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## Patterns of Chinese Theology

Wing-hung Lam

*The problems of indigenization discussed in this article are common to many cultures and must be faced as churches search for their cultural identity. Will these issues of pre-revolutionary China again be faced in post-Mao China?*

(Editor)

The problem of indigenization is intrinsic to the task of evangelism. When the missionary attempts to communicate the Gospel to his audience, a process of indigenization begins which involves the psychology, the language, and the culture of both parties. The western missionary is brought up in a culture which has been for many years closely associated with Christianity, and whose content and expression are alien to the non-Christian country. His very presence in the mission field, his life-style and value are often identified, rightly or wrongly, with the religion he advocates. This inevitably imparts to the Christian message a foreignness that easily becomes a source of irritation to the local people. If dislike for foreignness is to be regarded as constitutive of human nature, such dislike is easily recognizable among the Chinese.

The necessity of indigenization was long ago felt by the Jesuit missionaries to China. In their effort of preaching Christianity, they were culturally conciliatory in their approach. They put on a Chinese appearance in their activities and mingled with the Confucian intelligentsia. Using western scientific knowledge to establish Chinese confidence in their message, they sought to accommodate their religion to the local civilization. Over the delicate issue which later provoked the Rites Controversy, the Jesuits took a moderate position, respecting the traditional practice of the Chinese. How successful was the Jesuit mission is a question outside our discussion, but it is undeniable that they had won the hearing and admiration of the Chinese literati.

The 1920s were a unique period in the history of Chinese Christianity when there was a host of experiments to indigenize the Christian faith. Before this time, there had been little, if any, theological reflection among Chinese Christians in confessing Christ in the context of traditional Chinese experience. Foreign missionaries were largely the spokesmen for the local Christian communities. And the Gospel consisted primarily in a western Christ presented to the humanistic and pragmatic Chinese mind. It is the purpose of this essay to analyze the various emerging patterns of theological construction by Chinese Christian intellectuals.

Theological contextualization in the twenties was the ideological side of the broader indigenous movement of the Chinese Church which was an effort to establish independence from western [p. 225](#) churches through self-support, self-government, and self-propagation. Impetus was given to this movement as a reaction to the nation-wide anti-Christian campaigns which ran through the decade. The outbreak of anti-Christian

activities occurred in 1922 when the World Student Christian Federation decided to hold its conference in Tsing Hua University near Peking in April. It sparked a chain-reaction of emotion-filled campaigns against Christianity all over the country. Demonstrations, speeches, telegrams, and pamphlets were employed to oppose it as the tool of imperialism and agent of denationalization. Numerous student strikes occurred in Christian schools, supported by political parties, that crippled the function of the institutions. The government restoration of educational prerogatives from mission schools challenged the place of Christian education, both as a mediator of western culture and as a means of religious proselytism. The anti-Christian force was of such a magnitude as seemed to threaten the existence of the Christian movement. Evidence of such possibility was seen in the massive exodus of foreign missionaries after the Nanking Incident in March, 1927.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese Church was caught in turmoil, puzzled about the viability of its message and perplexed with the uncertainty of its future. For the first time in the history of Chinese Christianity, indigenous leaders significantly stood to defend the Christian faith.

The efforts of theological reflection during these critical years must be seen in the wider context of cultural relationship between China and the West. Three different contemporary trends were perceivable among Chinese intellectuals who were struggling to establish the cultural identity of the nation. Some scandalized Confucianism as a product of traditional feudalism incompatible with the new age. The only hope to modernize China was to follow the path of “total westernization”. Mr. Science and Mr. Democracy must be introduced. On the other hand, there were conservatives who held a relatively low view of the western way. The recent World War I was interpreted as the result of cultural bankruptcy of the West. They believed that the salvation of China depended on the renaissance of traditional Confucianism. A middle position was held by the advocates for a cultural synthesis of both East and West. They regarded culture as a dynamic, flexible force ready to undergo interaction with its environment. Intellectual openness had to be exercised to assimilate western p.226 ideology and technology and to evaluate Chinese tradition. The debate on cultural identity continued into the thirties and influenced the programme of theological indigenization undertaken by the Chinese Christians.

