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## Ching Feng [New Series, Volume 6, Number 1, 2005]

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# Ching Feng

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*A Journal on Christianity and  
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# A Christian Monastery for Buddhist Monks

## Part I: Karl Ludvig Reichelt's Sacred Mountains

NOTTO R. THELLE

This article is part of a broad investigation of the attempt by the Norwegian missionary Karl Ludvig Reichelt (1877–1952) to establish meeting grounds between Christians and Buddhists in China.

I have elsewhere described Reichelt as a missionary pilgrim or a pilgrim missionary, with equal emphasis on both. As a *missionary*, he was convinced that he had a special calling to engage in missionary work among Buddhists in China. Whatever he did as a student of religion, a dialogue partner, or a preacher, he wanted intensely to share his faith with others. As a *pilgrim*, he was on a journey searching for truth. His pilgrimage challenged him not only to a new understanding of Buddhism and other Chinese religious traditions, but of his own Christian faith as well.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Notto R. Thelle, “Karl Ludvig Reichelt 1877–1952: Christian Pilgrim of Tao Fong Shan,” in *Mission Legacies: Biographical Studies of Leaders of the Modern Missionary Movement*, ed. Gerald H. Anderson *et al.* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1994), 216–24; idem, “‘The Conversion of the Missionary’: Changes in Buddhist–Christian Relations in the Early Twentieth Century,” *Ching Feng*, n.s., 4, no. 2 (2003): 131–56; idem, “Karl Ludvig Reichelt—pionéren som kom inn fra kulden. Behov for en ny kritisk vurdering” [Karl Ludvig Reichelt: the pioneer who came in from the cold. Demand for a new critical evaluation], *Norsk tidsskrift for misjon* (hereafter cited as

My focus will be the very centre of Reichelt's project—the establishment of Christian “monasteries” for Buddhist monks, the most important of which were Ching Fong Shan (Jingfengshan 景風山) in Nanjing, established in the 1920s,<sup>2</sup> and Tao Fong Shan (Daofengshan 道風山), established in Hong Kong in the 1930s. The third institution, T'ien Fong Shan (Tianfengshan 天風山), was initiated in Hangzhou 杭州 in the 1930s. A few other minor centres were also opened, with only brief histories and minor impact.

The term “monastery” may confuse some readers, for the leaders of those Christian institutions were not monks but married clergymen in the Scandinavian Lutheran tradition. Although other terms were also used from time to time, the institutions were consistently called “monasteries.” They were established as sacred places for pilgrimage, study, religious discipline, worship, and dialogue, and were more or less designed according to Buddhist models and conventions. “Monastery” is therefore adequate as a term for indicating the central intention behind the institutions so called.

This is the first of two articles forming a bipartite study on Reichelt's monasteries. The first article will describe in some detail the plan and layout of the monasteries, their external facilities and interior designs, and will discuss the terminology used and the interpretations given. To a certain extent I will refer to the principles and strategies behind Reichelt's work in relation to the monasteries, and will include some suggestions about possible interpretive models, apart from the obvious Buddhist inspiration, for the institutions. Most of the discussion of hermeneutical issues, however, will have to wait for the second article, in which I will focus on the liturgies and hymns used in worship

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*NOTM* 52, no. 4 (1998): 195–216; idem, “Reichelts misjon og livsverk—en utfordring til vår tid?” [Reichelt's mission and life work: a challenge to our time?], *NOTM* 51, no. 1 (1997): 33–52.

Among major studies of Reichelt, see Håkan Eilert, *Boundlessness* (Aarhus: Forlaget Aros, 1974); Filip Riisager, *Forventning og opfyldelse* [Expectation and fulfilment] (Aarhus: Forlaget Aros, 1973); idem, *Lotusblomsten og korset* [The lotus and the cross] (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1998); Eric J. Sharpe, *Karl Ludvig Reichelt: Missionary, Scholar, and Pilgrim* (Hong Kong: Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre, 1984); Notto N. Thelle, *Karl Ludvig Reichelt—en kristen banebryter i Øst-Asia* [Karl Ludvig Reichelt: a Christian pioneer in East Asia] (Oslo: Buddhistmisjonens Forlag, 1954).

<sup>2</sup> I will use the traditional names of the institutions, written in Wade-Giles style, since these are the names under which they are still known. The name “Ching Fong Shan” was inspired by the Nestorian Church in Tang China, which was called *jingjiao* 景教 or the “Luminous Teaching.” The term *jingfeng* 景風 (the “luminous wind”) is found in the Nestorian monument as one of the names for the Holy Spirit. See below.

and on other rituals of the institutions. These were consistently created in order to attract Buddhist monks, and to develop a language that conveyed basic Christian ideas in forms that could be understood by them. The material in the two articles will enable me, and I hope also the reader, to engage in a more comprehensive reflection on the hermeneutics of the institutions, and to give at least a tentative evaluation of Reichelt's work in respect of the monasteries.

