CHINESE MISSION ON FIRE: A THEOLOGICAL BASED APPROACH FOR EFFECTIVE CHINESE EVANGELISM

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ABSTRACT
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Protestant Christianity landed in China in the early twentieth century along with gunfire and unequal treaties from foreign invaders. Since then Christianity can be hardly separated from the cultural aggression of Western imperialism. Moreover, with the difficulty of presenting the Gospel under the epistemological biases formed through thousand years of traditions, Chinese Christians have been struggling for a solution to establish the indigenous church for effective evangelism. Since the 1980s when China gradually opened her door to the world, different theologies started bombarding the land through a variety of mission channels; meanwhile, the Chinese government has also aggressively engaged in developing its own theology to support communist socialism. Now is the critical moment that will determine whether a theologically sound foundation can be established at this critical time for churches in China. This thesis reviews the historical and cultural background of the early Chinese Church, analyzes common problems of Chinese churches in China and the United States, and concludes with a recommendation based on the framework of Covenant Theology.
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CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION

“On that day a great persecution broke out against the church at Jerusalem, and all except the apostles were scattered throughout Judea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1). The Chinese Church, following the step of the New Testament church, began her days in a turbulent time. China, a big country with the richest long-standing culture, ironically entered the twentieth century as a weak empire under the surrounding pressures of modern powers. After the loss of the Opium War to the British in 1842, foreign missionaries could freely enter China under the protection of the Treaty of Nanjing which opened five ports to foreign trade. Christianity was finally rooted the soil, but since then, Christianity can be hardly separated from the cultural aggression of western imperialism. Moreover, with the difficulty of presenting the Gospel under the epistemological biases formed through thousand years of traditions, Chinese Christians have been struggling for a solution to establish the indigenous church for effective evangelism.

Problem

Theology and church management are two pillars of the church. The former sets the tone for teaching and the latter determines the ruling methodology to maintain mutual accountability and dependency among Christians. Unfortunately the Chinese Church has been weak in both. Moreover, the anti-theology and anti-denominational ideology has been dominant among Chinese churches. Since the 1980s when China gradually opened her door
to the world, different theologies started bombarding the land through a variety of mission channels; meanwhile, the Chinese government has also aggressively engaged in developing its own theology to support communist socialism. Now is the critical moment that will determine whether a theologically sound foundation can be established at this critical time for churches in China. In this research, we target the following questions: 1) What are the decisive factors in the formation of Chinese Christian thought? 2) What are the consequences of the anti-theology and anti-denominational ideology in Chinese churches? 3) What are the solutions to mitigate the problems?

Focus

This research was stimulated by common problems observed during the years of my service and missions among Chinese churches in both the United States and in China. Further studies surprisingly indicate that the problems are stemming from the same root of anti-theology and anti-denominational tradition. The development processes of Chinese churches in the United States and in China are so different in both social and cultural conditions; what makes them share the same ideology? To identify the root causes we must trace back to the early Chinese Church for clues.

Chinese churches in the United States, as the bridge of evangelism to China, are today’s important source of resources to support training for leaders of house churches in China. The problem becomes more and more serious if Chinese Christians in the United States remain unequipped with good theology and indifferent to historical western church traditions. A clear understanding of the Chinese Church in the United States is thus also important to mitigate the problem.

In summary, this research focuses on the study of sociocultural conditions between
1900 and 1949 when the Chinese Christian thought was formed, the development process of Chinese churches in the United States, and the comparison between early Chinese churches established in the 1930s and the modern Chinese churches in both China and the United States.

**Approach**

The church responses to the anti-Christian activities in the 1920s and several church revivals are important in understanding the forming of Chinese Christian thought. In Chapter 2 critical historical events before 1949 are first surveyed. In Chapter 3, influences of cultural heritage, social conditions, and western theological thoughts behind the development of Chinese Christian thought are analyzed. In Chapter 4, the development of Chinese Churches in the States is surveyed. Modern Chinese churches are compared with those established in the early 1930s. In Chapter 5, problems of the Chinese church are summarized in three perspectives: problems resulting from epistemological biases formed in tradition (normative), theological issues developed under different social conditions (situational), and parenting challenges in the postmodern age (existential). In Chapter 6, Covenant Theology is introduced as a recommendation to mitigate the identified problems. In Chapter 7, Ministries in Chinese reformed evangelism are introduced.

The goal of this research focuses on the establishment of theologically sound churches in China and in the United States; however the derived strategies may be used in other regions of the globe for effective Chinese evangelism as well.
CHAPTER 2
HISTORY OF THE EARLY CHURCHES IN CHINA

China is a huge country with a long-standing cultural heritage, and historically almost everything foreign entering the land disappeared like a drop in the ocean, blending naturally into the culture in time. How Christianity was rooted in China is therefore interesting.

The influence of Christianity on Chinese is evident by the growth of the church in China. Representing about one fifth of the world’s population, China will become the home to the largest Christian population on the globe. However the growth has not been without difficulties. To understand the problem, it is necessary to trace back to the early days when the Chinese Church first began. History is important because it records the dynamics of a process, in which ideologies, social structures and ethical systems are gradually established under the various social and cultural conditions. The following survey of the history of early Chinese churches provides necessary information for understanding the social backgrounds of the development of Christianity before 1949.¹

Missionary Works before 1895

As the first wave of Christian mission to the Far East, Nestorian missionaries traveled six thousand miles by foot to China in A.D. 635. Their work was evident by the

seventeenth century’s discovery of the Nestorian Tablet, erected in 781, on which the names of sixty seven Nestorian missionaries were recorded. Unfortunately in the year of 845 in the Tang Dynasty (618-905), a nationwide persecution, originally targeted at Buddhism promulgated by the emperor, severely damaged Nestorian works. John Young reported that Nestorians compromised with the Chinese concept of ancestor worship in order to attract Chinese, who were indifferent to Christianity because of their rich culture and a variety of ancient religious beliefs. Records showed activities of praying for the dead seven times a day. Consequently, the mission starting with preaching the Gospel of eternal life ended up with worshiping the dead. Therefore Young concluded that it was their necrolatry, not religious persecution, resulted in the final collapse of the Nestorians.\(^2\) According to Samuel Moffett’s report, the success of Nestorians was built on their close relationship with the government. In the last half of the eighth century, both the imperial dynasty and Nestorian church began to decline, which was hundred years before the great persecution of all religions in China. Therefore Moffett concluded that the decisive factor of the collapse of the Nestorian mission was neither religious persecution nor theological compromise, but the fall of the imperial house on which the church had too much relied on for its protection.\(^3\)

During the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), Nestorian missionaries returned to China as teachers. Franciscan missionary John of Montecorvino spent thirty years ministering in the Yuan capital, but without much success.


The third evangelistic attempt was during the late Ming dynasty (1368-1644) through the Jesuit Francis Xavier, but he was forbidden to enter the mainland and therefore only visited Portuguese trading posts like Macau. Xavier died on Shangchuan Island nearby Macau in 1552. Xavier’s effort was not in vain however, because subsequent Jesuit effort was successful in his footsteps. Father Matteo Ricci came to China in 1582 and established a good mission basis before he died in 1610. Due to the conflict over the Chinese tradition of ancestor worship, known as the “Rites Controversy”, an imperial edict was issued to expel all Catholic missionaries in 1724.

In 1807 during the Qing dynasty, Robert Morrison came to China as a Chinese language student and dedicated himself in Bible translation. His effort, as the fourth evangelistic attempt, marked the first success of protestant mission.

From 1839 to 1842, the British fought against China for being forbidden to import opium to China. China was defeated in the Opium War and forced to sign the Treaty of Nanjing in 1842. The treaty agreed to cede Hong Kong to Britain and open five ports for foreign trade. Missionaries were thus also allowed to enter China, for example, William Martin of the Presbyterians in North America, William C. Burns of the English Presbyterian Mission and Hudson Taylor, to name a few. Hudson Taylor reached China in 1854 and founded the China Inland Mission in 1865, which was very successful until 1895.

**Fall of the Qing Dynasty 1895-1911**

China lost a war in 1895 with Japan. The humiliated government launched the “One Hundred Days Reform Movement.” Under the pressures of western powers, the increasing anti-foreign feelings triggered the Boxer Uprising in 1900, causing the deaths of nearly 200 missionaries and over 2,000 Chinese Christians in North China.
Rise of the Church in New China 1911-1919

Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s democratic revolution in 1911 toppled the last empire, the Qing dynasty, and ended the two millennia of monarchial ruling system of China. Due to the immaturity of the new republic government, several warlords competed for the supremacy in China between 1916 and 1928. The anti-foreign feelings kept pushing the quest for independence of Chinese churches from foreign denominations, paving the way for the later church indigenization movement.

Challenge of the Church in the Chinese Intellectual Revolution 1919-1929

After the traditional examination system was abolished in 1905, students started to study abroad. As a result, new ideas learned from the West were brought back to China by returning students. On May Fourth 1919, an anti-Japanese demonstration broke out in Beijing due to the international injustice China received in the Treaty of Versailles in France. This May Fourth Movement initiated a nationwide intellectual revolution, and later evolved into the New Culture Movement from 1920 to 1922. The central theme of the movement was that science and democracy were the only hope for China, as a result Chinese traditions and religious beliefs were considered as obstacles to civilization. In March 1922, returning delegates from Lenin’s Moscow conference (January 1922) began to attack the international conference of the World Student Christian Federation to be held in Qinghua University in April. The anti-Christian movement was spread nationwide during the years of the collaboration between Kuomintang and Chinese Communist Party between 1924 and 1927. Christianity was accused of being used by western imperialism for cultural aggression. In March 1927, almost all of the 8,000 Protestant missionaries had to evacuate from mainland China.
Revival of the Church under the New Republic Government 1929-1937

After defeating the Communist Party, the Kuomintang leader Chiang Kai-shek imposed a military peace to focus on economical reconstruction in June 1928. During the subsequent ten years, church enjoyed a temporary break. The National Christian Council launched the Five Year Movement between 1929 and 1934. Holding different visions from the National Christian Council, Christian conservatives such as Watchman Nee and Wang Mingdao, also demonstrated successful results in establishing Chinese administrated indigenous churches in the 1930s.

Growth of the Church in Wars 1937-1949

In 1937, war broke out between China and Japan because of Japanese invasion. The entire nation was in turmoil again. However the war did not stop the evangelistic momentum; on the contrary, during the eight years of suffering, the church had grown from 560,000 in 1936 to nearly 700,000 believers in 1945. In less than a year following the surrender of Japanese, the civil war between Kuomintang and the Communist Party broke out again. In 1949, Chiang Kai-shek was defeated and fled to Taiwan, with the government continuing there as the Republic of China (Taiwan). Mao Zedong established the People’s Republic of China on October 1, 1949 on the mainland. There was definitely no room for religion under the new atheist government. The real disaster of the Chinese Church began.
CHAPTER 3
CHINESE CHRISTIAN THOUGHT

Having surveyed the critical historical events that happened in the early Chinese Church, we now move on to examine how the Chinese Christian thought formed in the 1930s. The Chinese Church began in turbulent times, and therefore her theology was basically a response to social conditions blended with cultural influences. In this chapter, we first identify the cultural and social factors in the development of Chinese Christian thought, and then examine some distinguished areas of theological thought in Chinese Christianity.

**Chinese Epistemology**

Epistemology, the way people understanding things, is highly related to culture. Chinese culture has greatly influenced the way of thinking and doing things for all Chinese, and therefore it is important to understand this cultural element in Chinese epistemology.

**Natural Theology**

Historically, Chinese in general have been mostly considered as atheists or materialists. As pointed out by Fathers Longobardi and Ste. Marie, Chinese and Christian thought, though having some superficial resemblances, were incompatible in general. Chinese therefore need to abandon their intellectual and cultural heritage in order to receive Christian truth.\(^1\) However, Leibniz in his research argues that 1) Chinese do have a similar

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concept of God to the Christian concept of God and spiritual substance; 2) spirits and matter in China are similarly understood as angels and matter in Christianity; 3) the Chinese and Christian concepts of the human soul and its immortality are compatible. Therefore he concluded that the conversion of the Chinese does not require abandonment of a 3,000 year-old intellectual tradition.²

Chinese culture is of tremendous richness and varieties. It is not surprising that western scholars may differ in opinions regarding the degree of resemblances between Chinese and Christian thought. Leibniz`s discourse on the natural theology of the Chinese is important in that it clearly identified the cultural elements in Chinese epistemology leading to the understanding of Christianity. This was good news to Leibniz, for he achieved his research goal in proving the compatibility between two thought systems and concluded that culture should not be an obstacle to Chinese evangelism. However, there are trade-offs in assuming this position, as will be discussed in later chapters, because similarities between Chinese and Christian thought are the very factors causing confusion and errors in the development of Chinese Christian thought.

