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Chinese Explorations of Orthodox Theology: A Critical Review

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Abstract: In spite of the small number of Orthodox Christians in China, Chinese publications related to Orthodox Christianity have mushroomed in recent years. Many Chinese theologians from other denominations of Christianity or scholars without formal religious affiliation are involved in the explorations of Orthodox theology. This essay analyzes and evaluates critically the existing Chinese explorations of Orthodox theology.

Through making references to the contemporary development of Orthodox theology, especially the revival of the doctrine of deification, this essay will show that the Chinese explorations of Orthodox theology were shaped not only by the renaissance of Orthodox theology in the twentieth century, but also by the contemporary Chinese context. The involvement of the Chinese context affects the Chinese explorations of Orthodox theology in both positive and negative ways. On the one hand the scope of exploration as a whole is largely focused on the areas or issues particularly relevant to the Chinese context, especially the relationship between Christianity and Chinese culture. Furthermore, in terms of depth, due to the religious backgrounds of the researchers, some of the Chinese studies of Orthodox theology fails to take seriously the connection between the theological, liturgical and spiritual dimensions of the Orthodox tradition, and exhibit difficulties in interpreting, for instance, the mystical theology in Orthodox Christianity.

It is expected that these limitations can be overcome, at least partially, through dialogue with contemporary Orthodox theologians. The dialogue may also help the Orthodox theologians to understand the possibly distinctive positive contributions to be made by Chinese theologians and scholars towards the contemporary articulation of Orthodox theology.

Key Words: Chinese Culture, Confucianism, Deification, Mystical Theology, Orthodox Theology

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Introduction

Orthodox Christianity in China has a history dating back several centuries and there are Orthodox churches in Hong Kong and Taiwan, but the number of Orthodox Christians in the Chinese speaking world remains very small in comparison to the number of Catholics or Protestants in China. In fact, unlike Protestantism and Catholicism, which are among the five officially recognized religions in China, Orthodox Christianity has not yet attained legal status in the People's Republic of China. However, it is interesting to

note that the Chinese publications related to Orthodox Christianity mushroomed in recent years.^[49] Among these publications, only a few are published by the Orthodox churches,^[50] while the majority are published by either Christian academic institutions,^[51] or secular publishers without any religious background. In fact, some of these publications are authored by Chinese intellectuals without any formal religious affiliation.^[52] This might reflect the influences of the cultural qua theological movement known as Sino-Christian theology, which involves many Chinese intellectuals who studied Christianity without formally becoming member of any Christian church.^[53] In addition to the relevant publications in Chinese, there are also publications concerning Orthodox Christianity written by Chinese theologians but in English.^[54] These Chinese and English publications authored by Chinese theologians or scholars might exhibit some degree of appreciation of Orthodox Christianity and/or attempts to explore the significance of the Orthodox theology for the future development of Chinese Christian theology.

Different from the previous exploratory studies concerning the significance of Orthodox theology for Chinese Christian theology,^[55] this essay tends to adopt a more critical approach, aimed at evaluating the existing Chinese interpretations of Orthodox theology. It will show that the Chinese explorations of Orthodox theology were shaped mainly by two factors. One is the renaissance of Orthodox theology in the twentieth century, and the other is the contemporary Chinese context, including the Chinese Christians' understanding of their context as well as theological tasks. Based on a survey of the contemporary Chinese reception of Orthodox theology, the essay will offer an evaluation of the achievements as well as limitations of the Chinese explorations of Orthodox theology so far. It will further suggest how the Chinese explorations of Orthodox theology for the future development of Chinese theology can be further improved.

[49] For a brief survey of the Chinese publications on Orthodox Christianity, see: Sha Mei 沙涓 and Lai Pinchao 赖品超, "Hàn yǔ xué jiè dí jī dū zhèng jiào yán jiū" 汉语学界的基督正教研究 [Chinese Studies of Orthodox Christianity], in: *É lú sī zhé xué píng lùn, dì yī jí* 俄罗斯哲学评论·第一辑 [Review of Russian Philosophy, vol. 1], edited by Chen Shulin 陈树林 (Harbin: Heilongjiang university Press, 2012. 10), pp. 209-226.

[50] For instances, Qià lā kè · qià ěr dùn 卡拉克·卡尔顿 [Clark Carlton], *Zhèng dào: xīn jiào xìn tú duì zhèng jiào xū zhī* 正道: 新教信徒对正教须知 [The Way: What Every Protestant Should Know About the Orthodox Church], translated by Li Lishi 李丽诗 (Hong Kong: Orthodox brotherhood of Apostles Saint Peter and Paul, 2013), and, Dū zhǔ jiào yī lā lǐ yōng (ā ěr fēi yé fū) 都主教伊拉里雍 (阿尔菲耶夫) [HE Metropolitan Dr. Hilarion (Alfeev)], *Zhèng xìn àu yì: dōng zhèng jiào shén xué dǎo lùn* 正信奥义: 东正教神学导论 [The Mystery of Faith: Introduction to Orthodox Theology], translated by Lín Sen 林森 (Hong Kong: Orthodox Brotherhood of Apostles Saint Peter and Paul, 2015).

[51] The most representative and influential is probably the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, a Christian organization based in Hong Kong, which published many books about Orthodox Christianity, including: Pà lì kǎn 帕利坎 (Jaroslav Pelikan), *Jī dū jiào chuán tǒng. dì èr juàn: dōng fāng jī dū jiào shì jiè de jīng shén* 基督教传统. 第二卷: 东方基督教世界的精神 [The Christian Tradition: Vol. 2: The Spirit of Eastern Christendom], translated by Sha Mei 沙涓 (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma Press, 2009).

[52] For example, Zhang Baichun 张百春, *Dāng dài dōng zhèng jiào shén xué sī xiǎng* 当代东正教神学思想 [Contemporary Eastern Orthodox Theology] (Shanghai: Shanghai Joint Publishing, Co., 2000).

[53] See further: Pan-chiu Lai & Jason Lam (eds.), *Sino-Christian Theology: A Theological Qua Cultural Movement in Contemporary China* (Frankfurt-am-Main: Peter Lang, 2010).

[54] For instance, Ambrose Mong, *Purification of Memory: A Study of Modern Orthodox Theologians from a Catholic Perspective* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co., 2015).

