another famous 20th Century Chinese theologian, is also a representative scholar on the relationship between Christology and culture. His Christology can be divided into two stages. If 1941 is taken as the dividing line, the early stage focuses on the humanity of Jesus Christ and the later stage marks a return to traditional doctrinal expression.<sup>48</sup> Under the influence of Anglican theology, his Christology formed a theology of redemption centered on the “Theory of Completing God’s own Will” *chenzhilun* 成旨论 and “Union or Identification Theory” *tongyilun* 同一论. First of all, the personality of Christ is the key feature of T. C. Chao’s early Christology, which is inseparably linked to his theological training in the United States during his early years. It was mainly influenced by B. P. Bowne’s “personality theory” and Henri Bergson’s “creative evolution theory.” The theory of personalism *rengelun* 人格论 asserts that the real is the personal, for Christians, so that God and human beings meet in the personality of Jesus Christ. In order to be understood and accepted, God assumes a personality through Jesus Christ because T. C. Chao’s God was both transcendent and immanent. However, his understanding of Jesus at this time was very similar to Y. T. Wu’s empiricism, which meant that Jesus was just a great man with a more perfect personality than ordinary people. In addition, under the influence of rationalism and Chinese Confucian culture, for T. C. Chao, Jesus was understood as “Man-God Jesus,” that is, God and

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47 Wang Weifan, “Let Theology Become a Chinese Learning,” in *Walking Lonely for Ten Years: Selected Works of Wang Weifan (1997-2007)*, (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 2009), 206.

48 Yongtao Chen, *Chinese Christ: The Christology of T. C. Chao* (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2014), 158.

Man sharing divinity. The divinity and humanity of Jesus Christ is the key to understanding Chao's early Christology, and its meaning is based on "personality" because both God and the human are personalities, and God shares his divinity with the human in the incarnation of Jesus Christ.<sup>49</sup>

Secondly, T. C. Chao's later Christology focuses on Christ's incarnation and the integrity of the two natures of divinity and humanity. T. C. Chao converted to the Anglican Church in 1941, making the influence of Anglican theology, such as the emphasis on the Bible, tradition and reason, more apparent in his theological thinking. In particular, the emphasis on the doctrine of incarnation, ecclesiology and episcopacy reflects the influence of Anglican tradition in T. C. Chao's later theology. The incarnation plays an important role in his later Christology, which is inextricably linked to the Triune God.<sup>50</sup> His explanation of the incarnation also highlights the full divine and human nature of Christ.

*The incarnated Christ is fully human, but also fully divine. His humanity is understandable but how are we to understand his divinity? The incarnation is in history, above the world, an experience of change confined in time and space. In this situation, his divine virtue is certainly different from the super-mysterious attributes: not omniscient, not omnipotent, not omnipresent, not absolute. Thus, the incarnation of God is related to the divinity of moral character and virtue. The human life of Jesus Christ embodied his fulfilling human duties, experiencing temptations but without sin, and so he was full of truth. This truth is divine, and when it is revealed, there is the eternal being, and the wholeness of the holiest, the supreme good, pure kindness, and pure love. If the holiest is divine, Jesus Christ is God; If supreme goodness is divine, Jesus Christ is God; If pure kindness and pure love are divine, Jesus Christ is God.*

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49 Yongtao Chen, *Chinese Christ: The Christology of T. C. Chao*, 99.

50 Ibid., 160-161.

*If God is holy love, and holy love is the essence of divinity, then Jesus Christ is completely divine and virtuous through learning obedience to keep and promote the attributes of the holiest, and holy love. The unity of divine nature and human nature means that Jesus Christ is God-man, the son of man and the son of God.*<sup>51</sup>

For T. C. Chao, this return to the traditional Christology of the church and the emphasis on the two natures of divinity and humanity is a great transition from his early focus on Christ's human nature to the later notion of the integrity of the two natures of Christ. Furthermore, the main views of Chao's Christology not only underline the Incarnation but also reflect the "Theory of Completing God's own Will" and "Identification Theory." This is because, for Chao, traditional western soteriology cannot fully explain the relationship between Christ's death and salvation.<sup>52</sup> The "Theory of Completing God's own Will" affirms that the will of God is fulfilled through the salvation of Jesus Christ, that sin can be conquered through the Holy Spirit and humankind can achieve the perfection and sanctification of life. Through his obedience, Jesus Christ has accomplished God's purpose of saving and redeeming humankind. Therefore, people need to follow and imitate Christ and fulfill their duties and responsibilities.<sup>53</sup> T. C. Chao summarizes the main points regarding the death of Jesus, based on the Bible: (1) Jesus' death is the expression of God's love, fully revealed. (2) The theory of "moral influence" posits that Jesus' death can make all people moral. (3) Jesus' death was a triumph over sin. (4) Jesus' death triumphed over death. (5) Jesus' death was

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51 T. C. Chao, "Four Lectures on Theology," in *The Collected Work of T. C. Chao* (Vol. 2) (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2004), 538.