Religious Philosophical Tradition

There is a time in Chinese history between 550 and 300 B.C. called the period of “Warring States” (戰國時代), which is one of the many turbulent times in the history of China, when kings of kingdoms fighting for the supremacy of Tien Zi (the Son of Heaven) [天子], the king of kings of the land. As in the Chinese saying, “Heroes are made in turbulent times”(時勢造英雄), the Warring States is a time of great men and blooming philosophies, so

² Ibid., 35.
called “Zhu Zi Bai Jia” (hundred schools of thought) [諸子百家]. Among Zhu Zi Bai Jia, Confucianism and Daoism were respectively founded by Confucius and Lao Zi, and became the most influential schools of thought in China.\(^3\)

Confucianism with its rich and comprehensive ethical and political system became the official belief system of the state during the first great imperial Han Dynasty between 206 B.C. and A.D. 221. Though there were short periods of times that Confucianism was challenged or ignored, it has basically remained as the official ethical ideology of China for over two thousand years and defines the ethical dimension of Chinese thought.

Different from Confucianism which more emphasizes rational thinking and understanding, Daoism focuses on the personal projection in the mystical universe. It combines earlier religious and cosmological traditions to form a religion. It is a belief of polytheism, exalting the worship of Chinese historical heroes elevated into deities after death. Daoism provides Chinese with a mystical world view and contributes the metaphysical dimension of Chinese epistemology.

**Indigenization of Christianity**

China entered the century in an awkward situation; on the one hand she was so large and had the richest long-standing culture, but on the other hand she was ironically weak compared to surrounding western powers. China was in wars for almost the entire first half of the twentieth century. The quest for survival was the common concern and modernization was believed to be the solution for the nation. Modernization implies to jettison the old, and the old tradition was thus the first being thought of as an obstacle to modernization. The New

Culture Movement during the period of 1920 to 1922, for example, challenged the value of Confucianism and all religious traditions. However these challenges did not hurt the Church; on the contrary, church revivals emerged under hard social conditions. Calvin Chao concluded that the pressure of poverty, political unrest and ideological emptiness made the Gospel welcome by the general public. The May Fourth Movement in 1919 led to a national anti-Christian reaction. Christianity was identified with imperialism, and the Chinese Church responded with church indigenization. Chun Kwan Lee surveyed several revivals in the 1930s and discussed responses of Christian leaders under complex social conditions.

Liberal Approach

During the anti-Christian time between 1920 and 1929, the ecumenical wing of church responded with the liberal social gospel, promoting the salvation of the entire nation through following the examples of Jesus’ love and sacrifice. This group consisted of liberal missionaries and Chinese Christian leaders returning from their overseas studies. Their emphasis was in line with the national self-strengthening motif for modernization between 1900 and 1919, and led to the later three-self ideal within government supported Chinese Christianity. After the new Nanking government made social reconstruction as the chief task after 1929, the ecumenical wing gained its full strength in promoting liberalism, with the following of Jesus’ ethical examples as the means to achieve social reconstruction. During the period of the war against Japanese invasion beginning in 1937, more sacrifice and social

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5 Ibid., 213-218.
services were emphasized. Christianity was presented as the symbol of love and sacrifice that would lead to a national regeneration.

Conservative Approach

While the ecumenical wing was promoting the social gospel through Christian’s social services during the 1930s, the conservative wing took a totally different approach. They believed that salvation must be personal, and therefore set evangelism as their major task, which sharply contrasted with the ecumenical wing. By rejecting the liberal social gospel, they retreated from social issues and advocated that salvation was for the individual and never for the nation. Watchman Nee, as a chief representative of the conservatives, founded the Little Flock Christian assembly hall in Shanghai in 1927. Nee’s church expanded rapidly; in 1949, there were over seven hundred local churches, two hundred workers and seventy thousand of members. The Little Flock, like all other conservatives, never joined the National Christian Council formed by the ecumenical wing.

Wang Mingdao, another leader of the conservatives, emphasized that only salvation in Christ can bring true spirituality, which includes the regeneration through faith and consequential good works. Since the inner regeneration is invisible, the external works become the necessary means to confirm one’s faith. Wang also emphasized the differences between this world and the world to come; the former is evil and the latter is God’s promised land. According to this antithetic view of two worlds, Wang also strongly opposed the liberal wing’s social gospel which aimed at building the kingdom of God on earth. Wang defined spirituality as a demonstration of the Christian’s life in this present world with the hope in the world to come. As with other conservatives, Wang’s emphasis on the other worldliness led to
negative attitude toward social involvement.\textsuperscript{6}

\textbf{Christian Anthropology}

Among the early Chinese Church leaders, Watchman Nee has the most wide and profound influence in the history of Chinese Christianity. The foundation of his theology is the tripartite view of man, which is still prevailing among Chinese churches today.

\textbf{Watchman Nee’s Trichotomist View of Man}

Watchman Nee’s theology was built on his trichotomist view of man. He believed that the Bible clearly differenced human spirit from soul. “Not only are they different in terms, their very nature differs from each other. The Word of God does not divide man into two parts of soul and body. It treats man, rather, as tripartite – spirit, soul, and body.”\textsuperscript{7}

Nee believed that the spirit of man is the most important because it is the channel through which the Holy Spirit interacts with man. The soul is the part of man controlling emotion, mind and will, and therefore man’s intellectual and emotional activities are all in the soul not in the spirit. The body is the part connecting to this world and is the least important. Nee concluded that the spirit was God-conscious, because through it, man communicated with God. The soul was self-conscious because it represented one’s personality. The body was world-conscious because it was that through which man connects to the material world. As a result, God dwelled in the spirit of man, the man dwelled in the soul, and the man’s senses dwelled in the body. Nee believed that regeneration took place

\textsuperscript{6} Ibid., 248-253.

only in man’s spirit, and man’s flesh remained unchanged as it was before regeneration:

He has bestowed a new life, His uncreated life, upon those who believe in the salvation of the Lord Jesus and receive Him as their personal Savior. This is called “regeneration” or “new birth.” Though He cannot alter our flesh God gives us His life. Man’s flesh remains as corrupt in those who are born anew as in those who are not. The flesh in a saint is the same as that in a sinner. In regeneration the flesh is not transformed.\(^8\)

Nee also suggested a union of the Holy Spirit and man’s spirit so that the two became one.

Nee writes:

God does not mean to distinguish between His Spirit and our Spirit. . . . Thus, the release of the spirit is the release of the human spirit as well as that of the Holy Spirit, who is in the spirit of man. Since the Holy Spirit and our spirit are joined into one (1 Cor. 6:17), they can be distinguished only in name, not in fact. And since the release of one means the release of both, others can touch the Holy Spirit whenever they touch our spirit. Thank God that inasmuch as you allow people to contact your spirit, you allow them to contact God. Your spirit has brought the Holy Spirit to man.\(^9\)

Gnostic Element in Nee’s Trichotomy

Gnosticism is a quest for secret knowledge and a disparaging of matter including devaluing physical and intellectual things. The Gnostic element is evident in Nee’s trichotomy in which the flesh points to sin and only the spirit is good. Nee said, “The Bible refers to the flesh as the composite of the unregenerated soul and the physical life, though more often than not it points to sin which is in the body.”\(^10\) John Murray especially warns Christians to be aware of such Gnostic impulse:

The body is not an appendage. The notion that the body is the prison--house of the soul and that the soul is incarcerated in the body is pagan in origin and anti-biblical; it is

\(^{8}\) Ibid., 76.


\(^{10}\) Nee, The Spiritual Man, 52.
Platonic, and has no resemblance points to the Biblical conception. The Bible throughout represents the dissolution of the body and separation of body and spirit as an evil, as the retribution and wages of sin, and, therefore, as disruption of that integrity which God established at creation.\textsuperscript{11}

**Eschatology**

To ecumenical leaders, soteriology was understood in a sociological sense through social reform or revolution and therefore the Christian mission was to build the kingdom of God on earth. But for the conservatives, soteriology was understood in a traditional spiritual sense through preaching the Gospel and therefore the mission was to call people to repent and prepare for the kingdom to come. These two trends of thought continued to exist in China after 1949.\textsuperscript{12} Due to their different views on the present world, eschatology was very different between the ecumenicals and conservatives.

**Premillennial Eschatology**

Premillennialism has been the dominant view among Chinese churches since the church began in China, which emphasizes a literal fulfillment of the one thousand peaceful year reign on earth by Christ. The second coming of Christ consists of two stages: a secret rapture removing the church before the seven year period of Great Tribulation, and then the coming of Christ with His saints to set up the kingdom for a thousand years, when Satan will be bound, and the temple will be rebuilt and sacrificial system reinstituted for memorial purpose. After the millennium, Satan will be released to deceive the nations again. Christ will then destroy His enemies, raise and judge the unbelieving dead. The final state will then be


\textsuperscript{12} Lee, 276.
ushed in with the creation of a new heaven and a new earth.

Social Influences on Eschatological Views

After Japanese invasion in 1937, China was in wars constantly until the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949. During the war years, the last judgment day and the second coming of Christ was the common preaching emphasis of Chinese evangelists. Their premillennial eschatological view brought comfort and hope to people living in crises.

Ecclesiology

Protestant Christianity landed in China through western powers. Therefore the traditional dislike of the foreign religion and anti-imperialistic feelings became the decisive factors in the development of Chinese ecclesiology.

Anti-Denominationalism Mindset

There were several reasons resulting in the common anti-denominational mindset among Chinese churches. First, denominationalism was not welcome by Chinese churches simply because it was foreign. Secondly, after the general assembly of the Church of Christ in China in 1927, there was an agreement initiated among different church denominations to merge into a new organic church to make the evangelistic missions more effective. Thirdly, under pressures of the strong anti-imperialistic feelings in the 1920s, anti-denominationalism was the assurance of church indigenization to disconnect the Chinese Church from western powers. Fourthly, conservative church leaders promoted anti-denominationalism theologically and demonstrated it ecclesiastically. Watchman Nee’s Little Flock was one of the most successful examples in church indigenization.
Watchman Nee’s Boundary of Church

Nee believed that denominationalism was the first and foremost obstacle to a strong and indigenous Chinese church. His unique ecclesiology was built on the concept so-called “one church one locality”, which means each city can have at most one church. The idea was to preserve the unity of the church and also guarded against denominationalism for having a church covering larger than a locality:

Such a place is a scriptural “city” and is the boundary of a local church, . . . A province is not a scriptural unit of locality; neither is a district . . . It was not God’s plan to unite the churches of different places into one church, but to have a separate church in each place. . . . He does not recognize any fellowship of His children on a basis narrower, or wider, than that of a locality. 

Nee’s ecclesiology denied denominations and all churches other than his Little Flock as the biblical Church, which eventually made his Little Flock the largest denomination, with no fellowship with any other churches.

Apologetics

Christianity in China has to deal with two essential problems: indigenization of the church and modernization of the nation. First, China has had many folk religions in her long-standing culture; how and why should China accept Christianity, a foreign religion? Apologetics therefore needs to handle the cultural conflict between western theological thought and Chinese tradition. Second, religion has never gained a high social standing in China, for it is generally believed that religion is against science, an obstacle to civilization.


Apologetics therefore also needs to prove the significance of Christianity in social civilization.

Pragmatic Approach

During the 1920s, China was in the dilemma between modernization and total westernization. On the one hand, China realized that the cause of national weakness was because of the traditional conservative ideology and therefore modernization was a must, but on the other hand, China did not want to abandon her long-standing culture. Christianity, representing a western culture squeezing into the dilemma, was presented as something superior to the old society, but also needed a common ground to harmonize with Chinese culture. Therefore, the apologetic focus was to demonstrate the compatibility between the theological reality in Christ and the Confucian emphasis on human relationships in the cosmic order.\(^{15}\) The liberal wing presented Jesus as the revolutionist who brought transforming strength and new civilization to mankind. The conservative, recognizing both Christ’s divine and human natures, presented Jesus as the example for Christians living in crisis. Apologetics of both wings, though different in the ontological interpretation of Jesus, were the same in emphasizing the functional dimension of Jesus.

Cultural Evidential Approach

To Christians in the ecumenical wing, a major apologetic task was to reduce the traditional dislike of foreign religion through indigenization, which means to present Christianity as a new Chinese religion by cultural contextualization of Christianity. One

example is to identify similar Christian thought in Chinese culture. Such cultural evidential apologetics has a long history. We discussed the early work of Leibniz in proving similar Christian thought in Chinese natural theology. In recent years, Zhiming Yuan demonstrated the finding of similar Christian thought in the famous Daoist book, Lao Zi. Other more radical approaches include identifying biblical events mystically hidden in Chinese symbolic characters. For instance, the Chinese word “ship” (船), can be interpreted symbolically as “eight people” (八口) on a “boat” (舟), miraculously matching the story of Noah’s Ark.