[55] A recent attempt can be found in: Lai Pinchao 赖品超 [Pan-chiu Lai], "Jī dū zhèng jiào zhī shén xué fù xīng jí qí duì hàn yǔ shén xué de yì yì" 基督正教之神学复兴及其对汉语神学的意义 [Renaissance of Orthodox Theology and its Significance for Sino-Christian Theology], *Dao Feng* 道风 [Logos & Pneuma] 32 (Spring 2010), pp. 247-272 (in Chinese with abstract in English). It is reprinted in: Lai Pinchao 赖品超, *Guang chang shang de Han yu shen xue* 广场上的汉语神学 [Sino-Christian Theology in the Public Square] (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma Press [Dao Feng Shu She], 2014), chapter 7, pp. 169-191. Some of the data presented in the present essay are adopted from this book, especially chapters 5-8, pp. 117-216.

Renaissance of Orthodox Theology

It is rather well known that the Orthodox churches in Russia and some other countries in Eastern Europe underwent some sort of revival in the last few decades after experiencing certain suppression under different Communist regimes. In fact, more than mere survival, the Orthodox churches became very powerful in the cultural, political and social spheres in Eastern Europe.^[56] However, after the collapse of the Communist regimes in Eastern Europe, with new laws related to religion established under the new political systems, a higher degree of religious freedom was granted.^[57] In this new situation, in addition to the internal difficulties, the Orthodox churches in these countries have to face not only the external challenges from secular ideologies of secularism and individualism, but also the competition from other Christian denominations and even other religions. It is thus quite right to describe it as “A Troubled Renaissance”.^[58] However, it is also important to note that there had been signs of theological renaissance even before the Communist domination in Russia and Eastern Europe.^[59]

Soon after the Russian revolution, many of the Russian intellectuals, including a significant number of theologians, migrated to the western world. Since then, some Orthodox theological seminaries were established, including the St. Sergius Theological Institute in Paris and the St. Vladimir’s Theological Seminary in New York. Some of the influential Orthodox theologians in diaspora, including Vladimir Lossky (1903-1958) and John Meyendorff (1926-1992), were affiliated to these seminaries.^[60] Besides these, equally important is the Greek Orthodox church flourishing in Greece and related areas. This is because some influential Orthodox theologians, e. g. John Zizioulas, come from the Greek Orthodox church. The influence of his theology, including particularly his Trinitarian theology and ecclesiology, are far beyond the boundary of the Orthodox churches.^[61]

As Timothy Ware points out, “Orthodox theologians are few in number, but some of them, often under the stimulus of western contacts, are rediscovering forgotten yet vital elements in their theological inheritance.”^[62] In other words, the contemporary revival of Orthodox theology is not only inspired by the inherited Orthodox theological tradition, but also stimulated by its dialogue with Catholic as well as Protestant theologies, and driven by its attempt to address some issues of the contemporary world. These factors make Orthodox theologians become more open to the theological or spiritual traditions of other Christian denominations as well as other intellectual traditions. In reverse, there are also some Catholic and Protestant theologians becoming interested in Orthodox theology. As a result, there are many recent studies comparing

[56] See: Niels C. Nielsen, Jr. (ed.), *Christianity after Communism: Social, Political, and Cultural Struggle in Russia* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1994).

[57] See: Silvio Ferrari and W. Cole Durham, Jr. (eds.), *Law and Religion in Post-Communist Europe* (Leuven: Peeters, 2003); also, W. Cole Durham, Jr. and Silvio Ferrari (eds.), *Laws on Religion and the State in Post-Communist Europe* (Leuven: Peeters, 2004).

[58] Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, New Edition 1997), pp. 160-166. [Chinese translation published in 2013.]

[59] For the modern revival of Orthodox theology, see: John Binns, *An Introduction to the Christian Orthodox Churches* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002, third printing with corrections in 2006), pp. 86-96.

[60] Concerning the Orthodox churches in diaspora, see: Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 172-187.

[61] Concerning the studies of Zizioulas, see: Liviu Barbu (compile), “Secondary Works on John Zizioulas,” in: *The Theology of John Zizioulas: Personhood and the Church*, edited by Douglas H. Knight (Aldershot, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 197-201.

[62] Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 191.

the position of an Orthodox theologian with that of either a Protestant or Catholic theologian.^[63]

Orthodox Theology and Ecumenical Movement

In the last few decades the Orthodox churches have been engaged in various kinds of ecumenical dialogue—not only among the Orthodox churches, but also between the Orthodox and many other denominations, including the Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed traditions. Particularly relevant to the Chinese Christian churches is perhaps the dialogue with the Evangelicals,^[64] because the theological tradition of Evangelical Christianity remains very influential among the Chinese Protestant churches.

Due to the active participation of Orthodox churches in the ecumenical movement, there are recognizable results both in church unity and in theological developments in both Orthodox and Western theologies. Apart from the influences of Orthodox theology on individual western theologians,^[65] the Orthodox involvement in ecumenical theological dialogue with other denominations also contributed enormously to the revival of some doctrines, including particularly the doctrines of the Trinity and deification (theosis). It is widely agreed that Orthodox theologians, especially Valdimir Lossky and John Zizioulas, played important roles alongside Karl Rahner (1904-1984) from the Catholic tradition, and Karl Barth (1886-1968) from the Protestant side, in the renaissance of Trinitarian theology in the twentieth century.^[66] Since there are many studies on the contemporary revival of Trinitarian theology, the following survey will focus on the doctrine of deification, which received more attention than that of the doctrine of the Trinity in the Chinese speaking world.

Historically, the doctrine of deification was developed mainly by the Greek fathers, as the book *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition*, which was translated and published in Chinese in 2014, sketches.^[67] In fact, there are many studies of the doctrine of deification within the Orthodox theological circle.^[68] However, in recent years, there are many contemporary Protestant and/or Catholic studies of the doctrine, and it becomes a focus of ecumenical dialogue. In *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions*,^[69] which was translated and published in

[63] Notable studies authored by Chinese theologians include: Man-yiu Lee, *The Church as Person in the Theologies of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, John Zizioulas and Jürgen Moltmann* (Hong Kong: Nation-Blessings Consultancy Company, 2013); and, Yik-pui Au, *The Eucharist as a Countercultural Liturgy: An Examination of the Theologies of Henri de Lubac, John Zizioulas, and Miroslav Volf* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2017).