52 T. C. Chao, "A Further Interpretation of Christianity," in *The Collected Work of T. C. Chao* (Vol. 2), 145-146.

53 Yongtao Chen, *Chinese Christ: The Christology of T. C. Chao*, 215.



a complete testimony to his personality, deeds and work. On the one hand, it proves that Christ is equal to God; on the other hand, it proves that Christ is the way of humanity surpassing sin and death.<sup>54</sup> The “Identification Theory” is T. C. Chao’s thinking developed on the basis of the “Theory of Completing God’s own Will,” which is reflected in his works: “A Further Interpretation of Christianity,” “Four Lectures on Theology” and “Life of St. Paul.” The main view of the “Theory of Completing God’s own Will” is that the fulfillment of human salvation is a two-way movement. On the one hand, God is identical with the human in Jesus Christ, and on the other, the human needs to be identical with God through God’s grace in Jesus Christ. He writes in the “Four Lectures on Theology,”

*But the salvation of the human being is attained through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is through faith that he becomes upright and experiences rebirth, following the way of Jesus Christ, as shown and testified. Human salvation comes from the identification of Jesus Christ with the human, and also from the identification of the human with Jesus Christ. We have no words to name this interpretation, which is just called “Union or Identification Theory.” According to this theory, the process of salvation begins in creation, is revealed in incarnation, completed in the crucifixion, manifested in the resurrection, fulfilled in the ascension, perfected in the coming of the Holy Spirit, in the revelation of judgment.*<sup>55</sup>

Chen Yongtao 陈永涛 argues that T. C. Chao pays attention to the personality of Christ in his early Christology, and regards salvation as the “humanization of human

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54 T. C. Chao, “A Further Interpretation of Christianity”, in *The Collected Works of T. C. Chao* (Vol. 2), 146-147.

55 T. C. Chao, “Four Lectures on Theology”, in *The Collected Works of T. C. Chao* (Vol. 2), 556.

beings,” that is, to make people truly human. The validity of this Christology is not based on doctrinal orthodoxy, but on its contribution to the human quest for social justice and a better life, as well as its understanding of Christianity and Chinese culture. Chao attempted to develop a Christ-centered humanism, that is, with two foci on God and the human as “God-Human Synthetism” 神人合本主义.<sup>56</sup> In addition, the “Identification Theory” is evident in T. C. Chao’s use of the expression *yixin weizhi* 以信为直 which means “having faith in order to be regarded by God as upright” to replace the words “Justification by faith” 因信称义 in Chinese. This is another example of the influence of Chinese culture on his theological thinking. According to T. C. Chao, “justification by faith” in the context of Chinese culture contains causationism, which can easily be misinterpreted to mean that since one has been justified by God, one can do whatever one wants, whether moral or immoral. To avoid the danger of libertinism and antinomianism, Chao prefers its translation as a way of maintaining his ethical and moral concerns in his Christology and soteriology. He interprets “uprightness” as a legal concept, meaning upright and honest; and “righteousness” is interpreted as a moral term referring to the inner and moral righteousness of human beings rather than external righteousness. The interpretation of “*yixin weizhi*” is “justification by faith” although it is related more closely to the Chinese cultural tradition in which he was rooted. However, this is not consistent with the understanding of Paul and Luther. Chao later modified the translation and did not replace “justification by faith” with his term of “*yixin weizhi*.”<sup>57</sup> In addition, the ethicalization of Christology is also the

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56 Yongtao Chen, “Searching Identity: The Effort of Y. T. Chao’s Contextual Theology,” *Jinling Theological Review*, no. 3 (2019): 58.

57 Yongtao Chen, *Chinese Christ: The Christology of T. C. Chao*, 230-231.

embodiment of T. C. Chao's combination of theology and Chinese traditional culture. He believes that Chinese culture has an ethical tendency, especially reflected in the virtue of "benevolence" in interpersonal relations, which connotes filial piety, being faithful to oneself and being forgiving towards others. Chinese ethics is the ethics of filial piety, and the ultimate ethics become "religion." From the perspective of morality, filial piety is the foundation of human beings. At the religious level, filial piety signifies deference for our ancestors and a return to our beginning or roots. The life of Jesus on earth showed characteristics consistent with the Chinese principle and act of filial piety, his experience as a human being brought the realization that he is the son of God, with the important lesson that God is the father of humankind, and that the greatest act is to sacrifice his life for loving people—to die on the cross.<sup>58</sup> T. C. Chao writes,

*Henceforth, if Christianity is to contribute to Chinese culture, Christians must, on the one hand, promote filial piety, make people look up to God as the Heavenly Father, and lay the ethical foundation for this profound religious veneration; on the other hand, the deliverance of individual persons makes them the children of God, for not only are they freed from the bondage of the old system but they can develop their personality, restore the national spirit, and bring forth the egalitarian brotherhood in a new society.*<sup>59</sup>

On the whole, the understanding of Christology among these Chinese theologians show that the emphasis on the person and imitation of Christ is closely related to national conditions and cultural traditions of the times, as well as a form of theological contextualization. Since then, the Chinese

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58 T. C. Chao, "Christianity and Chinese Culture", in *The Collected Works of T. C. Chao* (Vol. 3) (Beijing: The Commercial Press, 2007), 274-275.