In many ways Reichelt represented an understanding of non-Christian religions that became quite common in missionary circles in the early twentieth century: they were expected to function as a preparation for Christianity, which would fulfil them. This corresponds to a similar understanding of the Old Covenant, represented by "the Law and the Prophets," as a preparation for the New Covenant in Jesus Christ, who did not come "to abolish the Law or the Prophets . . . but to fulfil them" (Matt. 5:17). For Reichelt and some of his contemporary missionaries in China, the so-called "higher Buddhism," that is the aspects of Mahāyāna that seemed to be most in tune with Christianity, was in particular regarded as divine preparation for the Christian faith. The inner aspirations of Buddhism were so to speak pointing towards faith in Christ.

Reichelt's choice of the Nestorian lotus cross as the central symbol for his missionary work is a visual expression of this expectation.<sup>3</sup> The Nestorian cross is found not only in the Nestorian monument erected in 781, but in numerous places and various shapes dating from the Tang dynasty (618–907) and the Yuan (Mongol) dynasty (1275–1368). Although the symbolism may be interpreted in various ways, Reichelt gave it an unambiguous meaning in accordance with his missionary vision. The lotus—the Buddhist symbol of the human search for truth and purity—is the well-prepared ground on which Christianity, represented by the cross, is placed as the ultimate answer to the spiritual longing in Buddhism. For Reichelt and many of his contemporaries (many of whom were Buddhists), the lotus cross expressed a new open-

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<sup>3</sup> Among the numerous studies of the Nestorian Church in China, see, e.g., P. Y. Saeki, *The Nestorian Monument in China* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1916); John Foster, *The Church of the Tang Dynasty* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1939); A. C. Moule, *Nestorians in China* (London: China Society, 1940); James Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsi-an Fū in Shen-hsi* (London: Trübner & Co., 1888). More recent studies include Li Tang, *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity in China and Its Literature in Chinese: Together with a New English Translation of the Dunhuang Nestorian Documents* (Frankfurt am Main and New York: Lang, 2002); Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 2nd rev. ed. (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1998).

ness among Christians to the riches of other religions. But for many others, particularly some Buddhists who understood the symbol's somewhat triumphalistic implications, it became a provocation and a stumbling block. However, as we shall see, the lotus cross remained the central symbol of the mission.

The inadequacy of the evolutionary perspectives in Reichelt's vision has been discussed elsewhere and will not be repeated here.<sup>4</sup> Reichelt was a child of his time with all the inherent limitations of the contemporary missiological trends. Nevertheless, there are still a lot of ambiguity and contradictory tendencies in Reichelt's work, as well as many aspects that have not yet been sufficiently investigated. Perhaps the simplistic image of Reichelt as a "Bible-waving missionary who fraudulently adopted Buddhist guise" must be modified with more complex ways of understanding.<sup>5</sup>

The mixture of Buddhism and Christianity in Reichelt's work may seem confusing and even bizarre, and is certainly open to quite contradictory interpretations, depending upon perspectives and hermeneutic keys. Since Reichelt's was one of the most fascinating and daring experiments in the history of modern missions, it remains a challenge to search for an adequate understanding of his Buddhist-Christian monasteries and to discuss their possible implications.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> In addition to the references given above in note 1, I might add, for Scandinavian readers, my article "Karl Ludvig Reichelts religionshistoriske og religionsteologiske profil" [Karl Ludvig Reichelt's profile as a historian of religion and theologian of religion], *Norsk teologisk tidsskrift* 105, no. 4 (2004): 193–215.

<sup>5</sup> See Whalen Lai, "Why Is There Not a Buddho-Christian Dialogue in China?," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 6 (1986): 93.

<sup>6</sup> One of the limitations of most analyses of Reichelt's work is the lack of interdisciplinary competence. A one-sided dependence on Scandinavian and other Western sources will primarily reveal his Christianized interpretations of Buddhist traditions, and will dilute or even ignore the strong Buddhist colouring of many expressions. Reichelt's own interpretations do not only suggest his own theological understanding, but may even be an accommodation to his Norwegian critics who warned against all sorts of compromise or syncretism. An adequate investigation of Reichelt's work requires interdisciplinary competence in theology, buddhology (primarily Mahāyāna), and the Chinese language, in addition to acquaintance with Scandinavian and other Western sources.