[64] See: Daniel B. Clendenin, "Orthodox-Evangelical Dialogue: Past, Present, and Future," in: *Eastern Orthodox Christianity: A Western Perspective* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, Second Edition 2003), pp. 161-177.

[65] In addition to the Western theologians being converted or "homecoming" to Orthodox churches, e. g. Jaroslav Pelikan (1923-2006) from Lutheran and Richard Swinburne from Anglican backgrounds respectively, there are also Western theologians, e. g. Amos Yong from Pentecostal background, who openly admit their indebtedness to the Orthodox theological approach. See: Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2002), p. ix.

[66] See: Christoph Schwöbel, "Introduction-The Renaissance of Trinitarian Theology: Reasons, Problems and Tasks," in: *Trinitarian Theology Today*, edited by Christoph Schwöbel (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1995), pp. 1-30, especially 3-7, 15-19.

[67] See: Normal Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). [Chinese translation published in 2014.]

[68] For instances: Gregorios I. Mantzaridis, *The Deification of Man: St. Gregory Palamas and the Orthodox Tradition*, translated from the Greek by Liadain Sherrard (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1984); and, Panayiotis Nellas, *Deification in Christ: Orthodox Perspective on the Nature of the Human Person*, translated from the Greek by Normal Russell (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987).

[69] Michael J. Christensen and Jeffrey A. Wittung (eds.), *Partakers of the Divine Nature: The History and Development of Deification in the Christian Traditions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007). [Chinese translation published in 2016.]

Chinese in 2016, the plural form “traditions” is employed in the sub-title in order to indicate that this doctrine, instead of belonging exclusively to the Orthodox theological tradition, can be found in the theological traditions of other denominations, including Catholic and Protestant. The book covers not only the theologians acclaimed by the orthodox churches, e. g. the Cappadocian Fathers and Maximus the Confessor (d. 662), but also St. Anselm (1033-1109), Martin Luther (1483-1546), John Calvin (1509-1564), John Wesley (1703-1791), Karl Rahner (1904-1984), and even the theologies of the Copto-Arabic tradition. This book illustrates not only the orthodoxy of the doctrine of deification, but also its plurality or richness in the Christian tradition.

These publications indicate that the doctrine of deification is no longer considered a doctrine exclusive to the Orthodox churches. Instead, it is recognized as part of the common theological heritage shared by Catholics and Protestants. It is quite fair to say that the contemporary development or renaissance of this doctrine is largely due to the Orthodox involvement in the ecumenical dialogue.

Orthodox Theology and Contemporary Issues

In addition to their involvements in ecumenical dialogue, Orthodox theologians are also involved in the Christian responses to the contemporary issues. It is well known that Orthodox theology emphasizes the transmission of tradition.^[70] This might give the impression that Orthodox theology is very conservative and thus obsolete if not outdated. However, there are also a significant number of Orthodox theologians engaging in the discussion on various contemporary issues, including environmental protection, religion-science dialogue, postmodernism, and religious pluralism.

Among the contemporary issues, environmental protection is probably the favorite topic for Orthodox theology. The previous Ecumenical Patriarch Dimitrios (1914-1991) had already indicated his concern for ecological issues.^[71] The current Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I, due to his involvement in and contribution to the environmental movement, is acclaimed as “Green Patriarch.”^[72] The insights of the Orthodox theology on the environmental issues is recognized not only within the circle of ecumenical movement,^[73] but also by individual western theologians specializing in ecological theology.^[74]

In relation to the ecological issues, Orthodox theologians are also involved in the discussion concerning religion and natural science. Apart from the general discussion concerning theology and science,^[75] there are also specific studies of bio-ethics from an Orthodox theological perspective.^[76] Orthodox theologians are also

[70] Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 195-207.

[71] Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, pp. 235.

[72] See: His All Holiness Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew, *Encountering Mystery: Understanding Orthodox Christianity Today* (New York: Doubleday, 2008).

[73] See: Gennadios Limouris (ed.), *Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation: Insights from Orthodoxy* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1990).

[74] For example, Willis Jenkins, *Ecologies of Grace: Environmental Ethics and Christian Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), includes two chapters related to Orthodox theology, especially the relevance of the Orthodox doctrine of deification to the development of ecological spirituality: “After Maximus: Ecological Spirituality and Cosmic Deification”, pp. 189-205; and, “Thinking Like a Transfigured Mountain: Sergei Bulgakov’s Wisdom Ecology”, pp. 207-225.

[75] Alexei V. Nesteruk, *Light from the East: Theology, Science, and the Eastern Orthodox Tradition* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2003).

[76] See: Jon and Lyn Breck, *Stages on Life’s Way: Orthodox Thinking on Bioethics* (Crestwood, New York: St Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2005).

engaged in dialogue with Western theologians on the relationship between theology and science.^[77] The relevance or contribution of Orthodox theology is well recognized by some Western theologians. For example, references to the Orthodox interpretations of wisdom (Sophia) are made when addressing the theological issues derived from the recent developments in biology.^[78]

The references to Orthodox theology made by western theologians often assume that Orthodox theology can offer an alternative radically different from western theology which was largely dominated by the mentality of the Enlightenment. In fact, some Orthodox theologians are very critical towards the modern western culture influenced by the Enlightenment, and are interested in the discussion concerning postmodernity.^[79] For example, Christos Yannaras attempts to criticize modern western culture from the standpoint of orthodox theology,^[80] to conduct comparative and/or dialogical,^[81] studies between the Orthodox theological tradition and representatives of post-modern thought,^[81] and even to make use of the Orthodox theological resources to develop a postmodern metaphysics.^[82]

The openness of Orthodox theology is shown in its response not only to postmodern thought, but also to religious pluralism. In the discussion concerning theology of religions, Orthodox theologian Georges Khodr's brief exploration of the significance of pneumatology for theology of religions inspired some western theologians in their attempts to address the issues of religious pluralism from a Trinitarian theological framework, which highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in revelation and/or salvation.^[83] The significance of the Orthodox rejection of filioque for a Trinitarian theology of religions has also been explored.^[84] Furthermore, some Orthodox theologians actively participate in the discussion concerning theology of religions,^[85] and contribute to the explorations concerning comparative theology and Buddhist-Christian dialogue.^[86]

[77] See; Michael Welker (ed.), *The Spirit in Creation and New Creation: Science and theology in Western and Orthodox Realms* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2012); also, Philip Clayton and Arthur Peacocke (eds.), *In Whom We Live and Move and Have Our Being: Pantheistic Reflections on God's Presence in a Scientific World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), which includes and groups three chapters authored by Orthodox theologians, including Kallistos Ware, Alexei V. Nesteruk and Andrew Louth, to represent the "Eastern Orthodox" perspective.