59 Ibid., 275.

Protestant Church has experienced a post-denominational era of more than half a century, with the ecumenical unity movement and the theological reconstruction process, begun in 1998, having borne fruit in the church's doctrinal expressions, worship etiquette and social practice.

The understanding of Jesus Christ among Chinese Christians in the post-denominational era is also developing and constantly being renewed not only through rediscovering the image of Jesus in history through the bible, but also to construct, based on the writings of the early church fathers and the Apostles' Creed, the Nicene Creed and the Chalcedonian Creed, an understanding of the faith confession of Christ.

In this way, the understanding of the human nature of Christ can be maintained in the traditional image of Jesus as a great personality, without breaking away from the framework of orthodox doctrines and leading to unorthodox expressions. This also reflects the historical practice of the Chinese church—in theological updates and reflections on the recognition that “Jesus is the Christ.” As Kan Baoping 阚保平 points out, “the critique of the old theology is necessary, because the old theology provided the norms for church practice but can no longer translate new church experiences into new practice; in its criticism of the old theology, the Church is constantly interacting with its foundation—God himself—so that it is in constant pursuit of the restoration of an “alienated self” in the midst of history.”<sup>60</sup>

Secondly, the idea of the “Cosmic Christ” is a theological response to the social and cultural context in China. When the Chinese Church entered the second half of the 20th

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60 Kan Baoping, “Jesus is Christ: The Confession of ‘Jesus is Christ’ as the Foundation of Indigenization and Contextualization of Church in China,” in *Jinling Theological Writings: Selected Essays from 1993-2017* (Vol. 2 ), 224-225.

century, with the development of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the achievement of union worship, the barriers and boundaries between sectarian groups were eliminated, and theological thinking became more unified and inclusive. Especially in the aspect of Christology, Bishop Ting put forward the idea of “Cosmic Christ,” which was responded to by Chen Zemin, Shen Yifan, Wang Weifan, and others, accompanied by efforts to improve upon his theoretical system or framework. For Bishop Ting, it was very important to understand the universality of Christ. On the one hand, we can see that Christ’s sovereignty and care are universal to the whole universe. On the other hand, Christ’s sovereignty over the whole universe is based on love, because love is the highest attribute of God. For Chinese Christians, the Chinese cultural tradition of exalting the harmony and unity of the universe and the idea of ruling the country with benevolence sets a theoretical and practical foundation for accepting the theological thought of “Cosmic Christ.” Therefore, Christ’s concern is not limited to Christians and the church. “Not only communities of Christians here and there, but humankind as a whole and, indeed, the cosmos are within the realm of Christ’s redemptive work. The Holy Spirit, in the same way, is not only the giver of gifts to the Christians or to the church, but also inspires all created beings with great goodness and beauty.”<sup>61</sup> God’s work of creation and salvation is for all humankind, which also requires Chinese Christians not to ignore and deny the truth, beauty, and diversity of cultures outside the church, which is also within the scope of Christ’s ministry. Furthermore, the universal Christ manifests himself as a loving God, the universal lover. Bishop Ting believes that Chinese Christians should have a caring, compassionate and comforting God who shares our suffering

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61 Bishop K.H. Ting, “The Cosmic Christ,” in *God is Love*, 112.

with us. This gives us hope and confidence in history and beyond history. God's great love will accompany the whole course of the development of the world and will ultimately be a triumphant celebration of love and grace.<sup>62</sup>

Chen Zemin continued to deepen and annotate Bishop Ting's idea of the "Cosmic Christ" so that it could be accepted by more Chinese Christians and intellectuals. He believed that in the development of the Chinese Church in the decades since the 1950s, the "Cosmic Christ" has become a central theological idea that is recognized by more and more Christian intellectuals. This idea of the "Cosmic Christ" which is rooted in the Bible has two advantages: firstly, there can be a dialogue between the educated youth and intellectuals in society through the idea of the "Cosmic Christ," providing a common language that can attract and draw them together; secondly, the idea of the "Cosmic Christ" ought to help and educate grass-roots Christians thereby enhancing the quality of culture and faith. Thus, the idea of the Cosmic Christ can, at one level, draw the "culture Christians" and intellectuals and at the other level, the grass-roots Christians, closer to the church.<sup>63</sup> In addition, the theological idea of the "Cosmic Christ" has prompted the Chinese church to be more attentive towards many practical problems, and the idea is increasingly being understood and accepted by more and more Chinese Christians and theologians.<sup>64</sup> Chen Zemin emphasized that Christ is God incarnate, and the two perfect natures of God and the human are united in Christ. Therefore, through Christ and in Christ, human beings can attain salvation and renewal of life. Christ bore the sins of the world through his suffering and sacrifice on the cross,

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62 Ibid., 117-118.

