

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

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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.¹ 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.”²

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

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.

*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.*³

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.⁴ 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.⁵

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.”⁶

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.

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.⁷ 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, with Christ having been involved in the creation of salvation, and that salvation is a part of the ongoing creative work.⁸ 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.⁹

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.

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.

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.”¹⁰ 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.’¹¹ 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.¹² 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 effect through rooting in culture and the transformation of individuals and society through culture.¹³ 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.¹⁴ The relationship between theology and culture reflected in this model of relationship between God and the human is mutually complementary and inclusive.

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.

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.

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, and they all reflect the possibility, necessity and diversity of cultural integration in Chinese Christian hymns and sacred music.¹⁵

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.¹⁶

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

16 *Ibid.*, 436-437.

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.¹⁷

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 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.

17 Ibid., 437,439.

*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.*¹⁸

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.¹⁹ 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 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.²⁰

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.

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 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.²¹

20 Ibid., 57-58.

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.

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).²² 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.²³ These attempts to integrate Christian gospel and theology with Chinese culture all indicate that theological 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.

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.

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.²⁴ 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.²⁵

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 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.²⁶

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.

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

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.²⁷ 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.²⁸

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.²⁹ Tanner mentions the challenge of postmodernism to cultural understanding, which is that cultures are no longer traditionally defined by group identities and have clear cultural boundaries.

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.

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.³⁰

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.

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.

This approach works from within the culture, finding commonalities in the qualities that bind Christians together and that on which they agree.³¹ 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.³² Wang Weifan proposed that Chinese theology should be a Chinese learning, namely involving Chinese cultural thoughts—something which requires Chinese theology to integrate faith, knowledge and practice.

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.

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.³³

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.”³⁴

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

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.

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.³⁵ 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, 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.³⁶ 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.

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

36 *Ibid.*, 19-20.

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.”³⁷ 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.”³⁸

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.³⁹ 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:

*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.*⁴⁰

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.”⁴¹

37 Ibid., 22.

38 Ibid., 23.

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

40 Y. T. Wu, “The Significance of Belief of God toward Life”, in *Y. T. Wu’s Selected Writings*, 87.

41 Ibid.

This is a great man who expresses and fulfills the innermost voice and desire in the human heart, a man of brilliant personality.⁴² 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."⁴³

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.⁴⁴

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.

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.”⁴⁵

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.⁴⁶ 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 that is about to emerge in China, which has been predicted to be in labor, is the practice of “learning’ to follow Christ.”⁴⁷

44 Zeng Qinghao, “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.

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.

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.⁴⁸ 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 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.⁴⁹

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

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

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.⁵⁰ 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.

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.*⁵¹

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.⁵² 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.⁵³ 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

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.⁵⁴ 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.*⁵⁵

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 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.

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.

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。⁵⁶ 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*.”⁵⁷ In addition, the ethicalization of Christology is also the 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.”

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.

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.⁵⁸ 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.*⁵⁹

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 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.

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.

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.”⁶⁰

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 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.

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.

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.”⁶¹

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 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.⁶²

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

62 *Ibid.*, 117-118.

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.⁶³

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.⁶⁴ 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,

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."⁶⁵ Based on this idea, Chen Zemin developed his own "theology of reconciliation" that combined the views of the early church fathers⁶⁶ 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."⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸

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 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.

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.

Christ is the Lord of the Church, the Lord of history, the Lord of the world and the whole universe.⁶⁹ 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.⁷⁰

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.”⁷¹ 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,

*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.”*⁷²

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.

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.⁷³

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.⁷⁴ 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 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.⁷⁵

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.

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

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.⁷⁶ 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.

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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