The cultural evidential approach was not acceptable for the conservatives. For them Christianity was supra-cultural and cultural adaption of Christianity was unbiblical. Indigenization was nothing to do with culture but aimed at church administration. Wang Mingdao’s Christian Tabernacle and Watchman Nee’s Little Flock, were examples of such indigenous churches, administrated purely under Chinese leadership.

Scientific Evidential Approach

Religion to Chinese has always been understood in a mystical sense. It is subjective and irrational. The Chinese word “secret” (秘) shares the same root as the word “god” (神). Dao, the main theme in Daoism, is “Dao that can be described is not the universal and eternal Dao. Name that can be named is not the universal and eternal Name.” (道可道, 非常道. 名可名, 非常名.) Similarly in Buddhism, indescriableness is often emphasized: “‘Unsayable, unsayable, it becomes wrong once spoken,’ said Buddha.” (佛曰: 不可說, 不可說, 一說即是錯.) In the Chinese concept, god is understood as a secret being, nothing man

16 Yuan, Zhiming, Lao Tzu and the Bible, trans. Shangyu Chen (Bloomington, IN: AuthorHouse, 2010).
can think or talk about rationally. Therefore, religion is purely a belief, never subject to logical justification. However, when Christianity is claimed as objective truth, it faces immediately the rational challenge of science, the only measure recognized with high respect among Chinese intellectuals. Evidential apologetics through science is very welcome among Chinese evangelicals. For example, Josh McDowell’s *Evidence that Demands a Verdict* has been very popular among Chinese.

**Ethics**

There are three schools of ethical systems. The deontological ethical system advocates that man should do his duties for duty sake. The teleological ethical system emphasizes the situational value to man’s behavior. The existential ethical system focuses on the personal dimension of intent in doing things\(^\text{17}\). In Chinese churches, there is a sharp contrast between the liberals and the conservatives in their adopted ethical systems.

**Social Responsibility**

The liberal wing’s emphasis on the social involvement was based on the theological ethics to build the kingdom of God on earth. Christianity won a good reputation in social reconstruction through establishing Christian hospitals and universities in the 1920s and 1930s. Christian ethics emphasized the social service with Christ’s love and the establishment of biblical social order. It is evident that this teleological approach has always been the emphasis in the liberal wing of Chinese Christianity. For example, the theological construction campaign promoted by Bishop K. H. Ting in 1998, the leader of Three Self

Patriotic Movement, again focused on the replacement of the doctrine of Justification by faith with the doctrine of justification by love, or salvation by good works.\textsuperscript{18}

Subjective Pietism

To the conservatives, redemption was purely personal and nothing to do with the society. The task of evangelism was to save the person’s soul, not the society. Ethical emphasis was either on following the Bible to do one’s duties, in a deontological sense, or living a godly life and seeking for a closer relationship to God, in an existential sense. The other-worldly mindset excludes anything teleological from being true of ethical measures, for the world and anything belonging to it is evil, doomed to be destroyed in God’s wrath and therefore worth nothing for Christians to care about.

\textsuperscript{18} Xinyuan Li, \textit{Theological Construction or Destruction}? (Streamwood, IL: Christian Life Press, 2004), 23.
CHAPTER 4
MODERN CHINESE CHURCH IN THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA

Chinese churches or Bible study groups can be seen in almost all major campuses, large cities, and their satellite cities in the United States. Churches in China are also rapidly growing. China is believed to become the home to the largest Christian population on the globe soon. In this chapter, we introduce the development of the modern Chinese churches in China\(^1\) and in the United States\(^2\), and then examine their relationship to early churches in the 1930s.

Church in China

After 1949, the Chinese Communist government launched the Three-Self patriotic Movement (TSPM) to reform the Protestant church. The Three-Self idea, stands for self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating, aiming at cutting off all relationships of Chinese churches from their western support and requiring churches to submit themselves only to the leadership of the Communist Party. In 1954, TSPM was formally organized and all churches were required to join. Church leaders who refused to join were put in jail as counter-revolutionaries. By 1958, the number of churches in Shanghai was reduced to eight


from two hundred plus, and reduced to four from sixty six in Beijing. In August 1966 the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution broke out. Temples and churches were destroyed, bibles were burned, and all visible Christian activities were eliminated by the Red Guards of the Revolution. Without pastors and churches, small groups of Christians began to form by lay leaders underground and they became a new kind of Chinese church – house churches.

After the death of Mao Zedong and the downfall of the leftist “Gang of Four” in 1976, Deng Xiaoping took over control as a strong reformer. In 1979 TSPM was restored and underground house church activities began to surface. With the growth of house churches, more people heard the Gospel and became believers. In 1982, the number of Christians had grown from less than one million in 1949 to over thirty five million. However when house churches were enjoying their revival, Document No 19 on religious policy was issued by the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on March 31, 1982, forbidding Christian activities other than those designated by TSPM. Many churches were forced to go underground, but also many joined TSPM. The number of TSPM churches grew from six hundred in 1982 to five thousand in 1987. In spite of the pressures from the government, house churches are still growing rapidly.

**Chinese Church in the United States**

In 1848 when gold mines were discovered in California, tens of thousands of Chinese immigrants came to the United States, largely from the Canton province of China. The immigrant wave continued due to the Western Pacific railroad project started in 1862, attracting more laborers from China. Targeting Chinese immigrants, American denominations planted churches in big cities like San Francisco and Vancouver. In 1892, there were eleven denominations having Chinese missions. Seven Chinese churches were
planted in the United States, and three in Canada. In today’s China town in Northern California, there are still some old Chinese churches representing this group. Through Chinese pastors emigrating from Asia, Chinese churches were gradually taken over or established by Chinese ministers. In 1941, the Chinese population in Canada was 35,000, 10,000 were Christians, half of them belonging to the Chinese United Church, a denomination developed from Presbyterians and Methodists. In 1931, there were sixty four Chinese churches in the United States, six in Canada.

Since 1960, a massive student influx from Taiwan and Hong Kong greatly impacted Chinese churches. Christians among them found jobs after graduation and stayed, and started Chinese Bible study groups on almost all major campuses in the United States. When more and more students from similar backgrounds joined them and became Christians, the Bible study groups grew into churches. This type of church represents the majority of Chinese churches today in the United States. Many of them remain non-denominational and are led by lay leaders without full-time ministers with formal theological training.

Foreign Chinese students before the 90s were largely from Taiwan and Hong Kong. This was changed after the Tiananmen Square Massacre in China, so called the June 4th incident in 1989. The incident resulted in the passing of the Chinese Student Protection Act signed by President George H. W. Bush in October 1993, to allow over 80,000 Chinese students in the United States with temporary student visa to apply for permanent residency. Relatives of those students protected by the Act later also came to the United States, stimulating another wave of massive immigration. The June 4th incident had a great impact on Chinese churches: churches started special ministries targeting these massive waves of students and immigrants from China; consequently many young professionals and scholars
came to the United States, became Christians, and committed themselves to full-time ministry.

**Analysis and Comparison**

Churches established before 1949 were nearly all destroyed during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 to 1976, and therefore there exists virtually no connection between the churches in China today and the early churches. Nevertheless, churches in China today are eventually resurrected from the old, for it is evident that the spirit of the early church has never died. The theological reconstruction emphasis today in the TSPM circle is a repetition of the social gospel promoted by the liberal wing of the early church, while the anti-theology and subjective pietistic ideologies of the conservative wing of the early church remain dominant among today’s house churches. This also indicates the success of the TSPM church policy enforced by the government, which did not stop the growth of the church in terms of numbers, but did successfully block the western theological influences and in turn hindered the development of Chinese theology.

The similarity between the modern Chinese churches in the United States and the house churches in China is also evident; many of the Chinese churches in the States are non-denominational and led by lay leaders, just like the house churches in China. There are two reasons for this pattern of church leadership. First, the majority of modern Chinese churches in the United States began as Bible study groups established by Christian students from Taiwan and Hong Kong. When a Bible study group is converted to a church, there is always a debate about whether the church must have a theologically trained minister, for the church has been well taken care of by the lay leaders. The same debate takes over the question of denomination; the church remains independent naturally as the Bible study group before,
why bother to join a denomination now? Second, those lay leaders who founded the early Chinese churches in the United States were the fruits of the evangelistic work of those conservative Christians who fled to Taiwan or Hong Kong after 1949. In other words, the spirit of Christian conservatives in the early 1930s has never died, and was passed on through Christians who fled to Taiwan or Hong Kong, and gave birth to the next generation of Christians and churches, and through it this same conservative spirit was further passed on to the United States and all over the world.

In summary, Chinese theological thought formed in the 1930s has basically remained unchanged. The TSPM churches in China today adopted the same liberal theological thought formed in the 1930s and continued their emphasis on church indigenization through social service. On the other hand, the house churches in China and Chinese churches in the United States today inherited the conservative theological thought of the 1930s and remained indifferent to theology and denomination. It is sad to conclude that, having been through various social conditions, the Chinese Church has stopped at one place in theological development. The conservatives still emphasize the existential perspective of the Gospel which leads to personal salvation and individualism, while the liberals still emphasize the situational perspective of the Gospel which leads to corporate salvation and legalism. Both have the problem of truncated theology, lacking the normative perspective of the Gospel – God centered exegesis with a sound theological foundation.
CHAPTER 5

CHALLENGES OF THE CHINESE CHURCH

We have surveyed so far the history of the Chinese Church and the development of Chinese Christian thought; however analyzing the problems of Chinese churches is not simple, it requires a careful evaluation on the influences of both indigenous and western theological thoughts under cultural, social and historical conditions. In this chapter, we summarize the challenges from three perspectives. From the normative perspective, we examine the problems caused by epistemological biases formed in tradition. From the situational perspective, we focus on the theological issues developed under different social conditions. From the existential perspective, we discuss parenting challenges in the postmodern age.

Epistemological Biases Formed in Tradition

His disciples asked him, “Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?” “Neither this man nor his parents sinned,” said Jesus, “but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life” (John 9:2-3).

Epistemology, the way of understanding things, is highly related to culture. In Jewish tradition, severe disease reflects God’s punishment and is therefore closely related to sin. The question raised by the disciples exemplifies how the cultural epistemology influences understanding. When the disciples saw the blind man, their intuitive reflection immediately concluded with certainty that sin caused the tragedy; Jesus then opened their eyes as well, by pointing out their epistemological blind spot.
Epistemological bias is especially significant in Chinese because China has a long-standing culture heritage of tremendous richness and variety. Chinese orthodoxy of teachings had been formed through the times of the legendary emperors Yau (2357 B.C.) and Shun (2200 B.C.), Yu (legendary founder of Hsia Dynasty, 2100 B.C.), Tang (Shang Dynasty, 1600 B.C.), Wu (Chou Dynasty, 1050 B.C.) and well established by Confucius (500 B.C.). Since then this cultural epistemology has rooted itself deeply in the hearts of Chinese. It has not been changed even after thousands of years of political and cultural transformations from dynasty to dynasty, generation to generation. In this section, influences of Confucianism and Daoism, two of the most influential epistemological philosophies, are discussed.

Influence of Confucianism

Confucianism with its comprehensive structural principles formulated the Chinese ethical value system and became the official orthodoxy of social and political order. Comparatively, religion has never gained the same social position as Confucianism, because for most of the Chinese intellectuals, religion conflicts with modern science and therefore is a stumbling block to civilization, and discussions on Confucianism and its relationship to religion have been primarily focused on its rationalistic and agnostic nature. Confucius’ agnostic attitude in religion can be seen in some of his famous sayings: “The Master did not talk about extraordinary forces and disturbing spirits.” (子不語怪力亂神.) “While you do not know life, how can you know about death?” (不知生焉知死?) But Confucius also said: “Respect spiritual beings and keep at a distance from them.” (敬鬼神而遠之.) Confucius’ agnosticism does not disapprove religion, but rather it leaves plenty of room for religion to integrate with Confucianism. With temples almost everywhere in China, it is evident that religion has penetrated every level and aspect of Chinese social life. Honoring elders is an
essential virtue in Chinese culture, which includes both the honoring of living parents and the past ancestors; moreover, respecting the dead is the basis for good virtues. As said by Zengzi, a student of Confucius, “To pay careful attention to one’s parents’ funerary rites, then people will have good virtue.” (慎終追遠, 民德歸厚矣.) C. K. Yang pointed out that the reasons that religion maintains a strong supportive but subordinate relationship to Confucianism are 1) the presence of religious elements in Confucianism, 2) the separation between ethics and religion that forms their mutual dependency, and 3) the organizational weakness of Chinese religions.\(^1\) Studies indicate that before Confucius, Heaven was perceived as a personified supreme force controlling the destiny of everything, rewarding good and punishing evil. After the time of Confucius in the Warring States periods, Heaven was gradually perceived as an impersonal natural force of rules. Confucius’ famous saying, “Death and life have their pre-determined destiny; riches and honor depend upon Heaven” (生死有命, 富貴在天) recognizes the traditional supernatural concepts of Heaven and fate. On the one hand Confucius exalts human effort in pursuing perfection, but on the other hand he recognizes human limitation. However Confucius does not let his frustration end up in fatalism, but rather he takes the additional rational step to know one’s fate, and claims that one should know his fate by the age of fifty. Confucius did not make it clear about how to discover one’s fate; perhaps there had been too many ways to search destiny during his time. He himself devoted his later life to Yi-Jing (易經), the most famous mystical book in ancient China.