## 1. THE MONASTIC CONCEPT

Reichelt's vision of establishing Christian monasteries for Buddhist monks was based on his experience as a missionary pilgrim. On his numerous travels, he had been given ample opportunity to enjoy the hospitality and friendship offered at Buddhist monasteries, and was in many ways overwhelmed. He was one of the many "converted missionaries" who became so fascinated by aspects of Chinese religion and culture that they became mediators between Christianity and Eastern traditions.<sup>7</sup> Reichelt was in particular touched by the piety of the monks, the intense atmosphere of devotion, and the solemn beauty of the sanctuaries. He was impressed by the hospitality and friendship that gave him opportunities not only for participation, observances, and study, but also for preaching his own message and engaging in dialogue with the monks. His books and articles on Chinese religion in general, and Buddhism in particular, might be limited by his theological understanding and missionary intentions, but he was the first missionary to become a sort of advocate for Mahāyāna Buddhism in Chinese form.<sup>8</sup> His experiences of hospitality, friendship and contact in Buddhist institutions finally matured to a concrete vision of establishing corresponding Christian monasteries as meeting places for Buddhists and Christians.

Reichelt often referred to an experience during a visit to Weishan 滬山 Monastery in Hu'nan 湖南 in 1905 as the dawn of his vision for special work among Buddhist monks. His early reports from that visit, however, reveal hardly more than the fascination and curiosity of an inexperienced missionary who had discovered a new world.<sup>9</sup> His con-

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<sup>7</sup> Xi Lian, *The Conversion of Missionaries: Liberalism in American Protestant Missions in China, 1907–1932* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1997); see also my article, "The Conversion of the Missionary" (above, note 1).

<sup>8</sup> Holmes Welch, *The Buddhist Revival in China* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1968), 240–41, describes Reichelt as "a leading champion of Chinese Buddhism's good reputation."

<sup>9</sup> The first report was published in *Norsk Missionstidende* (hereafter cited as *NMT*), 1906, 58–62, but was later developed by Reichelt as a classical story of mental awakening, almost like Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus; see, e.g., Reichelt's *Den kristne misjon blant Kinas buddhister* [The Christian mission among China's Buddhists] (Oslo: Buddhistmisjonens Forlag, 1926), 3–5; idem, *Drømmen som blev virkelighet* [The dream that was realized] (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1947), 10–14.

tinuous studies in the following years obviously intensified his interest, and prepared him for deeper contact. But it seems that the encounter with the Buddhist monk Kuandu (K'uan-tu) 寬度 in 1919, and the close cooperation between them after Kuandu's conversion, were decisive for Reichelt's vision. The conversion of Kuandu led to the establishment of the first "Christian brotherhood among China's Buddhists" in January 1920. Kuandu actually provided numerous suggestions for the layout and purpose of a monastic community, where Buddhists could meet Christians in a congenial atmosphere.<sup>10</sup> It was expected that similar conversions would create a Christian movement among Buddhist monks and even lead to the transfer of Buddhist monasteries to the new brotherhood along with their buildings, rice fields and land, thus making self-support possible. The brotherhood and its institutions would then serve as a Christian presence in the Buddhist world.<sup>11</sup> As we shall see in the following analysis, Kuandu and other converted monks had decisive influence also over the development of liturgies, interior design, calligraphic inscriptions, and strategies in the initial work in Nanjing from 1922.

Transfer of Buddhists properties never materialized, as one might have expected,<sup>12</sup> but when Reichelt returned to China in November 1922 with his young associate and assistant, Notto Normann Thelle (my father; 1901–90), the immediate task was to realize the vision of a Christian monastery in Nanjing. The political upheavals ending with the Nanjing incident in 1927 prevented the completion of the ambitious plans. But even the modest institution that were established there from 1922 to 1927 included all the elements of a small-scale monastery, and prepared for the establishment of a more complete institution in Hong Kong in the 1930s.

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<sup>10</sup> The encounter with Kuandu is described in detail in Reichelt's pamphlet, *Kinas buddhister for Kristus* [China's Buddhists for Christ] (Stavanger: Det Norske Misjons-selskap, 1920). A brief account of it was published in *The Chinese Recorder* (hereafter cited as *CR*) 51 (1920): 491–97 as well as in the missionary journal *Kamp og seier* [Struggle and victory] (hereafter cited as *K & S*), Christmas edition, 1920. All these reports include reflections about strategies and views on Buddhism as a preparatory stage for faith in Christ. See also Notto N. Thelle's recollection in *Farfar forteller* [Grandfather's stories], xerox edition for private use, made in the 1980s.