## **TOWARD THE MAKING OF AN INDIGENOUS THEOLOGY**

The formation of Chinese theology is a task that involves two kinds of loyalty in the mind of the Chinese Christian. As Chinese, he wants to be faithful to his cultural tradition; as Christian, he has to present his religious message without diminution. Indigenization of the Christian faith can be regarded as an intellectual movement between the two loyalties. Some contemporary Christian scholars felt the conflict between traditional Chinese values and the Christian ethos. Their indigenous effort became a competition of commitments. Others were at home with both, confessing that Christianity and Confucianism are different names of the same truth. Most Chinese Christians stayed in between these two views, sympathetic with the ethnic culture and critical in relating Christianity to it. A persistent question occurs when the patterns of indigenization are examined: is the effort meant to render Christianity more acceptable to the Chinese or to preserve the Chinese cultural values?

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<sup>1</sup> See Shirley Stone Garrett, “Why They Stayed: American Church Politics and Chinese Nationalism in the Twenties,” in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*. Edited by John K. Fairbank (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp.283–310.

Contemporary Chinese Christians took Confucianism as the mainstream of Chinese culture. The school of Lao Tzu and Mo Tzu were considered as side currents. Buddhism and Taoism, though they may have been popular in the religious experience among the mass, did not gain as much intellectual attention among the students as Confucianism. In the current debate on cultural relations between East and West, most Chinese Christians took the middle position. They did not favour traditionalism, because Christianity came from the West and claimed their allegiance. They could not go for “total westernization”, because the upsurge of nationalism in the era of anti-Christian movement stigmatized Christianity as foreign. A main line of apologetics was to assert that Christianity was not denationalizing. Yet, to them, nationalism posed an ideological dilemma. On the one hand, nationalism was “somehow linked with the disintegration of Chinese civilization”.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, the Chinese Christians had to witness to the hostile world that Christianity did not betray the national culture. The attempts at indigenization were influenced, consciously or unconsciously by the dilemma. A viable solution p. 227 seemed to be a sympathetic criticism of the Chinese culture with a calculated accommodation of the Christian faith. Many Christian intellectuals adopted this approach toward indigeneity although their stations on the journey were different.

What, then, is indigenization? Amidst the vast Christian literature of the decade, we can construct a general consensus of opinions offered by the representative figures in the indigenous church movement. Indigenization is not a retreat to the ancient culture, imitating traditional customs and practices. Nor is it reluctance to co-operate with the West, following a form of anti-foreignism. Also it is wrong to conceive of indigeneity as the abandonment of the rich Christian experience of the past and the establishment of a new Christianity by merely fusing it with the local civilization, which would become, as one contemporary Christian scholar said, “neither a horse nor a donkey”.<sup>3</sup>

Positively speaking, indigenization, in Ch’eng Ching-yi’s view, is to “render Christianity suitable to the needs of the Chinese and to accommodate it to the customs, environment, history, and thinking of the Chinese culture.”<sup>4</sup> Chao Tzu-ch’en, professor of Yenching University, defined indigenous church as “one which conserves and unifies all truths contained in the Christian religion and in China’s ancient civilization and which thus manifests and expresses the religious life and experiences of the Chinese Christians in a fashion that is native and natural to them.”<sup>5</sup> Indigenous Christianity must be a local growth, subsequent to the transplant of the western religion, that absorbs the nourishment of Chinese culture and is suited to the spirit and psychology of the Chinese.<sup>6</sup> From these definitions it is easy to see the urgency and importance of the indigenous task.

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<sup>2</sup> J. R. Levenson, *Confucian China and Its Modern Fate: A Trilogy* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1968), p.105.

<sup>3</sup> Ch’eng Ching-yi, “Pen-se chiao-hui chih shang-ch’üeh” (Discussion of Indigenous Church), *Wen-she yüeh-k’an* I. 6 (May 1926):8. Ch’eng was elected General Secretary of the National Christian Council of China and served in that position until 1933.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp.9–10.

<sup>5</sup> Chao Tzu-ch’en (T. C. Chao), “Indigenous Church,” *The Chinese Recorder*, LVI (1925), p.497.

<sup>6</sup> See Wang Chih-hsin, “Pen-se chiao-hui yü pen-se chü-cho” (Indigenous Church and Indigenous Literature), *Wen-she yüeh-k’an*, I. 6 (May, 1926):1–17.

Few would doubt the necessity of the indigenous movement. The question is not why but how.