Religion in general directs society with its ethical value system; however, this is

not true for China. Chinese have never felt the need to obtain ethical guidance elsewhere, because comprehensive ethical principles have existed in the Chinese culture. Therefore Chinese do not expect religion to provide ethical standards, which is evident in most Chinese folk religions that have no ethical systems at all, characterized only by the worship of ancient heroes or studies of fate. Religion contributes only to the ethical power that encourages men to be good, while tradition actually defines the ethical framework. This is why religion never conflicts with Confucianism, but supports Confucianism with religious sanctioning power. Religion stays in the mystical realm of the Chinese mind, formulating a supernatural background for the rational ethical system defined in tradition.

The deontological tradition of non-Christian ethics focuses basically on the normative perspective of ethics, considering ethics essentially as obligation. Different from the teleological tradition, in which the goal of ethics is to gain pleasure or happiness, deontological ethics tends to disdain the pursuing of personal happiness, instead encouraging self-sacrifice. Such a self-denial attitude also distinguishes itself from existential ethics, in which ethics is an expression of inner self inclinations. Confucius is essentially a deontological ethicist, with his teaching emphasizing the duty of man in following the principles of Heaven. As all non-Christian systems, Confucianism is expressed in the unbalanced assertions between rationalism and irrationalism. On the one hand Confucianism tries to rationally generalize principles to cover all ethical aspects, but on the other hand the rational search ends up with the irrational worship of the supernaturally unknown.

The moral framework of Confucianism developed an epistemological bias in Chinese Christian thought. For instance, Chinese are too familiar with “honoring your parents” to grasp its biblical meaning from the fifth Commandment. When looking at the
term “honor”, Chinese will intuitively reflect on hundreds of detailed principles and stories from the Confucian Classic of Filial Piety (孝經), the Twenty-Four Filial Exemplars (二十四孝), and many other ancient books. As Chinese, we thought we had known the fifth Commandment well, until we encountered the Jesus’ teaching in Matthew 10:37, “Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me,” then we started panicking about the apparent contradiction. Chinese Christians especially need to be aware of cultural reflections in order to learn true Christian ethics from Scripture; otherwise Christianity may easily lead to moralism or legalism if the epistemological bias is neglected in context.

Influence of Daoism

Daoism emphasizes the harmony between humanity and the cosmos, health and longevity, and *wu wei* (action without action) [無為]. The concept of Dao is the same in both Daoism and Confucianism, meaning the eternal order of the universe. When man finds the way to synchronize himself with the universal principle, everything will naturally follow its path and therefore no human effort is necessary. On the contrary, if one behaves against Dao, everything will fall apart. Dao is the One of all and in all, and is often used together or interchangeably with Heaven. Daoism distinguishes itself from Confucianism by emphasizing the mystical realm while Confucianism focusing on the rational realm.

Watchman Nee in his “Sit, Walk, Stand” said, “We have sought to make it clear that Christian experience does not begin with walking, but with sitting. . . . nothing is so hurtful to the life of a Christian as acting.” This emphasis on the inner voice of intuition rather than the outer actions resulting from logical reasoning and planning is exactly the essential belief of *wu wei* in Daoism: “Let things go on their own way, not interfering, not imposing one’s will on nature, letting things happen of their own accord, not trying to reform
the world, not trying to “improve” the world, but simply accepting things as they are.”

Wang Mingdao, with the same emphasis as Nee on the inner self pietism, formulated details about how to live as a new converted person. To him ethics, Dao-De (道徳) in Chinese, is a combined concept between Chinese Dao and De; Dao is God’s Word and De is good conduct. Therefore ethics means performing virtuous conduct according to God’s Word. Wang’s ethical emphasis is also on the inner life of the individual.

The highest state of Daoism is described as a perfect peace through personal isolation. Lao Zi said, “People [live so close that they] can hear one another’s dogs barking and roosters crowing, but never communicate with one another all their lives.” This Daoist epistemological element is evident in the conservative wing of Chinese Christian thought. Watchman Nee, Wang Mingdao and most of the conservative Christian leaders were all very negative toward social involvement. Their evangelistic focus is on souls not the world. To them this world is evil, far beyond redemption, to be destroyed in God’s wrath, and therefore there is nothing Christians can do or should do. This pessimistic world view explains their unanimous agreement on the premillennial position in apocalyptic eschatology, which emphasizes the hope in the heavenly world to come.

In summary, the Daoist influence is twofold. Its inner emphasis on the individual leads to mystical pietism, while its other-worldly emphasis results in neglecting social involvement. The epistemological bias introduced in Daoism causes difficulties in exegesis and Christian practice. For instance, “Do not love this world” is commonly interpreted in

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3 Covell, 201.
Chinese churches with a very negative attitude toward all social activities. Christianity may easily lead to mysticism or anti-socialism if this epistemological bias is not well managed.

Theological Biases Developed in Sociocultural Conditions

Different theological thoughts have entered China through a variety of channels since the early 1900s. They were further developed under social conditions mingled with cultural influences. Their influences are discussed from three perspectives in exegesis (normative), world view (situational) and Christian practice (existential).

Anti-Intellectual Exegesis

Anti-intellectualism has its origin from western pietism in the late seventeenth century, when the Church decayed to a lifeless organization. Philip Jacob Spener, the founder of Lutheran Pietism, published his *Pia Desideria* (Holy Desires) in 1675 as a remedy to the dying Church. He believed that the reason for the decay was due to the absence of a true living faith. He therefore promoted Bible-reading, which shifted the emphasis from the theory of Christianity to the practice of Christian living. The target of the 1890s world mission is “the evangelization of the world in our generation.” During western revivals, anti-intellectualism was introduced to China through missionaries who believed that traditional theological training would only bring religious appearance but no spiritual essence. The revivals resulted from pietism, including the later Methodist and the Keswick movements in the nineteenth century, unintentionally accepted the anti-intellectual exegetical method, and devalued the rational thinking in practicing how to maintain a close relationship with God.⁴

Under such pietistic emphasis, Watchman Nee’s anti-intellectual exegetical methodology was overwhelmingly accepted among Chinese churches. Nee was influenced by the Brethren tradition and attended the Keswick Convention in 1938. His trichotomist view of man devalues reasoning because logical thinking belongs to the inferior level of soul which has no direct connection to God. Nee wrote:

Our only hope is that the Lord may blaze a way out, destroying the outward man (the soul) to such a degree that the inward man may come out and be seen. . . . Doctrine does not have much use, nor does theology. What is the use of mere mental knowledge of the Bible if the outward man remains unbroken? Only the person through whom God can come is useful.\(^5\)

Anti-intellectualism also leads to a tendency of seeking God through secret channels, bypassing human intellectual capability purposely. The door is thus wide opened to mysticism. Such influences have been especially observed in charismatic teachings, raising great concerns in Chinese churches.

Gnostic World View

Gnosticism is a mix of eastern religion, Greek philosophy and Christianity. Gnosticism maintains the dualism of good and evil, and follows the Greek concept of Aristotelian scale of being to categorize the world with beings at different levels. The influence of Gnosticism, in which the spirit is exalted above both soul and body, is evident in trichotomy. Trichotomy was originally developed under the great influences of ancient Greek philosophies and welcomed by Greek or Alexandrian Church Fathers of the early churches. After Apollinaris employed it in a manner impinging on the perfect humanity of Jesus and

was condemned as a heresy, trichotomy was gradually discredited.⁶

The Gnostic ideology of devaluing the physical world is embedded in Chinese culture, which also explains the overwhelming acceptance of Nee’s trichotomist view of man among Chinese churches. Nee’s teaching about salvation only occurring in the spiritual part of man further enhanced the negative attitude toward social involvement, which has always been a hidden problem of Chinese churches.

Pragmatic Value System

Pragmatism was introduced by Charles Peirce. The primary goal is to classify human thoughts through observing derived actions, which provides a direct access to the inner Cartesian mind through established behaviors.⁷ Peirce emphasized the importance of consequences of thought, for they constitute the meaning of the conception. His paper “How to Make Our Ideas Clear,” published in 1878, gained public attention twenty five years later, when William James promoted the principles of Peirce’s pragmatic theory. James, as a radical empiricist, went beyond Peirce’s pragmatic theory in determining meaning to discerning truth, advocating that true ideas must work and lead to something that has cash values. Preferring functional measures to static ones, he believed the right of belief without objective evidence, as long as it works for the individual in bringing peace and positive momentum.

John Dewey, the most influential pragmatist, introduced pragmatism to China


during his two year stay in China between 1919 and 1921. Under the influence of James’ pragmatism and Charles Darwin’s theory of evolution, Dewey found progress in the resolution of organic conflicts between individuals and their social and natural environments. According to Dewey, problem-solving mechanisms are developed through habits transcending from routine adaption to environment, and knowledge must be functional, that is, be able to solve problems. Therefore, the distinction between knowing and doing, facts and values no longer exists. Such emphasis on the action part of a thinking process results in the elevation of science as the clearest and the only methodology in doing things.

The influence of Dewey on China was expanded by Hu Shih, a former student of Dewey at Columbia University and a famous scholar in Chinese history. Hu’s famous words, “You cannot beat something with nothing” and “Discuss more problems and fewer doctrines” contoured the pragmatic atmosphere of China in the 1920s. When the nation in turmoil had no luxury in reflecting metaphysics, neither did the Church have time for doctrines.

Besides the social condition reflecting the value of pragmatism, its impact on churches was further enhanced by missionaries sent to China. According to M. Searle Bates, those missionaries sent to China from 1900 and 1950, took only two to three years of biblical or religious courses, far less trained than regular American ministers in biblical and theological education. They were all pragmatists, devoting their lives through preaching the Gospel to bring people to Christ, but leaving little doctrinal teachings for Chinese churches to lay sound theological foundations.  

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The dichotomy between ethics and religion in Chinese thought, as discussed previously, indicates that religion has never gained its social position equivalent to cultural traditions which defined practical values. For Chinese, religion is in the mystical realm primarily providing spiritual but not practical need. This is why “Christianity is not a religion” is emphasized in all kinds of evangelistic strategies to Chinese. Telling Chinese that Christianity is not a religion makes it more attractive, because people have far more material than spiritual needs. Unless Christianity can be proven to contribute social values, it remains in its religious category with an insignificant supportive role to the society. Pragmatism, under such cultural environment, becomes an important vehicle to convince Chinese to upgrade and reclassify Christianity into the practical world. From the church responses to the May Fourth Movement in the 1920s, we can see that both the liberal and the conservative wings, though very different in approaches, reflected the same pragmatic ideology in promoting practical values by asserting Christianity as a solution to the national crisis.

All Chinese know the saying by Deng Xiaoping, the former president of China, “A cat is a good cat as long as it can catch a mouse, no matter whether the cat is black or white.” This pragmatic tradition has been always in the Chinese culture; it is not the nature but the function of the being that is important. This ideology is applied to many circumstances: it is not the nature of Christianity that is important but its function in society; it is not the nature of God that is important but God’s relationship to me. The problem of pragmatism resides in its emphasis on the applications while devaluing the doctrines. When this ideology is embedded in Chinese culture, rooted in Chinese Christian thought, echoed with special social conditions, and now appraised in the current popular culture, pragmatism becomes a serious problem in Chinese churches.
Concerns for the Next Generation

Christian parenting has been a great challenge in this transitional era from the modern to the postmodern generation. For Chinese Christians, it is even more complicated with the added complexity of the cultural dimension.