[78] See; Celia E. Deane-Drummond, *Creation Through Wisdom: Theology and the New Biology* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 2000), pp. 73-111.

[79] Recent studies include; Aristotle Papanikolaou, "Orthodoxy, Postmodernity, and Ecumenism: The Difference that Divine-Human Communion Makes," *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 42. 4 (Fall 2007), pp. 527-544; Gabriel C. Rochelle, "Apophatic Preaching and the Postmodern Mind," *St. Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 50. 4 (2006), pp. 397-419.

[80] Christos Yannaras, *Orthodoxy and the West: Hellenic Self-Identity in the Modern Age*, translated by Peter Chamberas and Normal Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2006).

[81] Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God: Heidegger and the Areopagite*, edited with an introduction by Andrew Louth, translated by Haralambos Ventis (London: T & T Clark International, 2005).

[82] Christos Yannaras, *Postmodern Metaphysics*, translated by Normal Russell (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2004).

[83] See; Georges Khodr, "The Economy of the Holy Spirit," in; *Mission Trends*, No. 5: Faith Meets Faith, edited by Gerald H. Anderson and Thomas F. Stransky (New York: Paulist, 1981), pp. 36-49. Khodr's view is referred to, for examples, in; Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit (s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); and, Gerald R. McDermott and Harold A. Netland, *A Trinitarian Theology of Religions: An Evangelical Proposal* (Oxford: Oxford university Press, 2014).

[84] Pan-chiu Lai, *Towards a Trinitarian Theology of Religions: A Study of Paul Tillich's Thought* (Kampen, the Netherlands: Kok Pharos Publishing House, 1994), pp. 37-42.

[85] Michael Oleksa, "All Things New: An Orthodox Theological Reflection on Interfaith Dialogue," in; *Grounds for Understanding: Ecumenical Resources for Responses to Religious Pluralism*, edited by S. Mark Heim (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), pp. 122-136.

[86] See for details; Ernest M. Valea, *Buddhist-Christian Dialogue as Theological Exchange: An Orthodox Contribution to Comparative Theology* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2015).

Orthodox Christianity and Chinese Culture

Given their participation in the dialogue with other religions, it is not surprising to find that some Orthodox theologians are interested in the dialogue between Christianity and Chinese culture. In fact, there are some studies done by Orthodox theologians or scholars comparing Orthodox theology with Daoism or Confucianism.^[87] In fact, the significance of Orthodox theology for the communication between Christianity and Chinese culture has also attracted the attention of some Chinese Christian theologians. Some decades ago, Xie Fuya (also known as Zia Nai Zin, 1892-1991) briefly explored the significance of the Orthodox theological tradition for the communication between Christianity and Chinese culture in his introduction to a Chinese edition of an anthology of the Eastern (Greek) fathers, which includes the works by Gregory of Nyssa (335-394), Pseudo-Dionysius (fl. late 5th to early 6th century), Maximus the Confessor, and John of Damascus (676-749). Xie notes that mysticism is one of the major characteristics of their theological tradition and this characteristic puts the Orthodox theological tradition in stark contrast with the Latin fathers and Scholasticism, but echoes the Daoist philosophy of Zhangzhi (Chuang-tzu) and Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism.^[88] Besides, Xie continues, different from the emphasis on the extrinsic redemptive function of Christ in Western theology, the Christology of Eastern Christian theological tradition places emphasis on the interiority of Christ. It is expected that the Christian theology to be grown from the Chinese cultural soil in the future should come closer to the Eastern theological tradition.^[89]

In recent years, several Chinese theologians have attempted to explore the significance of orthodox theology for the communication between Christianity and Chinese culture, especially Confucianism. Lai Pinchao (also known as Pan-chiu Lai) argues that many of the Confucian criticisms of Christianity, especially those based on the concepts of immanence and transcendence, are not applicable to the Orthodox tradition. Instead of emphasizing one-sidedly the divine transcendence, the Trinitarian doctrine of God in the Orthodox tradition, with its mystical rather than spatial understanding of the divine transcendence, emphasizes both the divine transcendence and immanence without assuming their opposition or contradiction to each other. Furthermore, the Orthodox understanding of human transcendence embodied in Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of the creation of the human being with its root in the doctrine of image of God, highlights the goodness, freedom and dignity of the human being, who is endowed with the tendency of moving towards goodness and the potential to be sharer of the divine life and become perfect through unity with God. The Orthodox theological anthropology is radically different from the Western understanding of the human being characterized by its emphasis on the doctrine of original sin, and is thus more compatible with Confucianism,

[87] See: Hieromonk Damascene, *Christ the Eternal Tao* (Platina, CA: Valaam Books, Third Edition 2002); also, Luó mǎn nuò fū 罗曼诺夫 (Alexandre Lomanov), "Rú jiā sī jiǎ yǔ é luó sī dī líng xìng chuán tǒng" 儒家思想家与俄罗斯的灵性传统 [Confucian Thought and Russian Spiritual Tradition], in: *Chuán chéng yǔ shǐ mìng: ài xiāng dé bó shì shì sī shì wú zhōu nián jì niàn xué shù wén jí* 传承与使命: 艾香德博士逝世四十五周年纪念学术文集 [Heritage and Mission: Memorial Volume to Rev. Karl Ludvig Reichelt], edited by Chen Guangpei 陈广培 (Hong Kong: Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre, 1998), pp. 75-95.

[88] Xie Fuya 谢扶雅, "dǎo lùn" 导论 [Introduction], in *Dōng fāng jiào fù xuǎn jí* 东方教父选集 [Eastern Churches], edited by Fèi duō duō 费多铎 [George P. Fedotov] (Hong Kong: The Foundation for Theological Education in Southeast Asia in association with the Council on Christian Literature for Overseas Chinese, 1964), pp. 22-23.