Five patterns of indigenous thought are recognizable. Not every one is by itself unique and distinct, but their different emphases reflect their presuppositions and approaches to the problem. p. 228

### 1. Presence of Classical Precedents

Proponents of this pattern of indigenous theology had intimate knowledge of the Confucian tradition. Their love for and confidence in it did not flag although Confucianism was under attack during this time. Even their professed allegiance to Christianity did not weaken their emotional and intellectual tie to the ancient tradition. Instead, Christianity offered them opportunity to defend its value in the hour of adversity. They sought to maintain the double loyalties, though sometimes hard to tell which was higher, without betraying any conflict between them. If there were areas of tension, they either ignored their existence or explained them away. Their conviction was that the Chinese heritage was good and deserved our continual respect in the modern age. Its values had to be preserved not because they were Chinese but because they were universally true. They saw Christianity not as the ultimate, absolute religion to substitute the time-honoured deposit of cultural excellences but as a colleague for mutual service. Christianity and Chinese culture would enrich each other. And Christianity was interpreted from the standpoint of Chinese culture, seeking elements from the Christian doctrines that would agree to certain classical precepts.

A key representative of this pattern was Wu Lei-ch'uan of Yenching University. Wu came from a strong Confucian background and was well-versed in the knowledge of the Four Books and Five Classics. The basic premise in his thought lies in the identity of the sources of truth. Truth is one and its expressions are many. Christianity and Confucianism are different expressions, due to their backgrounds and traditions, of the same truth, *Tao*.<sup>7</sup> Whether it is Christianity absorbing Confucianism or Confucianism accommodating Christianity, the true *Tao* will bear its fruit in China. With this conviction, the uniqueness and finality of Christianity had no place in Wu's system. And his indigenous effort was governed by the intention of building up continuity between the two. He went back to the early Chinese sages and examined their original doctrines. Wu was not surprised at all to find that many basic Christian concepts already had their classical counterparts in the teaching of Chinese classics. And the Chinese should welcome Christianity as a like-minded friend, instead of as an ideological foreigner, who would vindicate the worth of its culture.

In Wu's view, the idea of a personal deity is present in *Shih Ching (The Book of Odes)* and *Shu Ching (The Book of History)*, signified by p. 229 the term "Shang-ti". But at a later time Chinese intellectuals sought to accommodate it to the understanding of the people and altered their concept of deity. The personified "Shang-ti" ceased to be used.<sup>8</sup>

Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah was identified by Wu with the expectation of the coming saint as seen in *Chung Yung (The Doctrine of the Mean)*, chapter 31. The Holy One was to arise and rule the nations in peace and to manifest the example of perfect virtues. According to Wu Lei-ch'uan, both accounts were written in the hour of crisis when

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<sup>7</sup> See Wu Lei-ch'uan, "Problem of the Christian Church in China: A Statement of Religious Experience," *The Chinese Recorder*, LII (1921), pp.97–102.

<sup>8</sup> See Wu Lei-ch'uan, "Chi-tu-chiao yü Ju-chiao" (Christianity and Confucianism), *Chen-li chou-k'an*, 1.43 (Jan. 12, 1923).

political unrest provoked the people to look for a saviour to rectify the situation. Thus Tzu Ssu, author of this chapter in *Chung Yung*, and Isaiah shared the same thought. To the Israelites, Isaiah was a prophetic voice; to the Chinese, Tzu Ssu was an optimistic theoretician.<sup>9</sup>

*Jen* (Humanity), the central doctrine in Confucianism, was, in Wu's argument, equivalent to the Holy Spirit. When the Confucian scholars referred to *jen*, a dimension of spirituality was present. We should pray for *jen* to dwell in us, and when *jen* is applied, it will prevail over the nation.<sup>10</sup>

Wu's primary concern was not conformity to the Chinese past but to transform the present. Social reform was a universal principle for human life, a goal which Jesus followed in his ministry. This was the way to bring in the kingdom of God. The same ideal was found in the Confucian programme from self-cultivation to the rule of the nation, until the great harmony was achieved.

## 2. Harmonization of Cultures

A second approach to indigenize the Christian faith emphasized the possibility of harmonizing it with Chinese culture. Harmonization did not mean a passive attitude to acknowledge weakness in traditional China. Nor was it compromise, surrendering the cultural characteristics in order to come to terms with another ideology.