Chinese Parenting Tradition

Chinese parents have high expectations of their children. They expect their children to achieve excellence in academics, and other professional areas such as music. Recently, the Chinese parenting stereotype was dramatically introduced to the West and raised much attention through Amy Chua’s book Battle Hymn of the Tiger Mother published in 2011. Many debates centered around the question of whether the Chinese way of parenting is appropriate or superior.

Traditional Chinese parenting is based on the assumption that the parents know what is best for their children. As exemplified in ancient Chinese marriage, the practice of arranged marriage based on the parents’ decision has a history of thousands of years. The methodology to implement such parenting is through the Chinese tradition of absolute obedience to parents, in which the parents’ authority over their children is unquestionable. Another aspect of this that makes this parenting style successful has to do with the children’s response. Chinese are taught that there are no bad parents, which means whatever parents do is for their child’s benefit. This traditional teaching implies that there is a mutual obligation between the child and the parents. The parents sacrifice tremendously to raise the child, and therefore it is appropriate for the child to respond with obedience, or should even sacrifice in return. In the well-known Chinese story of Master Mengzi (372-289 B.C.), “Meng-Mu-San-Qian” (Mengzi’s mother moved three times) [孟母三遷], Mengzi’s mother moved to different
places three times to find a good environment for Mengzi’s education. The principle in this old story is still actively practiced among Chinese in the United States. It is very common that a Chinese family moves several times for a good school district, along with the child’s growth from the elementary school, middle school, to high school. This high expectation has a consequence for the parenting model. There are two ways to achieve excellence: one is through encouragement that leads to the natural development of the child’s potential, and the other is through military style discipline that stretches the child to his limit. Chinese believe in the latter philosophy. As the old Chinese saying goes, “Man can be the man on the top of all men only if he has endured the worst pain of all pains.” (吃得苦中苦, 方為人上人.) The “man on the top of all men” is the Chinese definition of excellence, while the “no gain without pain” scenario is the way to achieve such excellence. When I was in high school, students were admitted to schools according to their scores on the annual national high school examination. Students could choose to retake the examination the following year if they failed the test or did not achieve a score high enough for admission to a preferred school. My classmate told me his story of attending a preparatory school due to his previous underachievement on the annual test. It was described as a horrible year for him, of “no day and no night”. At this special training school all students lived at the school, virtually a prison isolated from the outside world. Students were forced to keep reminding themselves that they were losers, and had no right to live with dignity. The teachers introduced themselves as ambassadors from hell, to fix their problems so that they could succeed the examination and go back to the human world next year. Amy Chua’s book does not surprise Chinese, but is very scary for most American readers by just reading excerpts, which describe how she used threats, humiliation, and various inhumane means to force her seven
year old daughter to play a difficult piano piece. I believe it is an extreme case of Chinese parenting, for most of the Chinese parents I know, do not go that far. Nevertheless it faithfully illustrated all the cultural elements of Chinese parenting discussed above. For many readers, the book at first glance seems ridiculous, but many questions emerge later as a person reconsiders the basics of parenting. What is the best way to help a child to realize his or her potential? Why can’t the military style training be an option? The world’s most wanted criminal, Osama Bin Laden could not have been killed except by navy SEALs, a team best known for its brutal training to ensure excellence.

This Chinese way of parenting children has been practiced for thousands of years, but not without difficulties, especially in recent decades after postmodernism has gradually influenced Chinese society. Postmodernism promotes the value of the individual and totally denies objective truth or authority. Many Chinese parents have experienced frustration with the traditional ways to raise their children and then wondering why the old way they had been subjected to no longer works on the next generation. Many gave up the Chinese way--parenting with authority, and turned to the American way--parenting as friends. Amy Chua’s book drew not only the attention from the West, but excitingly stimulated and encouraged Chinese society to regain their faith in the old parenting model.

The Loss of the Next Generation

It is evident in the United States that young Christians raised in traditional Chinese Christian families are losing their faith as they get in college. Surveys show that major complaints fall into two categories: 1) Chinese churches view success just as the world does and young people feel pressured to meet high expectations. 2) Chinese churches and families promote obedience and filial piety, which makes young people think their parents are
insensitive to their feelings. ⁹ As discussed previously, Chinese have an epistemological bias due to the separation between religion and ethics. We may bring our children to church every Sunday, but once we leave the church, we go back to our Chinese ethical system to raise our children accordingly. We may expect our children’s academic excellence to be exactly the same as non-Christian Chinese parents, and the only thing distinguishing us as Christians is that we also require our children to attend the church regularly. Most of us became the first generation of Chinese Christians by God’s grace via fighting through the cultural and historical barriers. How can we help our next generation when their Christian faith is now jeopardized?

CHAPTER 6

THEOLOGICAL BASED RECOMMENDATION FOR THE CHINESE CHURCH

We have surveyed the Chinese Church, including the history, culture, practices, and problems. Among all the aspects we have discussed, one characterization standing out is the anti-theology ideology. Biblical exegesis, theological studies, and Christian ethics all deviate from Christian orthodoxy because of this negative view of theology. In this chapter, we will present the recommendation, Covenant Theology, as a remedy targeting those problems. The logic flow starts with the question of why we need theology, followed by why Covenant Theology is the choice, and then what the Covenant Theology is, and finally we discuss some applications.

Theology and Scripture

The dominant anti-theology position in Chinese churches is not without reason. Besides cultural and historical factors, Chinese Christians devalue theology because of doubting its necessity and having skepticism toward theological formulation.

Necessity of Theology

Scripture is given a high value as the highest authority in Chinese churches, but theology is generally considered as unnecessary, impractical or even dangerous. Theology is unnecessary because Scripture is sufficient. Theology is impractical because it has a western origin. Theology is dangerous because anything added on the top of Scripture may distort the truth of the word of God.
John Frame answered the first question. “Theology is the application of Scripture, by persons, to every area of life. Why then, do we need theology in addition to Scripture? . . . because we need to apply Scripture.”¹ Frame emphasizes the purpose of the edification of theology and its subjective perspective to learning and application to the individual. Different kinds of theologies provide different ways of teaching how to apply the Scripture. For example, exegetical theology helps us to understand particular passages in Scripture; biblical theology teaches the history of God in dealing with people; systematic theology organizes the Scripture by topics; historical theology studies the theology in the history of churches in order to better apply biblical teachings today; practical theology provides answers to a particular application question of Scripture.

Influences of Theological Formation

The Bible contains a diversity of topics. Selectivity is therefore necessary to reduce exegetical summaries from thematic analysis, historical analysis and literary analysis into a relatively narrow and coherent theological formulation. Contextualization is also necessary to reshape Bible contents into acceptable forms of translation or metaphors to a particular target audience. Three influences on selectivity and contextualization in theological formation are heritage, present representations and private judgment.² Examples of heritage include confessions, traditions, and catechisms. Examples of present representations are church courts or books which help to determine orthodoxy for the church.

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² Richard L. Pratt, Introduction to Theological Studies (Charlotte, NC: Reformed Theological Seminary, 2003, class notes, lectures 13-18), 81-123.
Private judgment is the personal conviction, which is relative isolation from other influences. It is true that human factors are involved in the formulation of theology. However, denying theology is breaking ourselves from history, our community, and even our personal judgment, which makes us a homeless individual that could make more mistakes than those who give a high value to theology. To choose a good theological system is therefore very important.

Covenant Theology as the Choice

After confirming the necessity of theology, we have to consider which theological system is good for Chinese churches. The soundness of a theological system can be measured by its balance among three theological sources: heritage, present representations and private judgment. We now evaluate our recommendation for Covenant Theology, based on the soundness of the theology itself and also its capability in mitigating problems specific to Chinese churches.

Balanced Heritage

Tradition has been considered essential in the Catholic Church. In the Council of Trent (1545-1564), tradition was reconfirmed as having the same authority as Scripture. In the Catholic belief in the dual sources of Christian life, tradition is a separate and distinct source of revelation to supplement Scripture. Tradition is necessary, for Scripture does not cover everything and is silent on certain issues. Tradition is believed to have the origin of oral teachings of apostles not written in Scripture, and therefore is equally authentic as Scripture.

Since the Reformation, the authority of Church traditions has been challenged. Sola Scriptura requires that tradition step down to leave Scripture as the only authority. But
Luther’s reformation was by no means against tradition; Luther maintained a positive view on the value of Church tradition. He rejected church fathers as equally authentic with the Scripture, but he also valued ancient creeds and even described the Apostle’s Creed as the Gospel. Reformers after Luther gradually turned more radical; at the time of the Anabaptists, tradition was totally abandoned to ensure *Sola Scriptura*.

In church history, heritage has been either over emphasized in the Catholic Church or totally ignored by the Anabaptists. By overemphasizing tradition, the doctrine of *Sola Scriptura* can be jeopardized and the Church may lose the flexibility to deal with new situational issues. But by underemphasizing tradition, on the other hand, historical mistakes could also be repeated due to the absence of wisdom from past centuries of teachings through the Holy Spirit, which is exactly the case for the Chinese Church.

The Anti-Theology Tradition

A common understanding of theology in the Chinese Church is that theology was developed based on western tradition, which frames the Bible with human tradition and therefore violates *Sola Scriptura*. Moreover, even if theological assistance is needed in organizing biblical truth, it needs to be redeveloped according to the Chinese culture. This dominant view is represented by the suggestion of Cheng Jingyi, secretary of the China Continuation Committee, proposing a two-step approach for church development:

Step 1: Western Christ – Western Culture = Essential Christ
Step 2: Essential Christ + Chinese Culture = Chinese Christianity

Wang Mingdao has advocated for the supreme authority of the Bible and the

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apostolic church as the only valid church model. He did not accept any church traditions that had no explicit biblical foundation. He said: “The reason why I do not accept these traditions, is because when I was learning the Gospel truth, I did not attend a theological seminary, nor read any theological book. I only repeatedly read the New Testament and the Old Testament.”

This view is dangerous because focusing exclusively on the personal community has a tendency to lead the church toward idiosyncracies and errors. The correct understanding of *Sola Scriptura* is not to achieve *Sola Scriptura* by abandoning church tradition, which is the collection of wisdom learned in the past by which we can prevent ourselves from repeating errors. Choosing a good pedagogical strategy is essential for a healthy church to teach theological heritage systematically, so that people can receive the spiritual treasures from the work of the Holy Spirit left in the historical Church, and learn to live a balanced Christian life.

**Reformed Views**

Covenant Theology has a strong historical heritage in the Reformed tradition. The Reformed tradition traces its roots back to John Calvin in Geneva (1541-1564) and his influential works. John Knox and Puritans such as Thomas Cartwright and Richard Hooker influenced the Westminster Confession of Faith which represents the main tenets of Covenant Theology. John Knox also influenced the writing of the Scot’s Confession in 1560. The Reformed tradition in the States traces its roots to Colonial Puritans such as John Cotton, Solomon Stoddard and Cotton Mather, followed by Charles Hodge, and B.B. Warfield.

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4 Ronghong Lin, *Zhong Hua Zhen Xue 1900-1949* [Chinese Theology 50 years 1900-1949] (Hong Kong: Chinese Theological Research Center, 1998), 433.
Southern Presbyterians and Dutch Reformers influenced the formation of Westminster Seminary, from which Covenant seminary and Reformed seminary were developed.

Covenant Theology also has catechisms to summarize its doctrine. The Westminster shorter catechism follows a "from above" pedagogical strategy, which emphasizes the transcendent aspects of God and conveys an impersonal and principled faith. It begins with God and his eternal decrees, then historical salvation, and places personal salvation such as law, repentance, and outward means at the end. The Heidelberg catechism follows a different “from below" pedagogical strategy. It begins with personal hope, misery, redemption and then thankfulness. This approach is more human centered and emotionally oriented. These two catechisms complement each other well with their respective emphases; the "from above" approach is systematic and comprehensive, while the "from below” is emotional and practical.

Balanced Community Connection

The importance of a community connection in theological decision making is evident in the historical event of the Council at Jerusalem (Acts 15), in which guidelines for converted gentiles were determined. Catholics claim to maintain apostolic heritage and offer no salvation outside of the Church. After the Reformation, reformed churches started to disconnect from the Catholic Church. Further differences in doctrines among the separatists resulted in different denominations. Overemphasizing the community connection leads to extreme denominationalism, giving exclusive determination to the denomination represented by the officers, pastors, or theologians of the belonging community. But being totally against denominationalism can render the church to becoming an isolated theologian that relies on her own understanding of the Bible to make all decisions, which is the case for the Chinese
Church.

The Anti-Denominational Church Organization

The anti-denominational view has been dominant in Chinese churches since the early days, as discussed in Chapter 3. In the early Chinese Church in the 1920s, anti-denominationalism was a response to the overwhelming quest for church indigenization, to which denominationalism represents a connection with foreign churches and therefore is an obstacle to indigenization. For Chinese churches in the United States today, anti-denominationalism is a way to keep Chinese Christians with different theological backgrounds in one church. Though the social conditions of anti-denominationalism have changed over time, behind the scenes there is still the same ideology concerning denomination as either unnecessary or unbiblical.