[89] Xie Fuya, "dǎo lùn", p. 40.

especially the contemporary Neo-Confucian emphasis on human goodness.^[90] According to Lai, in addition to Gregory of Nyssa's understanding of the creation of the human being, his understanding of salvation is also relevant. Gregory understands salvation mainly in terms of deification, and assumes that the human being is not merely a passive recipient of divine grace but also an active agent or co-worker of salvation.^[91] Lai further argues that the Orthodox doctrine of deification, which is associated with the Trinitarian understanding that humanity is shaped by the Word and the Spirit as the two hands of the Father, is founded in both the Greek and Latin theological traditions and can make positive contribution to Christian-Confucian dialogue on human nature.^[92]

The positive role to be played by the Orthodox doctrine of deification (theosis) for the communication between Christianity and Confucianism is affirmed and further explored more recently by Alexander Chow, whose doctoral dissertation turned book, highlights the similarity between the Orthodox understanding of deification and the Confucian understanding of the unity between Heaven and humanity, and further explores how Orthodox theology may inform the formation of a contextual theology for contemporary China.^[93]

Apart from the dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism, there are also Chinese studies of Buddhist-Christian dialogue with references to the Orthodox theological tradition. A notable example is Lai's efforts in articulating a Christian understanding of universal salvation in response to the challenge of Mahayana Buddhism through making references to Orthodox theological resources.^[94] In order to argue for the possibility of salvation for those who are in hell, Lai makes references to Orthodox theologian Hilarion Alfeyev's view that Christ's descent to hell became the starting point for the ascent of humanity and this path of deification (theosis) is opened for all.^[95] In order to clarify that this concerns the possibility rather actuality of universal salvation, Lai quotes another Orthodox theologian Timothy Ware who states "It is heretical to say that all must be saved, for this is to deny free will; but it is legitimate to hope that all may be saved."^[96] With regard to the existence and nature of hell, Lai refers again to Ware's view that hell may exist as the final possibility, but it is not created by God for the purpose of punishing or imprisoning human

[90] Lai Pinchao 赖品超, "Chāo yuè zhě dì nèi zài xìng yǔ nèi zài zhě dì chāo yuè xìng" 超越者的内在性与内在者的超越性 [Immanence of the Transcendent and the Transcendence of the Immanent], in Lai Pinchao 赖品超 and Lin Hongxing 林宏星, *Rú yé duì huà yǔ shēng tài guān huái 儒耶对话与生态关怀* [Confucian-Christian Dialogue and Ecological Concern] (Beijing: Religious Culture Publishing House, 2006), pp. 1-42.

[91] Pan-chiu Lai, "Christian Transformation of Greek Humanism and its Implications for Christian-Confucian Dialogue," *Korea Journal of Systematic Theology* 22 (2008. 12), p.245-269.

[92] Pan-chiu Lai, "Shaping Humanity with Word and Spirit: Perspectives East, West and Neither-East-Nor-West," in: *Word and Spirit: Renewing Christology and Pneumatology in a Globalizing World*, edited by Anselm K. Min and Christoph Schwöbel (Berlin & Boston: Walter de Gruyter, 2014), pp. 131-149. A Chinese version of this essay is included in: Lai Pinchao, *Guang chang shang de Han yu shen xue*, chapter 8, pp. 193-216.

[93] Alexander Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). [Chinese translation published in 2015.]

[94] See: Pan-chiu Lai, "Reconsidering the Christian Understanding of Universal Salvation in Mahayana Buddhist Perspective," *Ching Feng*, n. s. 12 (2013), pp. 19-42.

[95] See: Hilarion Alfeyev, *Christ the Conqueror of Hell: The Descent into Hades from an Orthodox Perspective* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2009), pp. 213-218; cf. Lai, "Reconsidering the Christian Understanding of Universal Salvation in Mahayana Buddhist Perspective", p. 37.

[96] Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 262; cf. Lai, "Reconsidering the Christian Understanding of Universal Salvation in Mahayana Buddhist Perspective", p. 37.

beings; rather, it is a place of self-enslavement made by human beings and chosen by the misuse of their freedom.^[97] In order to point out that the real basis for this hope for universal salvation is the compassion which a Christian should have, Lai follows Ware in citing the saying of Isaac the Syrian (also known as Saint Isaac of Nineveh, d. 700) that “a merciful heart” is “a heart that burns with love for the whole of creation, for humans, for the birds, for the beasts, for the demons, for all creatures.”^[98] For Lai, the Orthodox approach of taking this merciful heart as the basis for the hope for universal salvation echoes the Mahayana affirmation of universal salvation, which includes not only the doctrine that all sentient beings, including icchantika, will attain Buddhahood, but also the bodhisattva’s compassionate vow of saving all beings from hell before entering into nirvana.^[99] Lai further affirms that though there are similar ideas in the Roman Catholic tradition, among the major denominations the Orthodox tradition is the most compatible with the Mahayana Buddhist doctrines related to universal salvation.^[100]

It is rather obvious that the Chinese explorations of Orthodox theology, especially those surveyed above, instead of being shaped merely by the modern renaissance of Orthodox theology, were also shaped by the Chinese Christians’ own concerns, including especially the relationship between Christianity and Chinese culture. This might be part of the reason why there are many Chinese studies of Orthodox theology conducted by scholars who are not from the Orthodox churches. The interplay between the Orthodox theological tradition and the contemporary Chinese context in the Chinese explorations of Orthodox theology may be able to enrich the studies of the Orthodox tradition with its rather distinctive Chinese perspective or cultural resources. For example, in Amos Yong’s study of pneumatology and Christian-Buddhist dialogue, he makes extensive references to the Orthodox tradition, especially the Desert tradition of Spirituality and the goal of salvation in terms of becoming divine.^[101] From the Buddhist side, Yong chooses the Theravada tradition of Self-Renunciation for comparison.^[102] He might have overlooked that the Mahayana Buddhist doctrine of Buddha-nature, which flourished mainly in Chinese Buddhism, could be closer to the Orthodox doctrine of deification, though not without some basic differences. It is interesting to note that many decades ago, a Chinese named Zhang Chun-yi (1871-1955) had compared the Mahayana Buddhist doctrine of Buddha-nature with the Christian doctrine of spirit, and even attempted to propose a Buddhist-Christian pneumatology, which emphasizes the unity between humanity and divinity. According to Zhang, the concept of spirit applies also to the human spirit rather than exclusively to the Holy Spirit, and thus relates to human nature, which is also what the Buddhist doctrine of Buddha-nature teaches.^[103] If Yong were more familiar with Chinese Buddhism, he might find more room for exploration and comparative studies of Buddhism and Orthodox

[97] See for details: Bishop Kallistos Ware, “Dare We Hope for the Salvation of All?,” in: *The Inner Kingdom: Volume 1 of the Complete Works* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2004), pp. 193-215; cf. Lai, “Reconsidering the Christian Understanding of Universal Salvation in Mahayana Buddhist Perspective”, p. 38.