In the understanding of Wang Chih-hsin, professor of Nanking Theological Seminary, culture is a world property which is not to be monopolized by any one nation. Culture itself is subject to constant changes and exchanges.<sup>11</sup> History is full of examples of cultural p. 230 absorption and assimilation. Western civilization emerged from the contacts between the Greco-Roman and the Hebrew cultures. Neo-Confucianism in Sung and Ming Dynasty was the integrated product of Confucianism and Buddhism. In Wang's view, Christianity is a universal culture into which western and eastern cultures can be synthesized. The possibility of such harmonization has the scriptural warrant in Jesus' words: "I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd" ([John 10:16](#)). Wang considered China as a sheep outside the fold to be gathered to the Good Shepherd in the future. His indigenous effort was directed by the vision of a universal Christian culture—a vision tempered by nationalistic flavour.

According to Wang, Chinese culture is ethical in orientation, established on filial piety. *Hsiao* (filial piety) fills all aspects of life, and from a religious perspective, it is the Chinese religion with the parents playing the role of God.<sup>12</sup> Christianity, if properly understood, is not against the doctrine of *hsiao*. He urged that,

We have to understand the differences in cultural backgrounds. In Jewish culture, religion is the centre; so God is the first premise. In Chinese culture, ethics is the centre; so parents

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<sup>9</sup> See Wu Lei-ch'uan, "Chi-tu-chiao ching yü Ju-chiao ching" (The Christian Scripture and the Confucian Documents), *Sheng-ming yüeh-k'an*, III. 6 ([Mar. 1923](#)).

<sup>10</sup> See Wu Lei-ch'uan, *Chi-tu-chiao yü Chung-kuo wen-hua* (Christianity and Chinese Culture), (Shanghai: Ch'ing-nien hsieh-hui shu-chü, 1936), pp.57–58.

<sup>11</sup> Wang Chih-hsin, *Chung-kuo wen-hua yü chi-tu-chiao* (Chinese Culture and Christianity), (Shanghai: Ch'ing-nien hsieh-hui shu-chü, 1927), pp. 1–9.

<sup>12</sup> Wang Chih-hsin, "Chi-tu-chiao yü Chung-kuo wen-hua" (Christianity and Chinese Culture), *Chen-kuang tsa-chih*, XXVI. 6 (1927):1–6.13.



come first. The Jews look upon God as Father; the Chinese regard parents as God. The meaning is the same.<sup>13</sup>

In this way harmony is achieved by showing our love for God through loving our parents. Even Jesus did not allow people to usurp the portion due to their parents by pretending that it was to be offered to God ([Mark 7:11](#)). Therefore, there should be no conflict between Jesus' ethics and the Confucian *hsiao*.

In discussing the doctrine of *jen* and *i* (righteousness), Wang was not hesitant in searching for Christian analogy. He took *jen* as love-for-others and *i* as love-for-oneself, which is mentioned in [I Corinthians 13](#). Mencius rejected Mo Tzu's all-embracing love as the extreme of *jen* and Yang Chu's self-centred interest as the extreme of *i*. The harmony between *jen* and *i* is clearly seen in Mencius' synthesis in teaching a love of gradation and discernment. In Christianity, the balance of love and truth is embodied in Jesus' words: "Give to those who ask of you," and "Cast no pearl before the swine."<sup>14</sup>

Advocates of cultural harmonization like Wang Chih-hsin cannot entirely conceal their cultural predilection. In their programme they [p. 231](#) are eager to show that Chinese concepts really have something positive to be synthesized. They hold on to the best of orthodox Confucianism as a protection for the survival of the tradition. Their effort seems to look for Christian sanction for the selected portion of Confucian thought. Thus, Christianity and Confucianism are not equal partners in the programme. Such inequality indicates their concern for the preservation of Chinese culture with the aid of Christianity. Their indigenization is the attempt to maintain the double loyalties—to Christianity and to China. In this way they can profess themselves as Chinese Christians.

### 3. To Fulfil, Not to Destroy

Advocates of this third position believed that Christianity would improve on traditional culture and thereby enrich it. They were willing to admit similarity, but not identity as Wu Lei-ch'uan did, between Christian doctrines and Chinese classical thought. It did not mean that their love for the ethnic culture was less or that they favoured complete westernization. They were interested in preserving Chinese values, but they went beyond seeking for points of cultural contacts. They saw the inadequacy of Chinese culture, not so much because of the current anti-Confucian iconoclasm as because of having a higher, theological conviction.