63 Chen Zemin, "The Questions about Theological Construction in Church of China," in *Quest and Witness*, 25.

64 Chen Zemin, "Christ and Culture in China," in *Quest and Witness*, 56.

manifesting God's love, in order that we can be reconciled to God. Thus, both the incarnation and the doctrine of reconciliation should be understood within the framework of the idea of "the Cosmic Christ."<sup>65</sup> Based on this idea, Chen Zemin developed his own "theology of reconciliation" that combined the views of the early church fathers<sup>66</sup> with those of modern theologians, emphasizing the "Recapitulation" (or the return to the Headship of Christ), which means that in Christ, all things in heaven and on earth come together. This is similar to the Chinese ideal of harmony and unity under Heaven 天下大同. To make it easier for the Chinese to understand the ecumenical, cosmic and reconciling nature of the gospel is to "break down the barriers of a divisive gospel." It is a gospel that eliminates the distance between us and God and the hostility of those who are far from God, it eliminates fragmentation and confusion, it eliminates the conflict between the rich and the poor, and it eliminates the hostility between different ethnic, social, and political groups in the world today."<sup>67</sup> What this gospel brings is the reconciliation between Chinese Christians and the people, identification with the people, and at the same time, reconciliation with God, who entered human history through the incarnation of Christ.<sup>68</sup>

Bishop Shen Yifan expresses the Chinese Christians' experience of Christ living in our life, society and in the universe through his hymn "The Eternal Christ" 《基督永长久歌》. It is also a condensation of their belief in the "Cosmic Christ." He affirms with Bishop Ting and Chen Zemin that

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65 Ibid., 70-71.

66 In this regard, Chen Zemin mainly adopts the term "recapitulation" of Irenaeus of Lyon to interpret the Cosmic Christ.

67 Chen Zemin, "The Gospel of Reconciliation," in *Quest and Witness*, 148-149.

68 Chen Zemin, "Reconciliation with People," in *Quest and Witness*, 176.

the love of Christ is universal, not only in the church, but also in guiding and governing all of human history. The whole universe is reflected in the glory of Christ's incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. Christ is the Lord of the Church, the Lord of history, the Lord of the world and the whole universe.<sup>69</sup> The understanding of the Holy Spirit, centred on the "Cosmic Christ," is that "the Spirit of God and the Christ of the Universe," is "a universal life-breeding spirit" that is operating in the universe at all times and in all places.<sup>70</sup>

Such an extensive understanding of Christology will affect our understanding of the belief and doctrine of God, humanism, redemption, ecclesiology and traditional Chinese culture. As Wang Weifan has said, "The Church of China has developed or extended its theories of God, Christology, and even ecclesiology. This characteristic is not so much due to theological reasons, as it is to traditional Chinese culture."<sup>71</sup> In terms of the relationship between ecclesiology and Christology, Wang Weifan expounds on the relationship between church and Christ based on 1 Corinthians 12:12-19. The body of Christ is one though it has many parts, and this is the unity of the one and the many, the many in the one, the one in the many. He argues that the Chinese people's unified view of the "Word" (Dao) and the "equality of things," with the logic of the "unity of uniqueness and diversity" and the "unity of specialty and generality" as one of the many reasons that have contributed to the united worship of the Church in China in the post-denominational era. He says,

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69 Shen Yifan, "Christ in China," in *The Voice of Heart from Pulpit: Selected Works of Bishop Shen Yifan Vol. 2* (Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 2004), 118.

70 Chen Zemin, "Christ and Culture in China," in *Quest and Witness*, 71.

71 Wang Weifan, "The Characteristics of Theological Thinking of the Church in China," in *In The Wilderness for Two Decades*, 52.



*The church is like seven golden lampstands, but among the lampstands was someone like the Son of Man, Jesus Christ. Each church is like a star, but the seven stars are held by the same Son of Man, Jesus, belonging to the "Word," belonging to the "truth."*<sup>72</sup>

This fully reflects that the church worships and serves the same Lord Jesus Christ, whose body is the "unity of specialty and generality." Wang Weifan believes that two efforts have to be made for the establishment and growth of the Church: one is to gather up believers in the truth of Christ, that is, to have a unified basic belief, confessing Jesus Christ, the son of God; the other is that all members grow in Christ who is the head, with each part working properly and building itself up in love.<sup>73</sup>

In contrast, Shen Yifan's ecclesiastical theory lays more emphasis on elucidating the practical significance of the incarnation in church life against the background of the "Cosmic Christ." He believes that the incarnational nature of the church provides the theological basis for the Three-Self Principle of the Church in China. For the Church in China, the Incarnation is the key to the renewal of church life. The Church breaks down the misunderstandings and barriers that used to separate Christians and non-Christians, thus going among the people, showing solidarity with them and sharing their joys and sorrows.<sup>74</sup> Therefore, Shen Yifan shows that the church is a community composed of people called by God through Jesus Christ, with its existence and development based on the incarnation of Jesus Christ and the testimony of God's great love. In bearing witness to

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72 Wang Weifan, "There is Only One Body," in *Walking Lonely for Ten Years: Selected Works of Wang Weifan (1997-2007)*, 328.

73 Ibid., 338.

74 Shen Yifan, "Christ in China," in *The Voice of Heart from Pulpit*, 115.

the gospel, the Church in China should identify with the people through love, so as to win the favor of all the people. Believers should love, tolerate and accept each other, transcending stereotypes and theological differences; should not stand in opposition to the world, but attract people to the Lord with the love of the cross.<sup>75</sup> In Shen Yifan's mind, the Chinese church has three characteristics: it is a growing church, it is a uniting church, and it is a church that bears good witness.<sup>76</sup> I agree with these ecclesiastical views that reflect the practical significance of the incarnation of Christ in the social and cultural context of China; they not only reflect the unique identity of the church, but also break down the division between the sacred and the profane among groups, and make the "Cosmic Christ" a part of the church's vision.