[98] Isaac the Syrian, *Mystic Treatises*, edited by A. J. Wensinck (Amsterdam, 1923), p. 341; cf. Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p. 262; Lai, “Reconsidering the Christian Understanding of Universal Salvation in Mahayana Buddhist Perspective”, p. 38.

[99] Lai, “Reconsidering the Christian Understanding of Universal Salvation in Mahayana Buddhist Perspective”, p. 38.

[100] Lai, “Reconsidering the Christian Understanding of Universal Salvation in Mahayana Buddhist Perspective”, p. 40.

[101] Amos Yong, *Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue: Does the Spirit Blow through the Middle Way?* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 107-130.

[102] Amos Yong, *Pneumatology and the Christian-Buddhist Dialogue*, pp. 131-158.

[103] For the thought of Zhang Chun-yi 张纯一, especially his pneumatology and Buddhist-Christian studies, see: Pan-chiu Lai & Yuen-tai So, “Zhang Chun-yi’s Buddhist-Christian Pneumatology,” *Ching Feng* (New Series) 4. 1 (2003), pp. 51-77; also, Lai Pan-chiu & So Yuen-tai, “Mahayana Interpretation of Christianity: A Case Study of Zhang Chunyi (1871-1955),” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 27 (2007), pp. 67-87.

theology, especially the doctrine of deification.

Limitations of the Chinese Explorations

It is quite understandable that the interplay between the Orthodox theological tradition and the contemporary Chinese context might also bring forth certain limitations to the Chinese explorations of Orthodox theology.

In terms of scope or width, the Chinese Christian studies of Orthodox theology have not adequately covered the diverse issues of contemporary Orthodox theology. Admittedly, the Orthodox approach to ecological theology has attracted the attention of some Chinese theologians. The Orthodox approach is regarded as one of the seven major approaches to ecological theology according to a Chinese handbook for contemporary theology.^[104] Some references to Maximus the Confessor and John Zizioulas are made in the dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism on ecological issues.^[105] However, the Chinese explorations of Orthodox ecological theology remain very few and preliminary. The Orthodox theological engagements in the dialogue with postmodernism and with science are largely ignored by Chinese scholars.

Furthermore, the existing Chinese studies of Orthodox theology are mainly about theologians of the Greek Orthodox Church, Russian orthodox theology before the Communist revolution, or Russian Orthodox theologians in diaspora. The Orthodox churches and their theologies in post-Communist Eastern Europe are largely ignored. The Orthodox theologies beyond the Greek and Russian Orthodox churches are also largely neglected in the Chinese academia. However, it is important to note that the Orthodox theologies in post-Communist Eastern Europe, especially their theological reflections on their political experience under the Communist regimes can be highly relevant to the Christian churches in China. The Orthodox theology beyond Greek and Eastern Europe may have made its own rather distinctive contribution to the theological discussion concerning some contemporary issues which are relevant to the Chinese context.^[106] These could be areas to be further explored by Chinese theologians or scholars.

Notwithstanding the enormous areas for further explorations, before moving forward, it is very important to examine the limitations of the existing studies with regard to their depth or approach. As we shall see, the existing Chinese studies of Orthodox theology betray a rather subtle yet fundamental limitation regarding the approaches adopted. This limitation or barrier might sometimes make the Chinese studies of Orthodox theology far from adequate.

Perhaps one may take the Chinese appropriation of the Orthodox doctrine of deification for Confucian-Christian dialogue as an example for illustration. Lai's aforementioned attempt at making references to the Orthodox doctrine of deification to address the Confucian query concerning whether Christianity can affirm

[104] Lai Pinchao 赖品超, "Shēng tài shén xué" 生态神学 [Ecological Theology], in: *Xin shì jì dí shén xué yì chéng, xià cè* 新世纪的神学议程·下册 [Theology for the New Century, vol. 1] edited by Guo Hongbiao and Du Jianwei (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Christian Institute, 2003), pp. 423-451.

[105] Lai and Lin, *Rú yé duì huà yǔ shēng tài guān huái*, pp. 283-308, especially 287 and 303-304.

[106] For example, Paulos Mar Gregorios (1922-1996), the then Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan of New Delhi, published rather extensively on patristic theology as well as issues related to science, technology and ecology. See for instances: Paulos Mar Gregorios, *Cosmic Man-The Divine Presence: The Theology of St. Gregory of Nyssa (ca 330 to 395 A. D.)* (New York: Paragon; House, 1988); *The Human Presence: Ecological Spirituality and the Age of Spirit* (New York: Amity House, 1987); *A Light Too Bright-The Enlightenment Today: An Assessment of the Values of the European Enlightenment and a Search for New Foundations* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

that every human being can become Christ, is challenged by Paulos Huang. Huang finds particularly unacceptable Lai's suggestion that based on a rereading of the Chalcedonian formula, it is quite possible to affirm that every human being can become Christ through a Christological doctrine of human goodness.^[107] Huang attempts to identify Lai's position in terms of semi-Pelagianism and semi-Augustinianism, and to argue for maintaining the distinction between "Christlike" and "becoming Christ", while agreeing to Lai's suggestion that to "become participant in divine nature" is the goal of Christian salvation.^[108] Huang's query and counter-proposal may raise the question if his query is based on his Lutheran background as well as the presupposed Latin Western theological framework, which is quite different from the Orthodox theological framework assumed by Lai's suggestion.

It is understandable that there are certain tensions between the Orthodox doctrine of deification and the forensic doctrine of justification by faith associated with Lutheranism. In fact, the tension between the Lutheran doctrine of justification by grace alone and the Confucian emphasis on self-cultivation are highlighted in Huang's and Redse's studies.^[109] However, it is noteworthy that according to the Finnish interpretation of Luther articulated mainly by Tuomo Mannermaa (1937-2015), Luther's understanding of salvation, instead of being exhausted by the forensic doctrine of justification by faith, is focused on union with Christ and implies a doctrine of deification comparable, though not entirely equivalent, to the Orthodox understanding.^[110] Under the influences of this interpretation of Luther, there are many studies arguing that the doctrines of justification and deification are compatible and it is possible to develop a Lutheran approach to deification.^[111] If Huang had properly taken into consideration the implication of the Finnish interpretation of Luther,^[112] perhaps Huang might find Lai's suggestion less unacceptable.