Several premises were shared in this pattern of theological thought. Firstly, they believed that God has not left himself without witness to his activities in Chinese society. Chinese culture is simultaneously the work of God and of man. Glimpses of divine revelation are perceivable in the teaching of the Chinese sages. The attitude of superiority among former missionaries was now replaced by that of humility. Secondly, they were optimistic about the future of the ethnic culture. Modern China was still in the making, and she had to undergo an inevitable process of cultural assimilation. Thirdly, they accepted the finality of Christianity in one way or another. The centrality of Christ was the focus of their message. As Chao Tzu-ch'en said, "The greatest contribution that Christianity can make to Confucian culture is its experience of God as revealed in the Word Incarnate, Jesus, the Christ."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p.3.

<sup>14</sup> See Wang Chih-hsin, *Chung-kuo wen-hua*, p.7.

<sup>15</sup> T. C. Chao, "Christianity and Confucianism," *International Review of Missions*, XVII (1928), p.595.

According to these convictions, proponents of this theological pattern sympathetically and critically examined their cultural inheritance. Very often their sympathy outweighed their criticism. They p. 232 looked for areas where the Chinese sages and the Christian faith could meet, and pointed them to the way of greater truth. They felt that the humanistic basis of Chinese thought lacks adequate perspective to give a sound philosophy of life. The finiteness and sinfulness of man obscure his metaphysical glasses.

In Chao's analysis, Chinese thinkers value the harmony between man and nature. When nature maintains internal and external equilibrium, life will prosper. The Confucian theory does not teach the conquest of nature, but seeks to understand its ways.<sup>16</sup> The Chinese mind seldom goes beyond nature itself, yet stays constantly within the sphere of human affairs. Such practical emphasis partially accounts for the weakness of its metaphysics and the vagueness of its religious dimension.

Confucian ethics mainly deal with human relationships. In Chao's view, the teaching of *hsiao*, however, is for men not for God, in the world not beyond the world. Man requires no other god than himself in the realization of the true, the good, and the beautiful. But the over-confidence in human ability defeats its own moral structure. Christianity will enable the Chinese doctrine to establish its foundation, beyond the maintenance of the man-nature harmony, upon the religious experience of a God-man relationship. From this, the Christian doctrine of the Fatherhood of God will enrich the Chinese view of family which includes the living and the dead bound together through *hsiao*, by the extended idea of a universal family. The Chinese individual is now liberated from the bondage of the traditional family to a heavenly fatherhood and a world brotherhood which is also the Confucian aspiration. As Chao put it, "the depth and height of brotherhood will not be reached without the religious homogeneity of a world God-consciousness that Christianity alone can give."<sup>17</sup>

#### 4. Cultural Dualism

Standing apart from the intellectual main current of indigenous theology was a most popular preacher at Peking, Wang Ming-tao. In a time of social disorder and political instability, members of Wang's church found psychological comfort and spiritual renewal from his conservative message. Wang's indigenous thought was governed by his theology of history. In his view, the world and the church are two competing forces, different in nature and in institution, that move the p. 233 wheel of history toward a definite end. The world is controlled under satanic authority and inhabited by sinners who rebel against God in their immorality and impiety. Such thoroughly corrupted social order is beyond any possibility of redemption.<sup>18</sup>

Wang was not concerned with the preservation or reformation of cultural values for they would inevitably pass away. Logically, Wang did not expect any divine activity in culture or God would have to destroy his own work in the last day. Yet, in introducing a Christianity detached from the world, Wang was aware of the impossibility of living out of contact with culture. How did he resolve this dilemma?

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<sup>16</sup> T. C. Chao, "Our Cultural Heritage," in *China Her Own Interpreter*, ed. by M. Stauffer (New York: Missionary Education Movement of the United States and Canada, 1927), pp.3-4.

<sup>17</sup> See Chao, "Christianity and Confucianism," p.598.

<sup>18</sup> Wang Ming-tao, *Yeh-su shi-shei* (Who is Jesus) (1927), (Reprint; Hong Kong: Hung Tao Press, 1962), p.3.