In short, through analysing the paradigm shift from the Chinese church's earlier emphasis on a personalized Christ to that of a Christology of the "Cosmic Christ," we can see that these perceptions of Christology were formed based on national conditions and social development characteristics of China, which are inseparable from the Chinese cultural spirit. I believe that the Chinese church's "Christology with Chinese cultural style" has already taken shape, and what is needed next is to continue to add brick and mortar to this foundation to form a Christology with distinctive Chinese cultural characteristics, so that Jesus Christ can truly become the Christ of the Chinese people.

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75 Shen Yifan, "The Church in China in Theological Thinking," in *The Voice of Heart from Pulpit*, 61.

76 Shen Yifan, "Church Life in China," in *The Voice of Heart from Pulpit*, 120-121.

## Conclusion

It has been more than half a century since the Chinese church developed its post-denominational theology with the spirit of inclusiveness through joint worship and communion. During this period, the reconstruction of theological thinking, which began in 1998, and the progress of Christianity's further contextualization in recent years are all constantly strengthening thinking on the contextualization and indigenization of theology as well as the relationship between theology and culture. Through the previous analysis of the interpretation of the incarnation and the construction of the cosmological paradigm of Christology, we can see that the Christology of the Chinese church has been marked by Chinese culture and has the characteristics of keeping pace with the times. Faith remains unchanged, while theological discourse on faith is constantly enriched and expanded with the development of the times, so that the mystery of faith can be understood and accepted by more and more Chinese people. This is the essence of the incarnation of Christ. Culture is one of the sources of theology, and theology is also a part of culture. The construction of theology is not only the construction of church, but also the construction of culture, which cannot be separated from the contribution of theology. Chinese traditional culture has a long history, and Chinese Christians have inherited this precious spiritual treasure. Our predecessors have set an example for us by doing theology based on the traditional doctrines and implanting the essence of Chinese culture in it. This is not only a dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism, but also a dialogue between Christian civilization and Chinese civilization. In this pluralistic and high-tech era, I believe there will be more and more Christians with a love

of Chinese culture who will continue to write new chapters of Chinese theology through a doctrinal grammar centred on Jesus Christ.

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## **Keeping Faith and Transforming Tomorrow<sup>1</sup> : Impact, Challenge and Opportunity of COVID-19**

**持守信心 更新未来：  
新冠疫情带来的影响、挑战与机遇**

**LIN MANHONG 林曼红**

We are all aware of, if not experiencing ourselves, the negative impact of the pandemic caused by Covid-19. Public health systems in many countries have been stretched almost to the limit or even beyond; globally, economies are tipping into recession; unemployment has been driven to record levels; poverty has intensified; and racism, xenophobia and religious-extremism are on the rise. Women, due to gender-inequality, have been affected more than men. For instance, according to a new analysis commissioned by the UN Women and UNDP, by 2021, around 435 million women and girls will be living on less than \$1.90 a day — including 47 million pushed into poverty as a result of COVID-19. Globally, an estimated 243 million women and girls aged 15 to 49 have been subjected to sexual and/or physical violence by an intimate partner in the last year. Emerging data show that violence against women and girls has intensified since the outbreak of COVID-19. In the Asia and Pacific region, 66% of women reported suffering mental health effects as a result of COVID-19, compared to 58% of

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1 This paper was delivered in October 2020 at a webinar on “Women, Faith and Diplomacy: Keeping Faith and Transforming Tomorrow” organized by the Asia Committee on Religion and Peace (ACRP). The author has been a member of the China Committee on Religion and Peace (CCRP) since 2014.

men. Women also face a higher risk of COVID-19 infection due to their work at the front lines.

How to combat Covid and to cope with its impact has become the most common challenge for global society. If human beings can work together with collective wisdom to fight against the negative impact of Covid-19, there will be a possibility of turning the challenges into opportunities.

Unexpectedly attacked by the novel coronavirus (in January, 2020), China put forth great efforts to fight against Covid-19 with the strength of the whole nation. It was only by overcoming enormous difficulties that a developing country with 1.4 billion people was able to control Covid-19 effectively within a rather short time, as well as to ensure the basic needs of her people, and to become the first major economy in the world to recover. People in every community and from all walks of life worked together with one heart and one mind to combat the pandemic.

Women also joined in to make great contributions. At the height of the battle against COVID-19 in China, more than 40,000 health workers from across the country, two-thirds of whom were women, rushed to Hubei province, which was the hardest hit by the virus. Religious communities also fulfilled their responsibilities through donations, responding actively to the initiative of suspending all religious gatherings and activities, and postponing the opening of a new semester at all seminaries. According to incomplete statistics, by May 2020, Christian communities had contributed 230 million Chinese *yuan* (around 35 million US dollars) to the battle against COVID 19. The total contribution from all religious communities was around 131.5 million US dollars.