The Bible teaches that present community should have both a formal and an informal influence on our theological formulations. The informal influence of friends is seen in Acts 18:26. The more official influence of courts of church is seen in Acts 15:6-29. The need of the involvement in a community is because human hearts are wicked and deceitful, and therefore we all need corrected vision and formal accountability through a community.

Reformed Views

The Reformed community relates to heritage with neither disregard nor enslavement. Presbyterian policy safeguards against either too much or too little power given to the present community. This form of government disperses authority among different entities. For example in the PCA, authority is vested in the Westminster standards, the Book of church order, General Assembly position papers, presbytery policies, judicial cases, common beliefs and practices.
Balanced Personal Judgment

Before the Reformation, private judgment had been forbidden. The Church was holding the right to interpret the Scripture with unquestionable authority. The Reformation advocated the priesthood of all men and stimulated the translations of the Bible. Later, radical Anabaptist movements completely divorced themselves from the ecclesiastical traditions of the Catholic Church and established new authoritarianism with its own community. Since the Enlightenment, the individual has been encouraged to find his own truth by rejecting traditional authority but relying on reason and empirical science. Chinese churches, under the influence of individualism, tend to the “just-me-and-my-Bible” myth.

The just-me-and-my-Bible Myth

The common anti-theology and anti-denominational ideology of the Chinese Church naturally leads to the “just-me-and-my-Bible” myth, which believes that the Bible and the Holy Spirit teaches me directly and grants the individual exclusive determination in theological formulation. John Frame pointed out that the “just-me-and-my-Bible” myth is “an act of disobedience and pride.”5 God gave teachers to the Church (Eph. 4:11) and Christians have an obligation to hear them. It is impossible for one individual to gain a complete knowledge of God. Interpretation and application of Scripture must be done through a hermeneutical community rather than by the individual.6 Theology is the corporate work of Christians in the Holy Spirit.


Reformed Views

Reformed practice is more balanced in treating personal judgment and its relationship to tradition and present community. It rejects the absolute authority of tradition and asserts Sola Scriptura, emphasizes private judgment but asserts Scripture being the final judge, and emphasizes the importance of tradition and present community but admits that they are error-prone because of the sinful nature of believers in misinterpreting the truth.

Covenant Theology as the Framework

After evaluating the history and characteristics of Covenant Theology and its effectiveness targeting the problems of Chinese churches, we now have a deeper look at its theological framework. Covenant Theology emphasizes the sovereignty of God, which requires man’s response with obedience. John Frame’s triad perspective of the lordship attributes is adopted here to discuss 1) God’s sovereignty and the supreme authority of His word, 2) His full control over His created world and 3) His covenant presence in man as His image.7

God’s Authority in His Word

God reveals Himself to us through His created nature and His spoken words. The former is called general revelation and the latter is called special revelation. According to Romans 1:20-21, God’s general revelation through His creation is a source of knowledge of God, which is clear enough for man to honor Him. However human sin makes man inevitably suppress the truth and misinterpret the general revelation. Therefore general

revelation is insufficient and special revelation is needed for men to understand the truth revealed in nature and God’s redemptive love. How to correctly interpret Scripture, the special revelation, is therefore crucial to Christians.

**God and His Word**

Scripture as God’s speech has three attributes: power, authority, and clarity.\(^8\) According to Romans 1:16, the Gospel has the power to save those who believe, which means that God’s word does not only provide instruction, but also power to enable those who obey it to experience the promised transformation. Scripture is God’s breath (2 Tim. 3:16), and therefore has the supreme authority. Jesus said he who keeps His commandments is he who loves Him (John 14:21). In the Great Commission (Matt. 28:20), Jesus commanded disciples to teach whatever they had been taught. God’s words were meant to be followed, and therefore must be clear.

Scripture as the believer’s guide in making decisions has another three attributes: comprehensiveness, necessity and sufficiency. Scripture can be our guide for everything, comprehensively touching all levels of our life (2 Tim. 3:16). General revelation is inadequate (Rom. 1:20-21), and therefore Scripture as special revelation is necessary. Scripture also contains all the divine words needed for any aspect of human life, and therefore is sufficient.

**God Centered Exegesis**

Dispensationalism is the dominant view among Chinese churches, which gives a spurious view of redemptive history and greatly influences their exegesis. Dispensationalism

\(^8\) Ibid., 144.
emphasizes the separation of Israelites from other believers in redemptive history by presenting the view of that God has different plans for Jews and gentiles. Such teaching of dual plans for two people groups introduces a truncated understanding of redemptive history and results in theological difficulty in understanding the truth. Dispensationalism emphasizes the literal interpretation of Old Testament prophesies and then fits it into the New Testament reality, which violates the general exegetical principle of interpreting the less clear prophesies in the Old Testament in light of the fulfilled reality in the New Testament. For example, the dispensationalist belief that God will fulfill the incomplete part of the promise in the Davidic covenant leads to the prediction that Christ will be the king of Israel physically on earth for one thousand years in the future. Such exegesis does not resolve the problem of the broken succession of the Davidic kingship, but rather concludes with a bold prediction without sound biblical support. Relatively Covenant Theology presents a healthier perspective by teaching a single plan for a single people of God, in which the new covenant is a fulfillment of all the previous commitments, a full restoration of blessings to reverse the curse of sin. God’s plan is not interrupted or changed, but is consistent from the old to the new era throughout redemptive history. The unclear prophesies in the Old Testament should be interpreted in the light of the fulfilled reality in the New Testament. Therefore with the revealed truth in the New Testament about Christ’s eternal ruling, we can understand that the promise of the unbroken succession of the Davidic kinship is a type pointing to Christ and therefore should not be interpreted literally. Covenant Theology insists on this correct exegetical principle, interpreting the unclear in the Old Testament by the clear reality fulfilled in the New Testament, not vice versa. Accepting details in the shadow of the Old Testament and then pushing them into the reality in the New Testament, as practiced in
dispensationalist exegesis, ends up with difficulties in exegesis.

Dispensationalism teaches that the birth of the New Testament Church shifted mankind from the period of law to the period of grace and therefore introduces an antithetical view between law and grace. But in the Bible we find no such a period of pure law or pure grace, nor does the grace come after the law but before. Covenant Theology emphasizes theological continuity and sees the Mosaic covenant not as a covenant of works but the other aspect of the covenant of grace. Law and grace are interrelated harmoniously in all times rather than opposed to each other. Grace eventually came before the law, for the deliverance under Moses is directly linked back to the covenant of Abraham pointing at Christ, the seed of woman (Gal. 3:16-17).

The different views in the doctrine of God result in the differences concerning the relationship between God’s will and man’s will, which in turn makes for differences in biblical interpretation. Those who deny the perseverance of the saints in Covenant Theology take the position that God cannot or will not interfere with human will. The Semi-Pelagianism and Arminianism, as representatives of this school of theological thought, have brought lots of exegetical difficulties in history. God’s sovereignty manifested in His will through the human will is clearly evident in biblical examples such as God’s turning Haman’s evil plot of destroying Jews against himself (Book of Esther), God’s using Joseph’s brothers’ evil act in selling Joseph to Egypt to save Israel (Gen. 50:20), and God’s wisdom in letting Jesus be killed by men to accomplish salvation (Acts 2:23-24).

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God Centered Theological System

Justification by faith alone is commonly understood in Chinese churches as that I am justified because of my faith in God, which leads to the Semi-Pelagianism in which salvation is a synergetic work of God and man. To avoid Christians from being neither cold nor hot based on such understanding of justification, teachings become legalism by adding work requirement to justification. A God centered theological system is very important to Chinese churches.

Covenant Theology is a God centered theological system which emphasizes the total depravity of man and therefore man must rely on God’s grace to be saved. Since the fall, man is born with sinful human nature and therefore can never understand God’s revelation. But God in His redemptive plan provides man with salvation through the covenant, moving the elect from destined death to His kingdom of glory. Covenant Theology structures Scripture through God’s covenants with Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, King David, and finally the given Son of God. It provides a unified view of God’s plan and the continuity between the Old Testament and the New Testament, centered by God’s eternal will – “I will be your God and you will be my people.”

God’s Control in His Created World

As discussed previously, the misunderstanding of the created world leads to the dichotomy view of present society in the Chinese Church. The conservative wing emphasizes the corrupted part of the world and teaches separation from it as in the normal Christian life. This world is evil and destined to perish in God’s wrath. Christians in this world should

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maintain a pilgrim mindset and only look upon the heavenly world to come. The liberal wing emphasizes the redemptive hope of this world and encourages social involvement of Christians as God’s ambassadors on earth. History has demonstrated the failure of both approaches in evangelism; the conservative wing changed Christianity into an isolated community while the liberal wing turned to the social gospel by sacrificing biblical truth. Covenant Theology provides a clear and balanced view on this world created by God, which is what the Chinese Church needs to understand.

**Christ and Culture**

Richard Niebuhr summarizes five models of the Christian views of culture: 1) Christ against culture, 2) Christ of culture, 3) Christ above culture, 4) Christ and culture in paradox, and 5) Christ the transformer of culture.¹¹

The first view, Christ against culture, emphasizes the opposition between Christ and culture. When conflicts were common in the early days of Christianity due to the different practices Christians brought to the Greek society, this world was believed to be wicked by early church fathers. Tertullian, for example, discouraged a Christian’s participation in the military or in political events.

The conservative wing of Chinese churches commonly holds this view. Wang Mingdao, for example, believed that the Christian task is purely spiritual and the task of the church is to save human souls not the culture. Chinese culture, like all other cultures, has been too corrupted to be integrated with the Gospel. The social responsibility of Christians is to save souls through evangelism. Wang said:

This world has been gradually decaying since Adam sinned. In human eyes, there are nations that are civilized or uncivilized, rich or poor, virtuous or virtueless, but in God’s eyes, they are all full of evils. God does not want to fix this corrupted world; rather He has determined to destroy these rebellious nations and to establish a world of eternal righteousness. . . . The purpose of the Gospel is not to change evil customs or bad regulations. Its function is to regenerate man through faith, creating a new man. . . . The Gospel’s purpose is not to reform society, but that the society will benefit because of man’s believing in the Gospel.  

Watchman Nee, applied his trichotomy view and easily reached the same conclusion as Wang Mingdao. For Nee, Christians should not love this world, whose activity is at the level of the soul, not spiritual:

Satan is utilizing the material things of this world, all men and things, to create a kingdom of the anti-Christ. . . . All things belonging to this world have been under the judgment of death. Though we are still living in this world and using things in it, we can no longer plan our future based on worldly things.  

Nee and Wang are the chief representatives of conservative Chinese Christians. They strongly oppose social involvement promoted by liberal leaders and criticized them as the “Social Gospel” or the “Faction of Unbelief”.

In the New Testament, the antithesis between this world the heavenly one is also emphasized:

Do not love the world, or anything in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For everything in the world – the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does – comes not from the Father but from the world. The world and its desires pass away, but the man who does the will of God lives forever. (1 John 2:15-17)  

Scripture clearly indicates the antithesis between Christ and this corrupted world, but it does not mean that Christ is against culture and commands His people to live pessimistically. John Frame argued that culture is not synonymous with the world, but a broader term than world.

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12 Lin, 220-221.

13 Ibid., 222.
The world is a bad part of culture, the culture of unbelief that God’s people should not be conformed to. But God does not call Christians to oppose culture.\textsuperscript{14}

The second view, Christ of culture, recognizes the agreement between Christ and culture. In opposition to the first view of Christ against culture, this view identifies Christ with culture, which is a way of resolving the conflict between Christianity and pagan cultures through finding a common ground. Some of the early church fathers also took this approach to make Christianity attractive to the Greeks. Justin Martyr, for example, believed that God made the world from preexisting substance as the platonic Demiurge did. People holding this view tend to present Jesus as a moral teacher who offered the noblest standard of humanism.

The liberal wing of Chinese Churches, as the supporter of this view, emphasized the self sacrifice of Jesus to encourage Christians to do the same to save the country. Most of them honored Chinese culture and Confucianism even under the cultural challenge of the May Fourth Movement (1919). They believed there existed little conflict between Christianity and Confucianism; rather Christianity brought a new strength to the value of Chinese traditions. Wang Zhixing believed that Christianity is a global culture system, and therefore can accommodate the eastern culture. “It has been absolving the western culture, and we expect it can do the same for the eastern culture.” He further pointed out the biblical support in John 10:16; China is just like that outdoor sheep, waiting to be brought back to the good shepherd’s garden.\textsuperscript{15}

The third view, Christ above culture, recognizes the difference between Christ and culture; however Christ is not against culture but supplements it at a higher level. Thomas

\textsuperscript{14} Frame, \textit{The Doctrine of the Christian Life}, 867.