Wang's solution was founded in his hope for the Church Triumphant. The church is the bride of Christ purged with his blood of sacrifice, saved by his substitutionary death, and united to him without blemish.<sup>19</sup> To Wang, only the redemptive history of the people of God matters. His ecclesiology is strongly eschatological in outlook and other-worldly in emphasis. His theological dualism is extended to the status of individuals before God. Sonship to God is exclusively given to believers; non-believers in the world are enemies of God. The contact between these two opposite groups is evangelistic mission. Chinese culture, which has been contaminated by human sinfulness, is not to be harmonized with, or fulfilled by, Christianity, but to be evangelized by it. His theological order is that only changed man can change the world. And Wang took a low view of the effort of social reconstruction by the liberal wing of the Chinese church.

In Wang's theology, we see a constant dichotomy between faith and reason, the church and the world, individual Gospel and social Gospel. This bias has naturally led to a form of monastic retreat from the world in turmoil and to a breeding of self-righteousness in social relationship. The shortcoming of his position is that Wang had an incomplete theology of culture and was still living in the mentality of the majority of missionaries of the previous century.

### 5. Christianity Judges Culture

Although theologically conservative like Wang Ming-tao, Chang I-ching, a prolific writer in the South, was more positive in his view of Chinese culture and more comprehensive in his apologetic effort. Unlike the liberal Chinese Christians, he was more critical than sympathetic in his examination of Chinese tradition. Instead of showing areas of similarities between Christianity and Chinese culture, Chang p. 234 was ready to point out the differences and weaknesses of Confucian thought. He entered into a cultural debate with Confucian scholars from a theological standpoint.

Chang acknowledged the presence of divine activity in Chinese civilization. The lordship of Christ prevails over both the creative and redemptive dimensions. Equal attention should be given to both in the formulation of an indigenous theology. However, the gravity of man's sin has deeply and widely affected his cultural function. Even the best of Chinese culture is not exempted from it. The sages of the past had only glimmers of light that were to be gathered to the True Light in Jesus Christ.

Chang adopted a sun-moon analogy to compare Jesus with Confucius.<sup>20</sup> Jesus is the sun whose light is intrinsic and intense. Confucius is the moon whose light is a reflection of sunlight, having no illumination of its own. Wu Lei-ch'uan looked upon Jesus and Confucius in the same human category. Chao Tzu-ch'en regarded Jesus as a supreme man. But Chang argued that the difference between Jesus and the Chinese sage is that between God and man. Jesus' stupendous claims, his miraculous deeds, and his fulfilment of prophecy are unique evidence of his divinity, incarnate in human form. Like other sages of China's past desirous of knowing the *Tao* of heaven, Confucius sought after it without the aid of special revelation from God. This explains his agnostic reserve in commenting on the religious and supernatural realm of reality. And this *Tao* is none other than Jesus Christ.

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<sup>19</sup> Wang Ming-tao, *Chi-tu ti hsin-fu* (The Bride of Christ) (1926), (Reprint; Hong Kong: The Bellman House, 1970), pp.1–6.

<sup>20</sup> Chang I-ching, "Yeh Ju pien" (Debate Between Christianity and Confucianism), *Chen-kuang ts'ung-k'an* (Shanghai: China Baptist Publication Society, 1928), II, 32–33.

Chang encouraged the Confucianists to consider the credibility of Christianity without abandoning their Confucian interest and respect. However, unlike Wu Lei-ch'uan, he was reluctant to admit the existence of precedents of Christian teaching among the ancient classics. Similarity cannot be taken as equivalence, for they are qualitatively different in their metaphysical structures. This is also due to the difference in epistemology. The Confucian way of knowing begins in man and nature, whereas Christianity has its starting point in the self-revelation of God.<sup>21</sup> Man's blind search gives rise to religious polytheism in Chinese experience which has to be corrected with the monotheistic faith in Christianity.

Regarding the national crisis, Chang's hope was dependent upon his theology of divine grace and judgement. It is improper to argue p. 235 that China should adopt Christianity for political modernization. Chang felt that the core of the issue of national reconstruction lies in the transformation of individuals and the community together. For human effort alone is not sufficient to turn egoism to altruism, selfishness to sacrifice, and exploitation to service. The kingdom of God is both a task of man and a gift of God.

## THEOLOGICAL COMMON GROUND

The problem of indigenization is ambiguous as well as complex. Its nature defies a final solution, for an indigenous theology is a task that involves at least three aspects of intellectual effort—the definition of the Christian faith, the identification of culture, and the expression of the former in the latter. Each of these presupposes a context which is conditioned by both time and space.