Unlike Huang's query which relates directly to Lai and only implicitly or indirectly to the Orthodox doctrine of deification, the query made by Liu Xiaofeng against Orthodox theology is much more direct and explicit. In his introduction to the Chinese translation of Vladimir Lossky's *Orthodox Theology: An Introduction*, Liu tends to identify mystical theology with negative theology, and even criticizes Orthodox theology on the ground that it takes human sinfulness too lightly. For Liu, given Barth's emphasis on the infinite distance between God and the human being, what should be emphasized is human sinfulness rather than human similarity to God. Liu further comments that what should be taken seriously is the direct

[107] Pan-chiu Lai, "Christian-Confucian Dialogue on Humanity: An Ecological Perspective," *Studies in Interreligious Dialogue* 14. 2 (2004), pp. 202-215, especially p. 211.

[108] Paulos Huang, *Confronting Confucian Understandings of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation: A Systematic Theological analysis of the Basic Problems in the Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (Helsinki: Department of Systematic Theology, University of Helsinki, 2006), pp. 195-197. [Chinese translation published in 2009.]

[109] For instance, Arne Redse, 'Justification by Grace Alone' *Facing Confucian Self-Cultivation: The Christian Doctrine of Justification Contextualized to New Confucianism* (Leiden: Brill, 2015).

[110] See; Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson (eds.), *Union with Christ: The New Finnish Interpretation of Luther* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998); also, William W. Schumacher, *Who Do I Say That You Are: Anthropology and the Theology of Theosis in the Finnish School of Tuomo Mannermaa* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2010).

[111] See; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *One with God: Salvation as Deification and Justification* (Collegeville, Minnesota: Liturgical Press, 2004); also, Jordan Cooper, *Christification: A Lutheran Approach to Theosis* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2014).

[112] In his book, Huang did mention briefly Tuomo Mannermaa's interpretation of Luther. See; Huang, *Confronting Confucian Understandings of the Christian Doctrine of Salvation*, pp. 262-263.

experience of the Bible rather than the Orthodox claim for its distinctive tradition.^[113] It is all too obvious that Liu's criticism is based on a Protestant standpoint, which is based on a rather one-sided reading of Barth and overlooks that Barth's own position might exhibit certain similarities, in spite of the apparent differences.^[114] However, the most important problem remains that Liu's criticism of Orthodox theology betrays his lack of sympathetic understanding of the Orthodox tradition in general as well as inadequate understanding of the Orthodox mystical theology in particular.^[115] The case of Liu vividly illustrates that many Chinese scholars may find it rather difficult to understand the mystical tradition of Orthodox Christianity and this may be due, at least partially, to their own religious backgrounds which differ radically from the Orthodox tradition.

In his introduction to the Chinese edition of an anthology of Pseudo-Dionysius, Chen Zuoren (also known as Stephen T. Chan) perceptively points out the relationship between Pseudo-Dionysius's negative theology and that of Meister Eckhart (c. 1260-c. 1328) and Martin Heidegger (1889-1976).^[116] Chen makes reference to Jean-Luc Marion's proposal concerning God without being,^[117] and further explores the significance of Pseudo-Dionysius's negative theology for Chinese theology.^[118] Though Chen affirms that there is no contradiction between negative theology and affirmative theology,^[119] when exploring the significance of Pseudo-Dionysius for Chinese theology, his discussion is focused on the negative theology in *Mystical Theology*, and he neglects the significance of Pseudo-Dionysius's other works in the anthology, including *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and makes no connection among the three works by Pseudo-Dionysius.

Chen's interpretation of Pseudo-Dionysius is in sharp contrast to the interpretations offered by scholars from the Orthodox tradition. For example, Andrew Louth's study of Pseudo-Dionysius emphasizes how the concept of "hierarchy" in *Mystical Theology* is connected to *Celestial Hierarchy* and *Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*, and how it differs from the Neo-Platonic interpretation of the concept. Louth further highlights the distinction between negative theology and mystical theology. While the former belongs to the sphere of human reason, the latter involves the immediate divine-human relation and relates to church liturgy, which is an invitation to open oneself to accept and respond to divine love. In this sense, mystical theology refers to the

[113] Liu Xiaofeng 刘小枫, "Zhōng yì běn dǎo yán" 中译本导言 [Introduction to the Chinese Edition], Fú. Luò sī jī 弗·洛斯基 (Vladimir Lossky), *Dōng zhèng jiào shén xué dǎo lùn* 东正教神学导论 [Orthodox Theology: An Introduction], translated by Yáng déyǒu 杨德友 (Shijiangzhuang, PRC: Hebei Education Press, 2002), pp. 1-29, especially p. 28.

[114] How and to what extent Barth's understanding of participation in Christ differs from the Orthodox doctrine of deification remains a controversial issue in Barth scholarship. See: Bruce L. McCormack, "Participation in God, Yes; Deification, No: Two Modern Protestant Responses to an Ancient Question", in: *Orthodox and Modern: Studies in the Theology of Karl Barth* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2008), pp. 235-260; Adam Neder, *Participation in Christ: An Entry into Karl Barth's Church Dogmatics* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009), pp. 86-92; and, Zhang Shaobo 张少博, *Zhèng jiào dí chéng shén jiào yì yǔ bā tè shén xué* 正教的成神教义与巴特神学 [Orthodox Doctrine of Theosis and Barth's Theology] (Hong Kong: The Chinese University of Hong Kong, unpublished Ph. D. thesis 2015).

[115] For a critique of Liu's criticism of Orthodox mystical theology, see: Lai Pinchao 赖品超, "Zhōng yì běn dǎo yán" 中译本导言 [Introduction to the Chinese Edition], in: *Méi yán duō fū* 梅延多夫 (John Meyendorff), *Bài zhān tíng shén xué zhōng dí jī dū* 拜占庭神学中的基督 [Christ in Eastern Christian Thought], translated by Tan Lizhu 谭立铸 (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma Press, 2011), pp. xiii-xxxv, especially xxvi-xxxv. This essay is reprinted in: Lai Pinchao, *Guang chang shang de Han yu shen xue*, chapter 6, pp. 145-168.