\textsuperscript{15} Lin, 218.
Aquinas is the best representative of this view. The Catholic Church also adopted this view, for it matches the Catholic theological dualism of nature and grace. Nature is the lower level of God’s creation, while grace is a special gift given by God above the nature. John Frame argued that this view leads to the misunderstanding that we do not need Christ in the lower level of nature when we do things in our daily life; we only need Christ for eternal life. According to Genesis 6:5, man is too corrupted to possibly live a godly life without Christ; therefore it is unbiblical to separate grace from nature.16

The fourth view, Christ and culture in paradox, emphasizes further the dualism between Christ and culture, the double sovereignty of God in two kingdoms. God rules in the church through Christ, but God rules in the world through natural laws. This view also recognizes the distinction of Christ and culture like in the first view, but since God is in both realms they are not opposed to each other, and man is required to obey two moralities. This view is held in the Lutheran tradition, in which the spiritual and the secular are depicted as God’s right hand and left hand. John Frame pointed out the problem of this view is its promoting of two standards of God, which indicates that Christians cannot Christianize the world governed by the secular standard, nor can Christians use any secular standard in church.17

The fifth view, Christ the transformer of culture, encourages Christians to participate in the work of God in transforming the culture of the world. This is the Augustinian view expressed in his City of God, and is also emphasized by John Calvin. This is the view we recommend for the Chinese Church.

17 Ibid., 871.
The Cultural Mandate of Man

The word “culture” is derived from the Latin “colere,” which means the tilling or cultivating of the ground. This reminds us of the original setting in Eden when God created the man. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.” (Gen. 2:15) Culture, is then defined as any and all human effort and labor expended upon the cosmos, to unearth its treasures and its riches and bring them into the service of man for the enrichment of human existence unto the glory of God. 18 John Frame defined culture according to its relationship to God’s creation – Creation is what God makes by Himself; culture is what He makes through us. 19 After the six days of creation, God stopped His work and mandated man to continue:

God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground.” (Gen. 1:28)

Genesis 1:28 describes the first command that the man received from God, filling the earth and subduing the earth, which defines the human effort of man to glorify God, and therefore is the biblical definition of culture. In the Reformed tradition, Genesis 1:28 is thus called the “Cultural Mandate.”

Culture, in a general sense, means the way that men do things. So as Henry Van Til said, religion is inseparable from culture. In God’s eyes, there are only two kinds of culture, Christian culture or non-Christian culture. Though we have different ways to do things according to our own tradition (therefore Chinese culture or American culture); we


eventually do things either according to God’s will or ours. In the Garden of Eden, man sinned by choosing Satan’s way of doing things, using Satan’s culture to cultivate the God created land. The corrupted culture of man in turn corrupted the land; the land does not behave the same way as it did when originally created: “It will produce thorns and thistles for you” (Gen. 3:18), and then the corruption extended to the entire creation: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time (Rom. 8:22). When a man is converted, he is restored with his position as a child of God; at the same time, he is honored with the resumed capability to continue his cultural mandate.

God did not abrogate the cultural mandate due to human sin; rather He reiterated it after the Flood:

Then God blessed Noah and his sons, saying to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number and fill the earth. The fear and dread of you will fall upon all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air, upon every creature that moves along the ground, and upon all the fish of the sea; they are given into your hands. (Gen. 9:1-2)

In the New Testament, Jesus gave the Great Commission:

Then Jesus came to them and said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age. (Matt. 28:18-19)

In John Frame’s triadic perspective, the elements of the Cultural Mandate were reiterated in the Great Commission. In the Cultural Mandate, God commanded (normative perspective) man to subdue the earth (situational perspective) and to fill the earth with man’s children (existential perspective). In the Great Commission, Jesus commanded disciples to teach (normative perspective) and claimed He Himself had control over heaven and earth (situational perspective) and promised His presence to the disciples (existential perspective). Both mandates, the Cultural Mandate and the Great Commission, contain the divine promise
from the normative perspective, the land from the situational perspective, and the seed from the existential perspective. Both mandates remain in force and the second is necessary to complete the first.\footnote{Ibid., 309.}

**Church in the Semi-Eschatological Age**

Chinese churches seldom talk about the Cultural Mandate. We are familiar with the Great Commission--the missionary mandate, but have little knowledge about the cultural one, not to mention their relationship. This explains the dichotomy between the conservative and the liberal wings of Chinese churches, leading to the extremes of either disregard for social involvement or liberal social gospel.

The other theological influence causing the dichotomy regarding Christian’s social responsibility is eschatology. There are basically three views: 1) premillennialism, the view that the return of Christ precedes a thousand years of Christ reign on earth, 2) post-millennialism, the view that the return of Christ follows that one thousand year period of peace, and 3) amillennialism, the view that the one thousand years period is a symbol of the present age. Post-millennialism basically shares the same view as Amillennialism on the present age, which is the symbolized one thousand years mentioned in the book of revelation. Different eschatological views provide different interpretations of the present age, and therefore influence the Christian view of the time we are living in. Premillennialism emphasizes the future hope of the heavenly world to come and therefore is pessimistic about Christian social influences, while post-millennialism and amillennialism are more positive about the Christian culture’s success in the present age. The pessimistic influence of
premillennialism is evident in China. In the time of the early Chinese Church, premillennialism was the prevailing eschatology in China. On the one hand, its emphasis on the future heavenly kingdom provided an effective escape from the national crisis in those turbulent times, but on the other hand, it resulted in the negative attitude of Christians toward a society in political turmoil. Even if premillennialism did not directly bring the negative mode, it at least worsened the pessimism already formed in the prevailing theological world view and poor social conditions. The impact of premillennialism with its negative world view of the present age is still evident among Chinese churches today.

Amillennialism or post-millennialism are the dominant Reformed view. Vos’s illustration of the two ages: this age starts from the Fall to the return of Christ, the parousia; the age to come starts from the resurrection of Christ to eternity. The present age is the overlapped period between this age and the age to come, between the resurrection of Christ and parousia.\textsuperscript{21} The Reformed concept of already-and-not-yet clearly instructs Christian’s attitude to this age: we have had the fact of Christ’s triumph but are still waiting for the summation of Christ’s victory. So on the one hand we know God is in control, but on the other hand we need to bear our cross with Jesus to continue the cultural mandate on earth. The cultural mandate of man clarifies the purpose of salvation, not only for saving the person’s soul, but also for resuming the man’s duty in participating in God’s work in building His kingdom on earth. The Reformed understanding of man’s ultimate goal is to glorify God in all aspects of life, not like in those biased views of Chinese conservatives and liberals, in which one is important and the other is not. Christian life is not a monastic existence, but as a

\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 278.
whole directed to God’s glory.\textsuperscript{22}

God’s Image in His Covenant Presence

Although the Covenant Theology emphasizes transcendence as a priori attribute of God, it by no means downgrades the importance of God’s immanence. Covenant Theology emphasizes not only God’s presence in man but also the extended blessing to the man’s descendants through His divine covenant. This “you and your seed” emphasis provides both a balanced view of the fallen but redeemed man, and a biblical paradigm for parenting covenant children.

Man as the Image of God

The image of God in man represents the given sovereignty to rule God’s creation. Man imitates God as His image bearer after God’s creation. God rules His created world, and man imitates by ruling and naming animals. God filled the world with stars, vegetation, birds and animals, and man imitates by filling the world with children and cultivating the land. God stopped His work after six days and rested, and man imitates him by resting on the Sabbath. After the fall, Man lost the glory image of God and became subdued by creation. Man is powerless to obey God’s command and to rule the land. Christ, as the true image of God, came to save the elect, and restores the image of God in those who are in Him.

The complexity of the existential perspective of challenges in Chinese churches is due to the influences of individualism blended with anti-intellectualism. The former exalts personal judgment in decision making, but the latter devalues human emotion and reasoning. But as John Frame pointed out, our emotion, intellect and will are all regenerated and

\textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 302.
sanctified when we are saved by God’s grace.\textsuperscript{23} According to Philippians 4:4, the Bible commands us be happy always, indicating that we should feel differently about things that used to worry us. Our feelings are changed along with the growth of our new life. Sanctified emotions are good because they have a renewed hermeneutical component, a source of knowledge for ethical decision-making according to God’s will. We are depraved but saved as whole new persons (2 Cor. 5:17). Watchman Nee’s teaching that salvation only occurs at the spiritual level of man is unbiblical. Scripture does not deny passions, such as in Jesus’ wrath and compassion, and Paul’s affection. Emotions are needed to keep our faith in Christ (Heb. 5:14) and love God (Mark 12:30). Logic can also be used as a tool to know God, as long as it is used to govern our thinking as a law of thought subordinate to Scripture, the ultimate law of thought. When logical deductions lead to “apparent contradictions” denying truth clearly taught in Scripture, we need to give up logic and accept the unsolved “problem” by faith.\textsuperscript{24}

You and Your Seed in the Covenant

Man as the image of God, having been blessed with the land and granted authority to oversee God’s creation, sinned by joining as the ally of Satan. Man started to fear God rather than fellowship with Him, alienating himself from God, the garden and eternal life. This imputed sin extends to all mankind. The resulted curse on the land extends to all creations. God’s salvation came with the first prophecy spoken by Himself (Gen. 3:15). What God did was put enmity between the serpent and the woman along with her seed, to break the

\textsuperscript{23} Frame, \textit{The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God}, 336.

\textsuperscript{24} Frame, \textit{The Doctrine of the Word of God}, 369.
relationship between man and Satan to make a new group returning to God through the Seed of Woman. The Seed of Woman is Jesus as later clarified in the New Testament. Mankind is eternally separated into two groups-enemies of God, the seed of the serpent, and children of God, the seed of the woman. The enmity containing hatred with murderous intent is evident in the entire human history, starting from Cain’s murder of Abel. This enmity reached its climax on the murder of Jesus on the cross, but at the same time the prophecy of the defeat of Satan by the seed of woman (Gen. 3:15) was also fulfilled.  

God’s Covenanted Generations

Chinese pay great attention to genealogy, which is the same with Jews but with a different reason. For Jews, genealogy is the proof of their sonship of Abraham, the only covenanted race to whom God promised His blessing. For Chinese, genealogy represents one’s understanding of his past, a very basic virtue in Chinese ethics. The Chinese idiom, Shu-Dian-Wang-Zu (count records but forget ancestors) [數典忘祖], indicates that it is very ungrateful if one knows all the historical records but does not know his own ancestors. Many ancestral halls with popular Chinese last names have still been well maintained.

Chinese have a strong feeling on the seed; however only in the kinship sense not the spiritual, which is also the same as Jews. Most Chinese Christians believe salvation is personal, and has nothing to do with the parents, and there is nothing parents or others can do for the individual. The Reformed concept of “you and your seed” in Covenant Theology is little known nor taught in the majority of Chinese churches. Chinese Christians are missing this great blessing and obligation in bringing their children into God’s covenant. Covenant_____________________

Theology is thus especially important to the Chinese Church in the sense of raising the next generation. The biblical teaching of parenting in Ephesians 6:1-4 is the remedy for Chinese parenting models biased with cultural epistemology, and is also especially meaningful in practice under the concept of divine covenant, which promises His perseverance in His covenanted generation.

Covenant Theology in Practice

So far we have discussed the framework of Covenant Theology and its usage as a remedy for the problems of Chinese churches. To summarize this chapter, we discuss two areas related to Christian practice.

Theological Based Pietism

In Chapter 5, we discussed the influence of pragmatism in Chinese churches. It is a general belief among Chinese churches that theoretical knowledge is impractical and only application that leads to change in behavior is practical and useful. Richard Pratt argued that behavior is not the only way to make practical theology alive. Loving God involves how should we think (Orthodoxy), how should we believe (Orthopraxis) and how should we feel (Orthopathos).²⁶ Orthopraxis is only a part of application, not the entirety of application. Covenant Theology has a balanced emphasis on all three (Orthodoxy, Orthopraxis, Orthopathos) and requires both a clear understanding of God and the obedience of man. The former emphasizes more the conceptual side of life (Orthodoxy), and the latter requires more on the behavioral side (Orthopraxis) and the emotional (Orthopathos) dimension of life.

²⁶ Pratt, 125.
Theological based pietism is the only way to avoid the mistakes of subjective pietism in the history of the Chinese Church.