In the missionary activities during the nineteenth century, the problem was largely tackled by preaching a "Western Christ against Chinese culture". Since the late nineteenth century, due to the ineffectiveness of the missionary approach and the growing appreciation of the Chinese tradition, the emphasis of the Christian message consisted in a "Western Christ of Chinese culture". The emergence of the Christo-centric apologetics in the Chinese church in the 1920s, occasioned by the anti-Christian movement, sought to present a "Chinese Christ of Chinese culture". They longed to see that the Chinese Christ would save the nation in crisis. These five patterns of indigenous experiments represent almost the entire spectrum of theological reflection.

Among these patterns of indigenous thought, we can establish three premises of durable value regarding the problem of contextual theology. First, no culture is beyond the redemptive activity of God, which is the common basis of Christian hope of all five patterns. The current situation of the nation intensified this theological expectation among the Chinese Christians. Though pessimistic about the world, Wang Ming-tao's enthusiasm for evangelism expressed certain belief in cultural redeemability. And Wu Lei-ch'uan's national reconstruction was more explicit of this conviction. Secondly, no definition of Christianity is absolute, for culture itself is relative. There exists a mutual necessity between culture and Christianity. Culture needs Christianity for enlightenment; and the Christian faith requires culture for a better interpretation. Any claim to a full expression of the Christian religion is simply blind dogmatism. If such claim is not possible within a culture, the possibility is even less in cross-cultural missions. p. 236 No pattern above is completely sufficient to give an indigenous theology, for indigenization is an ongoing process as the Christian church fulfils its *Missio Dei* in God's world. Therefore, a full identification of traditional concepts with Christian doctrines will usurp the unique

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<sup>21</sup> Chang I-ching, "Tu Ch'en Kuan-chang po-shih Kung-chiao tsan-i pien-mu" (A Critique of Dr. Ch'en Kuan-chang's Lecture on Confucian Religion) in *Chen-kuang ts'ung-k'an* II, 118.

value of revelation in Jesus Christ. Here, Chang I-ching's distinction between common and special revelation would help Wu Leich'uan to avoid the danger of cultural idolatry. And Wu had a hard time to answer the question: why choose Christianity if the Chinese sages already have the truth? To some extent, Wang Chih-hsin had to face the same question in his programme of cultural harmonization.

Thirdly, no culture is exempted from divine judgement although every culture has traces of God's work. Chang was right to urge for cultural repentance of all nations. And Chao Tzu-ch'en's argument that the Confucian sages were agents of truth is also well taken. Any recognition of truth, good, and beauty assumes the existence of an absolute, which may not be viable in the ambiguity of life. And it is this absolute reality that judges all cultural decisions made in existential contexts. p. 237

## **The Kingdom Strikes Back: The Ten Epochs of Redemptive History**

Ralph D. Winter

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(William Carey Library), with permission.*

Man has virtually erased his own story. Human beings have been pushing and shoving each other so much that they have destroyed well over 90 per cent of their own handiwork. Their libraries, their literature, their cities, their works of art are mostly gone. Even what remains from the distant past is fiddled with evidences of a strange and pervasive evil that has grotesquely distorted man's potential. This is strange because apparently no other species of life treats its own with such deadly malignant hatred. The oldest skulls bear mute witness that they were bashed in and roasted to deliver their contents as food for still other human beings.

We are not surprised then to find that the explanation for this strangeness comes up in the oldest, detailed, written records—surviving documents that are respected by Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions, whose adherents make up more than half of the world's population. These documents, referred to by the Jews as "the Torah," by Christians as the "Books of the Law" and by Muslims as "the Taurat" not only explain the strange source of evil but also describe a counter-campaign and follow that campaign through many centuries.

To be specific, the first eleven "chapters" of Genesis constitute a trenchant introduction to the whole problem. These pages describe three things: 1) a glorious and "good" original creation; 2) the entrance of a rebellious, evil, superhuman power who is more than a force, actually a personality; and the result 3) a humanity caught up in that rebellion and brought under the power of that evil.

In the whole remainder of the Bible, we have a single drama: the entrance into this enemy-occupied territory of the kingdom, the power and the glory of the living God. From [Genesis 12](#) to the end of the Bible, and indeed until the end of time, there unfolds the single, coherent drama of "the Kingdom strikes back." In this drama we see the gradual