Comprising the majority of believers, many women actively participated in various types of voluntary work,

and Ms. Fan was one of those volunteers. She is a Christian who owns a restaurant in the northeastern part of China. Early this year, her restaurant business was suspended due to the pandemic. Instead of resting at home, she decided, rather quickly, to do something meaningful. She became a community volunteer during the day and then prepared milk tea in her restaurant in the late afternoon, so that every evening, she would be able to deliver free hot milk tea to those who worked outdoors at night, responding to the epidemic emergency in her city. A cup of hot milk tea warmed those first responders daily as she continued the delivery throughout the entire cold winter. It is also notable that during the first half of the year, though worship at church was halted, online pastoring never ceased. Pastoral care provided to Christians, especially to women and the elderly, helped to keep them healthy in both body and soul, serving as a means to combat the epidemic.

At the press conference in Geneva on September 7th, 2020, the World Health Organization (WHO) claimed that China's positive anti-epidemic outcomes could be attributed to three factors:

- 1) the important role played by China's huge investment in public health infrastructure at all levels,
- 2) the Chinese people's sense of personal responsibility and
- 3) the continuous improvement in the ability to cope with the epidemic situation even when the number of cases had greatly declined.

Of course, ending the pandemic will depend not only on the strength of any single group or country, but on the concerted efforts of the whole world. From the discovery of the virus in January, until March 2nd, China received pandemic prevention materials (PPEs) from seventy-one countries

and nine international organizations. We have also taken an active part in global humanitarian relief activities. Since the end of February, China has provided humanitarian assistance to more than 20 Middle Eastern countries that suffered serious epidemic outbreaks. Since March, our country has sent quite a few medical teams, consisting mainly of women, to provide assistance in some countries in Europe, Africa and Asia and also to deliver a large amount of anti-epidemic materials to places where the need was great. The Chinese overseas also played an active role in local anti-epidemic efforts. The president of the European Federation of Jiangxi Merchants, an overseas Chinese woman, appealed to her hometown for help when the epidemic broke out in Austria. Thanks to the generous donations from Jiangxi Province and from overseas Chinese, there was an adequate supply of masks in Kraubath, Austria. The high level of protection this provided brought the COVID-19 infection rate down to zero in this city.

I was asked, as a female seminary professor, to send a prayer to the World Council of Churches to encourage the global Christian fellowship to fight against the pandemic. In addition, the China Committee on Religion and Peace (CCRP), of which I am a member, also donated surgical masks to multi-religious peace organizations in quite a few countries. Two weeks ago, the CCRP organized and hosted a video conference entitled “Solidarity and Cooperation — A Multi-Religious Response to COVID-19 and Shared Well-being.” Leaders of religious and peace organizations in twelve countries attended this conference to share their experiences and reflections.

Diplomacy, both governmental and non-governmental, based upon the principles of dialogue, solidarity and cooperation, has contributed to the fight against the epidemic, just as women and faith groups have also played their respective



roles. As the world is a “community with a shared future,” solidarity and cooperation are not options but imperatives. We pray with faith that the world will continue to come together to cooperate in this fight, overcome the virus soon and turn challenges into opportunities to build a better and transformed community for tomorrow.

Lin Manhong is Associate General Secretary of the China Christian Council and Director of the Department of Theological Education of CCC&TSPM, the Academic Dean of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary and Professor of Christian Ethics.

## Major Ministries of the CCC&TSPM in 2020

### 中国基督教两会2020年主要事工

The year 2020 was an extraordinary year. The China Christian Council & Three-Self Patriotic Movement (CCC&TSPM) took the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity as the main direction of its work while simultaneously focusing its efforts on the prevention and fight against COVID-19. We adjusted our work plan in a timely manner and endeavored to serve churches across the country while fulfilling various tasks effectively.

#### 1. Going all out in the fight against COVID-19

The virus struck suddenly at the beginning of 2020 and soon gave rise to a raging epidemic. In solidarity with the Chinese people, the Chinese Church offered prayers for the people and for the country. The CCC&TSPM issued official documents and notifications based on the requirements of different stages of epidemic prevention and control as well as prayer initiatives, giving guidance to local churches in implementing “double suspension and delay”<sup>1</sup> measures, and providing pastoral care and support to believers during this special period. We exposed and resisted the heresy of the Korean *Shincheonji* Church (or the New Heaven and New Earth Church). At the same time, we actively networked and mobilized resources, purchasing materials for epidemic prevention, and offering donations to those areas most seriously hit by the epidemic. Christians all over the country

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1 This means that churches and meeting points were closed, all kinds of gathering activities were halted, and the opening of theological seminaries was postponed.

followed the teaching of “giving thought to do what is honorable in the sight of all,” donating money to support front-line epidemic prevention and treatment. According to incomplete statistics, donations in both cash and kind raised by Christians nationwide totaled over 200 million yuan.

## **2. Substantially and effectively promoting the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity**

We actively promoted the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity in accordance with the requirements of “*The Five-year Plan for Promoting the Further Contextualization of Christianity in China (2018-2022)*.” Revision work on the document “*The Questions and Answers to the Essential Christian Doctrines*” was officially launched at a seminar and training session held in Shanghai. The training and preaching exchange meeting on the reconstruction of theological thought was held in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province. Twenty-two members of the preaching teams preached on the theme “The Church is a Lampstand, Glorify God and Benefit the People.” We strengthened exchanges with the academia by co-publishing “*A Collection of Theological papers on the Further Contextualization of Chinese Christianity*” with the Religious Culture Research Institute of Peking University, and holding a forum in Shanghai attended by experts and scholars to enhance exchanges and to build synergy.