Covenant Theology Based Evangelism

Covenant Theology exalts the Bible as the ultimate and absolute standard of truth. To teach biblical truth thoroughly is an essential task in reformed evangelism. With the help of confessional statements, such as Westminster Confession of Faith and Westminster catechism, important doctrines such as what is God, what is Scripture, what is man and what is faith can be systematically taught to strengthen believers. TULIP, the acronym standing for total depravity, unconditional election, limited atonement, irresistible grace, and perseverance of the Saints, can be used to introduce the Gospel with a balanced emphasis on all perspectives of biblical truth. This soteriological summary is based on these facts: men after the Fall naturally suppress the inner need for the truth and ignore special revelation through which God identifies Himself. We do not have the capability to respond to God’s salvation by ourselves. We believed because He elected and adopted us first, before the creation of the world (Eph. 1:4). God predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ (Eph. 1:5, 11). We are chosen according to the foreknowledge of God the Father (1 Pet. 1:2). God’s election is selective, passing by all others (Rom. 9:13, 18, 21, 22).
CHAPTER 7
CHINESE REFORMED EVANGELISM

As the last chapter of this thesis, we would like to share some amazing work God is doing among Chinese in Reformed circles. We first introduce on-going programs focusing on Chinese Reformed evangelism, followed by an example of the development of a Chinese PCA church.

Reformed Evangelism in China

Some ministries targeting Chinese reformed evangelism are introduced in the following.

Third Millennium Ministry

The church today is growing quickly but there are relatively few well trained Christians to lead the growth of God’s Kingdom. The traditional solutions to meet this need are all far beyond being cost effective. It involves bringing leaders to the West for training, sending missionaries to teach abroad, or building seminaries. In view of this need, Third Millennium Ministry (IIIM, http://thirdmill.org) was launched in 1997 to provide a new way to meet the urgent need for Christian leaders throughout the world by delivering training to their own lands in their own languages. IIIM provides multimedia seminary curriculum in five major languages including Chinese (Mandarin). The curriculum consists of graphic-driven videos, printed instruction and internet resources. Instructors are seminary professors, writers and editors who are theologically trained educators, and translators who are
theologically astute native speakers of their target languages.

Covenant Evangelical Theological Seminary

The church in China in recent years has outpaced any other nation, but most church leaders have no formal theological training. Due to the lack of theological resources available in China, many began to obtain support through the Internet, the knowledge base of anything to anyone in today’s e-generation. As an expected pitfall, Chinese churches are facing the great danger of becoming heretic by receiving false teachings acquired through the Internet. In view of this need, Covenant Evangelical Theological Seminary (CETS, https://www.cetsedu.org) was established in 2008. CETS is presently the only Chinese web-based seminary providing Reformed theology training for Chinese churches and Christians through the internet. Its mission is to introduce Reformed Theology to the Chinese churches and help to transform them from anti-intellectual traditions. CETS offers theological degrees in Bachelor of Arts, Master of Arts, and Master of Divinity. Teachers include theologians and theology professors in various reformed seminaries and Chinese theologians in the Reformed circle. Teaching materials are based on reformed theology resources translated into the Chinese language, which include abundant Chinese theological materials on DVDs provided by Third Millennium Ministry (IIIM). Besides degreed courses, CETS also offers training for Sunday school teachers, Bible study leaders, and other church lay leaders.

China Partnership

China Partnership is an organization which facilitates partnerships between PCA churches and Christians in China to share the Gospel with Chinese people through a reformed and covenantal influence. Evangelistic results have been evident in growing numbers of trained indigenous leaders ministering to the Chinese Church, multiplication of
churches, diverse “word and deed” ministries serving the Chinese people, and energizing the PCA churches for Chinese ministry.

A Chinese PCA Church: OCECC

Although Reformed theology is still little known among Chinese churches, we do see God’s hand leading Chinese churches toward the Reformed circle through the PCA. Orlando Chinese Evangelical Christian Church (OCECC, http://www.ocecc.org), was first started as a Bible study group in December 1999 in Orlando Florida, and became a non-denominational church in 2000. In early 2001, an advisory board was formed by three Chinese pastors to help the young church. In July 2001, four of the church founders were ordained as deacons by an advisory pastor. In January 2009, OCECC joined the PCA as a particular church with two elders ordained with PCA ruling eldership at the same time.

OCECC, as the majority of Chinese churches in America, was established first by lay leaders as a Bible study group and then converted to a church. However her growth path was very different which results in her successful development today as a PCA church. The first reason is because the founders of OCECC realized the problems of Chinese churches today. They understood the importance of spiritual guidance of a church and therefore quickly formed the advisory board composed of experienced pastors to supervise their leadership at the beginning of the mission. Second, they understood the importance of formal theological training in leading a church, and therefore two of the church founders devoted themselves to part-time theological studies at Reformed Theological Seminary (RTS) at the beginning of the church. Of course, above all it is God’s providence; RTS started the Orlando campus in time, which does not only provide theological resources nearby but attracts Chinese servants to Orlando. Biao Chen, a RTS Chinese student, started his study in 2001,
graduated in 2004 and became the pastor of OCECC. He was ordained by the board of advisory pastors in 2005 and then admitted to the PCA as a teaching elder in late 2008. In January 2009, two deacons were ordained as PCA ruling elders and OCECC officially joined the PCA as a particular church.

Because of God’s providence and the founders’ awareness of the importance of theological education, OCECC has grown in the environment of the Reformed circle, which was the main reason why OCECC was started by lay leaders as a non-denominational church, but did not follow the common pattern of Chinese churches in the United States to remain non-denominational and indifferent to theology.
CHAPTER 8
CONCLUSIONS

This research began with the questions: 1) What are the decisive factors in the formation of Chinese Christian thought? 2) What are the consequences of the anti-theology and anti-denominational ideology in Chinese churches? 3) What are the solutions to mitigate the problems? Based on the analysis of the sociocultural and historical factors in forming Chinese Christian thought, we identified the anti-theology ideology as the root cause of difficulties in biblical exegesis, theological studies, and Christian ethics. Accordingly, we presented Covenant Theology as a recommendation to mitigate the problems.

To analyze the formation of Chinese Christian thought is not simple. It is a complex process involving various social and cultural influences. At the very top level of analysis, we can say that theological thought was first introduced by missionaries, then accepted by Chinese Christian leaders, then promoted by those leaders, and finally acknowledged among Chinese churches. When we go deeper, we start to see the influences of sociocultural factors in each propagation of the process in determining what part of the thought is accepted, and how it is adapted into the Chinese philosophical system. In this research, we adopted a triadic approach to perform the analysis from three perspectives. From the normative perspective, the analysis is focused on the cultural factors. From the situational perspective, the analysis is focused on the social factors. From the existential perspective, the analysis is focused on personal judgment. In this thesis, for instance, we analyzed how pietism was propagated and adapted into the Chinese Christian thought.
Pietism along with the anti-intellectual ideology was introduced into China by western evangelicals in the early twentieth century. It was easily accepted by Chinese Christians because its inner self emphasis was a cultural match with that in Daoism. In addition, the timing was good as well; the emphasis on the individual was in line with the desire to escape from the social turmoil. Watchman Nee, the most influential leader in Chinese Christian history, adopted pietism and developed his famous trichotomist view of man, which has influenced all Chinese Christians. Again, there is a decisive cultural factor resulting in his trichotomy being overwhelmingly accepted by Chinese, as discussed in Chapter 5. Anti-intellectual exegesis, native attitude toward social involvement, and the premillennial eschatological view are derived to form the Chinese Christian thought, because of Nee’s trichotomy.

In this thesis, we presented a triadic approach of analysis to identify the root causes of problems and find corresponding solutions in the recommended Covenant Theology. In Chapter 2, we first went through some critical historical events in the process of church development in China before 1949. In Chapter 3, we analyzed the influences behind this development, which includes the cultural heritage, social conditions, and western theological thoughts. The cultural influences are basically from Confucianism and Daoism. Confucianism with its rich and comprehensive value system defines the ethical dimension of Chinese thought. Daoism with its mystical world view contributes to the metaphysical dimension of Chinese thought. The social influences include the pressure of church indigenization in the early twentieth century and the political environment change introduced by the new atheist government establish in 1949. The dichotomy between the liberal and the conservative wings of early churches in response to the quest for church indigenization
reflected their intrinsic differences in theological standpoints. The liberals emphasized the situational perspective of the Gospel and therefore adopted the teleological ethical approach. Soteriology was understood in a sociological sense, and the Christian mission was to build the kingdom of God on earth. Christian ethics emphasized the social service with Christ. Salvation was believed to be obtained in a corporate sense through Christian works to encourage the people of a nation as a whole. Apologetics aimed at reducing the traditional dislike of foreign religion through cultural contextualization. On the other hand, the conservatives focused on the existential perspective of the Gospel and therefore adopted the deontological/existential ethical system. Soteriology was understood in a traditional spiritual sense, and the Christian mission was to call people to repent and prepare for the kingdom to come. Christian ethical emphasis was either on following the Bible to do one’s duties or seeking for a closer relationship to God. The other-worldly mindset excludes anything teleological from being true ethical measures. Salvation was believed to be personal, never corporate. Christianity was considered supra-cultural and cultural adaption of Christianity was unbiblical. Indigenization had nothing to do with culture but targeted church administration by pure Chinese leadership. In Chapter 4, we revealed an interesting fact that Chinese theological thought formed in the 1930s has never changed. The theological reconstruction campaign promoted today in the TSPM circle is virtually a repetition of the liberal social gospel emphasized in the 1930s. The anti-theology and anti-denominational ideology of the 1930s is still dominant in the house churches in China and Chinese churches in the United States today.

The challenges are then summarized from three perspectives in Chapter 5: problems resulting from epistemological biases formed in tradition (normative), theological
issues developed under different social conditions (situational), and parenting challenges in the postmodern age (existential). The first category of challenges is due to the deontological ethics embedded in Confucianism which introduced an epistemological bias in Chinese Christian thought. Chinese Christians need to be aware of cultural reflections resulting from such bias in order to practice true Christian ethics based on Scripture rather than Chinese culture; otherwise Christianity may easily lead to moralism or legalism. Daoist inner emphasis on the individual leads to mystical pietism, while its other-worldly emphasis results in disregarding social involvement. Such epistemological bias causes difficulties in both exegesis and Christian practice. The second category of challenges is from theological thoughts developed under various social conditions. Anti-intellectualism was introduced to China through early missionaries who believed that traditional theological training would only bring religious appearance but no spiritual essence. Under such pietistic emphasis and the Gnostic ideology embedded in Chinese culture, Watchman Nee’s anti-intellectual exegetical methodology was overwhelmingly accepted among Chinese churches. Nee’s teaching about salvation only occurring in the spiritual part of man also enhanced the negative attitude of Chinese toward social involvement. John Dewey introduced pragmatism to China during his visit to China between 1919 and 1921, further enhancing the traditional emphasis in Chinese churches on applications by devaluing doctrines. The third category of challenges is related to the Christian himself and the next generation ministry. Christian parenting has been a great challenge in this transitional era from the modern to the postmodern generation. For Chinese Christians, it is even more complicated with the added complexity of cultural dimension.

Among all the aspects we have discussed about the Chinese Church, the anti-
theology ideology is identified as the root cause of all the problems. Biblical exegesis, theological studies, Christian ethics all deviate from Christian orthodoxy because of this negative view of theology. In Chapter 6, we first explained the necessity of theology. We then pointed out the balance in Covenant Theology in treating heritage, community connection and private judgment, which respectively aims at the problems of Chinese churches in the areas of anti-theology tradition, anti-denominational church organization, and the just-me-and-my-Bible myth. We also discussed the good balance of Covenant Theology in emphasizing God’s authority in His Word, God’s control in His created world, and His covenant presence in man as His image, which respectively provides remedies for Chinese churches in the problematic areas of anti-intellectual exegesis (with the Reformed God centered exegesis), negative attitude toward social involvement attitude (with the Reformed teaching of Cultural Mandate), and parenting the next generation (with the Reformed emphasis on “you and your seed”). Problems resulting from dispensationalism and Arminianism in Chinese churches were also discussed with the recommended solution in Covenant Theology. Finally in Chapter 7, we surveyed the development of a Chinese PCA church and current ministries in Chinese reformed evangelism.

China has a long-standing cultural heritage of five thousand years. Therefore the problematic domain of the Chinese Church involves a variety of cultural and social conditions with tremendous complexity. This research only targets the Chinese churches in China and the United States, with the focus on the theological aspect. Further research may include Chinese churches in other areas, such as in Taiwan or Europe, Chinese evangelism in other target groups, such as the young Generation Y or Z, or special issues of Chinese churches, such as the relationship between house churches in China and the government.
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