[116] Chen Zuoren 陈佐人, "Zhōng yì běn dǎo yán" 中译本导言 [Introduction to the Chinese Edition], in: (Tuō míng) Dī ào ní xiū sī (托名)狄奥尼修斯 [Pseudo-Dionysius], *Shén mì shén xué* 神秘神学 [Mystical Theology], translated by Bao Limin 包利民 (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 1998), pp. 23-26.

[117] Jean-Luc Marion, *God Without Being*, tr. by Thomas A. Carlson; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

[118] Chen Zuoren, "Zhōng yì běn dǎo yán", pp. 26-29.

[119] Chen Zuoren, "Zhōng yì běn dǎo yán", pp. 20-23.

union with God or deification which is embodied in the liturgy.^[120] In similar vein, in his comparative study of Pseudo-Dionysius and Heidegger, Christos Yannaras points out that unlike the Western theologians who tend to identify negative theology merely as a corrective of affirmative theology or cataphatic theology, the Orthodox understanding of negative theology, following Pseudo-Dionysius, refers to the divine-human relationship which involves personal participation as well as erotic communion, and is beyond human conceptuality.^[121] The difference between the existing Chinese and Orthodox interpretations of Pseudo-Dionysius might reflect a rather basic problem of the Chinese explorations of Orthodox theology to be addressed.

Concluding Remarks

In the Chinese academia, the study of Christianity as a whole is dominated by the studies of Protestantism or studies with the Protestant perspective. There are a significant number of studies of Catholicism or studies with the Catholic perspective. The studies of Orthodox Christianity constitute just a very tiny part of Christian Studies in the Chinese speaking world. This unbalanced situation in turn makes the study of Orthodox Christianity, especially Orthodox theology, even more difficult. This is because many Chinese scholars might approach the Orthodox theology with an inappropriate framework inherited from other Christian theological traditions or even secular intellectual traditions.

Some of the aforementioned limitations of the Chinese explorations of Orthodox theology are partially due to the contextual concerns of Chinese theologians and scholars. But more often they are constituted by the religious backgrounds of the researchers, and many of whom are not members of the Orthodox churches and not familiar with the Orthodox tradition. Some of them might thus approach Orthodox theology with a theological framework inherited from the Western Latin theological tradition, especially Protestant theology. Some others might even adopt a more intellectual or philosophical approach in their interpretations of Orthodox theology.^[122] As a result, the vital connection between theology and spirituality as well as liturgy in the Orthodox tradition is often neglected. It is rather unfortunate that the Orthodox theological tradition is deeply embedded in its liturgical and spiritual, especially mystical, tradition. Unlike the systematic and intellectualistic tendencies of modern western theology, especially academic theology, the Orthodox theological tradition takes seriously the limitation of human language and does not rely on an intellectualistic articulation of a theological system. It is thus rather difficult for an outsider of the Orthodox tradition to have an adequate understanding of Orthodox theology, especially its mystical theology, without a proper and comprehensive understanding of its liturgy, visual arts, spirituality, etc. Admittedly, some Chinese studies of Orthodox theologies may be able to highlight properly the connection between the Christian liturgy and the negation of language in the Orthodox tradition.^[123] But how to overcome the limitation or barrier constituted by the researcher's own religious background or lack of it, remains a crucial challenge for many individual researchers of Orthodox theology and the future development of Chinese studies of Orthodox theology as a

[120] Andrew Louth, *Denys the Areopagite* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1989), pp. 104-109.

[121] Christos Yannaras, *On the Absence and Unknowability of God*, pp. 83-110.

[122] For example, Xu Fenglin 徐凤林, *É luó sī zōng jiào zhé xué 俄罗斯宗教哲学 [Russian Philosophy of Religion]* (Beijing: Peking University Press, 2006).

[123] For example: Li Bingquan 李丙权, *Mǎ xī wēng, jì zhòu lā sī hé kè fú běn tǐ-shén xué wèn tí 马西翁, 济宙拉斯和克服本体-神学问题 [Jean-Luc Marcion, John Zizioulas and the Problem of Overcoming Onto-Theology]* (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma Press, 2015).

whole.

One of the possible ways of overcoming the limitation or barrier outlined above is to engage the relevant Chinese scholars and Orthodox theologians in dialogue. Through dialogue, the Orthodox theologians may be able to furnish the Chinese scholars an insider's point of view and help them to have a more sympathetic understanding of the Orthodox tradition as a whole so that they can have a better understanding of Orthodox theology. Furthermore, the dialogue with living Orthodox theologians, especially those from post-Communist Eastern Europe, may also help the Chinese scholars to learn from the Orthodox churches' rich experience of living under political pressure and/or persecution, and from their theological reflections on political totalitarianism. This may help the Chinese scholars and theologians to consider their ways of living in their own political context. In return, through the dialogue, Chinese scholars and theologians may have the chance to share their exploration of Orthodox theology with Orthodox theologians. Although their explorations may be fragmentary and preliminary, with their rather distinctive cultural resources, socio-political experiences, and worldviews, their contributions may help to enrich the development of Orthodox theology.

中文题目:

汉语学界对正教神学的探索:一个批判性的回顾

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提要:虽然基督正教徒在中国为数甚少,但关于基督正教的中文书刊却如雨后春笋。在汉语学界,不少来自基督宗教的其他宗派的神学家,以至在形式上没有宗教归属的学者,都有参与对正教神学的探索。本文尝试分析并评估汉语学界的这些对正教神学的探索。

藉着参考正教神学在当代的发展、尤其成神论的复兴,本文将会指出,汉语学界对正教神学的探索,既受到二十世纪正教的神学复兴的影响,也受到中国处境的左右。中国处境的介入对中国学者对正教神学的探索,有着正反两面的影响。一方面,在探索的范围或广度上,整体来说是高度集中在与中国处境、尤其与基督宗教与中国文化关系的议题或领域上;此外,在探索的深度上,由于研究者的宗教背景,汉语学界一些对正教神学的研究,未能掌握正教传统中,神学、礼仪与灵性等向度的紧密关系,并因此在诠释例如正教传统中的冥契神学时,显得有点困难。

可以预期的是,透过与当代的正教神学家的对话,至少可以部份地克服这些限制。这种对话也将有助正教神学家理解,汉语界的神学家及学者的探索,对于正教神学的当代陈述,也有可能作出颇为独特的贡献。

关键词: 中国文化;儒家;成神;冥契神学;正教神学