## **3. Writing a new chapter on loving the country and loving the Church in the new era**

On September 23rd, the 70th anniversary meeting of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Chinese Christianity

was held in Shanghai. At the meeting, a report was given under the title “Adhering to the Direction of Further Contextualization of Chinese Christianity, Carry Forward the Patriotic and Church-loving Tradition, and Run the Chinese Christian Church Better in the New Era.” The report summed up the historical achievements of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement as follows: the foreign image of the Chinese Christian Church has been changed; the unity of churches has been promoted and a unique governance model of dual councils, CCC&TSPM, has been established; the harmonious and healthy development of the Church has been achieved through various ministries; the theoretical support for the further contextualization of Chinese Christianity has been laid through deepening the reconstruction of theological thought; and the fellowship with the ecumenical church has been enhanced. At the same time, the CCC&TSPM in different regions helped implement the policy of religious freedom and safeguarded the legitimate rights and interests of the Church. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement has gathered China’s patriotic and Church-loving Christian believers, constantly explored ways to integrate the Church with socialist society, and strengthened the mission of the further contextualization of Christianity in China. It is an advanced, innovative and long-term movement.

This year marks the 75th anniversary of the victory of the “Chinese people’s War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression and the Victory of the World Anti-Fascist War.” The CCC&TSPM called on churches across the country to pray for peace, to organize worship activities in an orderly manner, and to participate in the commemorative activities on peace held by the Peace Committee of China’s Religions, showing the peace-loving image of Christian believers in China.

#### **4. Regulating church affairs in an orderly and law-abiding way**

We have completed the interpretation of *the Church Order of the Chinese Protestant Church* and promoted its implementation, so as to help improve the construction of church systems in local churches, enhance their awareness of running the churches according to the law and regulations, and ensure the healthy and orderly development of Christianity as a whole.

The Church Governance Committee has discussed the issue of opposing heresy, and set up a sub-committee to guide the work on sacraments and vestments. Considering the current common problems, the Committee has formulated norms on sacraments and vestments that inherit the tradition of the catholic church and taking into account traditional Chinese culture and regional characteristics.

Eight special committees held online or offline meetings and put forward suggestions on how to carry out various tasks under the condition of epidemic prevention and control.

#### **5. Developing theological seminaries and training ministries**

The CCC&TSPM continued to promote the standardization of theological education in China. We held a meeting on the accreditation of teachers' professional qualifications in theological seminaries in order to promote the process. In addition, we completed the trial version of the curriculum standards for China's theological seminaries (Bachelor's level), setting up a syllabus for 13 theological seminaries that offer a Bachelor's degree or higher.

A total of 129 students graduated from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary with 102 out of 106 students

obtaining a Bachelor's degree in Theology and 23 obtaining postgraduate diplomas and a Master's degree in Theology. Dissertation defenses for the first two doctoral students in theology and three doctoral candidates in pastoral theology were held at the end of the year.

We were devoted to the training of in-service pastors and teachers from theological seminaries. We sped up the compilation of teaching materials for theological seminaries and adhered to the principle of running seminaries with Chinese characteristics. *The History of Christianity in China*, a textbook that has been in use for a year, received good feedback. The compilation of *An Introduction to the New Testament* was accomplished. The compilation of the two textbooks, *Chinese Christian Ethics* and *A Course in Patriotism*, has begun. The textbook entitled *A Three-Self Patriotic Movement reader* used for training volunteers has been published.

The examination for studying abroad was held as planned. Three co-workers were selected to undergo training or take up academic degree courses at the Ecumenical Institute in Bossey, Switzerland.

## **6. Serving Christian believers through various media platforms**

Media platforms such as the *Tianfeng* magazine, and the Chinese and English websites of the CCC&TSPM, WeChat public official account and App have played a positive role in guiding public opinion in the period of pandemic prevention and control. More than 20 articles on the theme "Fight against COVID-19" were published on these media platforms, giving greater drive to the enthusiastic efforts of Christian believers in pandemic prevention and control. Updating of the website and the WeChat official accounts were accelerated, dissemination was timely and the role of these media platforms became more prominent.

Compared with previous years, the year 2020 saw unprecedented difficulties in the publication and distribution of Bibles and other religious literature. In order to increase channels to serve Christian believers, we have learned to make use of new forms of media to promote the distribution of *Tianfeng* magazine, new versions of the Bible and new books.

In mid-2020, Jiangxi, Hubei, Hunan, Guizhou and other provinces were struck by floods. Fortunately, information about churches affected by the floods were quickly gathered and it was possible for them to receive Bibles in large prints which were distributed for free.

## **7. Contributing to socio-economic development through faith and social services**

This year, social services provided by the CCC&TSPM focused on the “fight against the epidemic.” Relief work was carried out in Hubei, Heilongjiang, Urumqi and other epidemic-hit areas through the donation of medical protective screens, disinfectants, respirators, ventilators, protective gears, air disinfectors and other medical equipment and protective supplies. The CCC&TSPM donated over 1.2 million yuan in cash and distributed supplies worth more than 4.5 million yuan.

After the flood struck some provinces this summer, our co-workers visited the affected areas very promptly and offered cash donations to Qianshan County of Jiangxi Province and Anqing City of Anhui Province for post-disaster relief work.

We also provided social services that contributed to the cause of “targeted poverty alleviation.” In December last year, a team of co-workers from CCC&TSPM carried out a survey in Nujiang Lisu Autonomous Prefecture in Yunnan Province, and decided to support the relocation projects of

twenty local churches. We also proposed to churches in the coastal, developed provinces of East China to make donation initiatives and received an active response. The first sum of money has been received and handed over to each church in Yunnan Province through the local CCC&TSPM.

## **8. Telling Chinese Christian stories better while resisting religious infiltration**

After the outbreak of COVID-19, it was nearly impossible to carry on overseas relations work as planned and it was brought to a halt. Earlier-planned visits had to be suspended or canceled, and some of the meetings were held online. We participated in online meetings such as those with the World Council of Churches and the North America and Asia Pacific Forum. Although the epidemic impeded normal exchanges, the Chinese Church maintained communication with the universal church through video conferences, praying for one another and sharing the anti-epidemic experience of the Chinese Church and society.

“Do not be slothful in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.”(Rom. 12:11 ESV) The CCC&TSPM will work hard and run the Chinese Church better.

Following the first successful stage of epidemic prevention and control, work and production was resumed among people from all walks of life in China. Under effective prevention and control measures, church gatherings and teaching activities in theological seminaries were also gradually resumed.

This Report was contributed by the National Committee of the CCC&TSPM



## **Letter of Appreciation for Janice Wickeri from CCC&TSPM**

March 10, 2022

Dear Ms. Janice Wickeri,

On behalf of the China Christian Council and the National Committee of the Three-self Patriotic Movement of the Chinese Protestant Churches, we write this letter in appreciation of the extraordinary contribution you have made to the Chinese Theological Review (CTR) over the past 35 years.

We can never exaggerate the significant role the CTR has played in fostering the growth of the Chinese Protestant Churches, particularly in enabling the English-speaking Christian communities to hear the voice of Chinese Christians who have been engaging in the contextual exploration of Christian theology and church ministry since the Church's re-opening in the 1980s. The CTR has not only provided the academia with opportunities of dialogues but also attracted friends from around the world to join us in witnessing the work of the Lord in this unique cultural context.

We admire your undertaking this huge responsibility as Editor of the CTR at the invitation of Bishop K. H. Ting back in the early 1980s. We appreciate your tireless and quiet efforts in reading through the pages and between the lines for accurate and acceptable communication of the authors' thoughts. We acknowledge your contribution to the production of each volume, from selecting articles

to printing. We attribute the high quality of the reading materials not only to your outstanding professionalism but more to your earnest devotion to the Chinese churches, the Chinese people and the Chinese culture.

We celebrate and give thanks to God for the friendship forged through years of mutual trust between you and the Chinese churches! A bosom friend afar brings a distant land near. Wherever you are, you will always be a true friend of the Chinese Protestant churches!

May the love and peace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you!

Rev. WU Wei  
President  
China Christian Council,

Rev. XU Xiaohong  
Chairperson  
National Committee of TSPM

## **Letter of Appreciation for Janice Wickeri from FTESEA**

December 20, 2020

Dear Janice

The FTESEA Board of Trustees at its Annual Meeting on Dec 4 and 5, 2020 received your 2020 report as editor of CTR with gratitude. Taking note that this will be your final report, given your decision to retire as Editor of CTR at the end of 2020, the members of the board recorded their appreciation for your dedicated service in faithfully editing CTR volumes for the past 35 years.

As you stated in your report you were invited by Bishop K.H. Ting to undertake this work in order to provide “to those outside China a vivid picture of Chinese Protestant thinking as it has been evolving over the past years.” The board recognized your commitment noting that in the initial years you and those who assisted you received no honoraria but were committed to doing this for your sisters and brothers in the Protestant churches and theological seminaries of China.

Such sacrificial service has helped to build bridges between Chinese Christians and Christians in the rest of the English-speaking world. You were certainly the right person for this work and the board members noted with appreciation the ways in which you blended your editorial skills with the ability for genuine listening and a love for the Protestant Church in China.

It is clear that your long journey of quiet accompaniment with the Chinese Protestant church led to your becoming a deeply trusted colleague to the leadership there. Your care and attention in conveying the authentic voice of Chinese Protestant theologians and other writers meant the CTR was one of the very, very few channels by which those outside China heard the voices of Chinese Protestant thinkers. We are grateful for your leadership.

On behalf of myself as Chair and on behalf of the members of the FTESEA Board of Trustees I wish you all the best in your plans for the coming years. I am sure you are aware that the good work you have initiated will continue with Theresa Carino stepping in as editor, continuing to publish future issues in cooperation with Manhong Lin.

Advent greetings,

Dorcas

J. Dorcas Gordon,  
Chair, FTESEA Board of Trustees