<sup>11</sup> Similar expectations were still expressed as late as 1923. See *NMT*, 1923, 209.

<sup>12</sup> This was a time when Buddhist properties were confiscated for use by schools, hospitals, military, and political authorities, and appropriation for Christian purposes would certainly have created bitter animosity among Buddhists. One of the temples expected to be taken over by the brotherhood was actually confiscated by municipal authorities.

## 2. THE BLUEPRINT OF A MONASTERY

The first sketches and plans for the Christian monastery were made by Reichelt and Kuandu during a summer vacation at Jigongshan 雞公山 (Kikungshan) in He'nan 河南 Province in 1919, and were later refined and drawn by the Norwegian engineer cum missionary Nicolai Kiær (1888–1934). The drawing, still somewhat amateurish, reveals a monastery modelled after Buddhist conventions, but modified to serve as a Christian community.<sup>13</sup>

Entering the gate one will find an open plaza occupied by a church or temple hall, the largest building modelled after a Buddhist worship hall, *cantang* 參堂, with a guest house for visitors on the right side of the plaza. Immediately behind the church are two buildings, one with a lecture hall and a library and the other with a “prayer tower” built like a pagoda, a meditation hall, and a pastor’s residence. All these buildings house the evangelistic department, but three central buildings—the church, the lecture hall, and the meditation hall—are regarded as the centre of all activities, designed for worship, teaching, and meditation respectively. On the left side of the compound is the educational department, with a large dormitory, a school building, and residence for teachers. Here baptized monks—the best qualified people to be prepared for pastoral work, teaching or evangelism—as well as others to be trained for nursing or printing and publishing, will be educated by taking classes. The third department, located at the back, is the administrative centre for the institution itself and for a nationwide network of similar institutions one might hope to establish in the future. Here the superintendent and his assistants, like the abbot and his administration in a Buddhist monastery, will reside. In the most remote part of the compound there will be, in addition, guest facilities for lay Buddhist visitors, a home for aging brothers, and even a small mortuary chapel and a crematorium. In this way the plan has included many of the central elements of a Buddhist monastery: facilities for preaching and teaching, education and training, meditation and practical work, ad-

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<sup>13</sup> The following description is based on information from various sources. In addition to the writings on the encounter with Kuandu mentioned above, see notably K. L. Reichelt, “Special Work among Chinese Buddhists,” *CR* 51 (1920): 491–97; Paul D. Twinem, “A New Brotherhood,” *CR* 54 (1923): 639–48.

ministration and business, as well as for the care of the elderly, the dying and the dead.

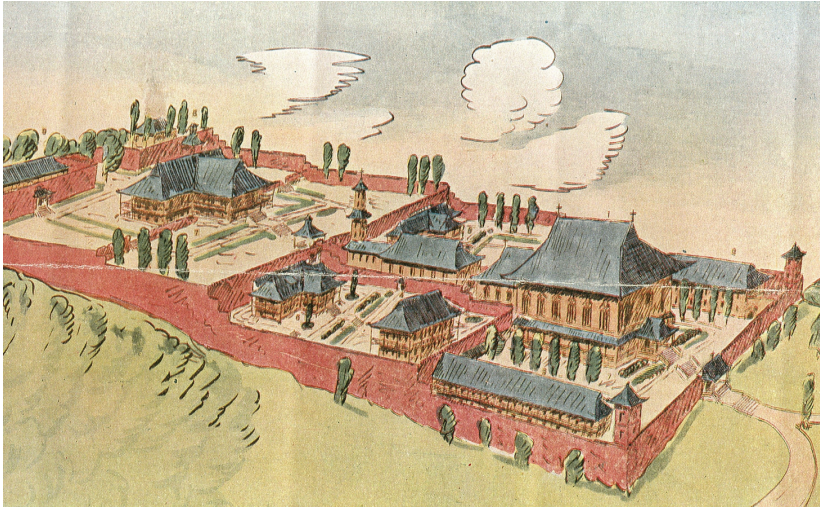


FIGURE 1: The first plan of the Christian monastery for Buddhist monks (1919).<sup>14</sup>

The plan was never realized in all details, but the ambition to create a monastery adapted to Buddhist ideals both in terms of external structure and internal atmosphere remained, and was later developed in great detail.

### 3. ESTABLISHING MONASTERIES

The first tentative steps to realize the plan were greatly impeded by limited means. With a daily life verging on poverty Reichelt and his coworkers established modest external facilities that could compare neither with the original plan nor with some poor Buddhist monaster-

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<sup>14</sup> Published in *K&S*, Christmas edition, 1920.

ies. Nevertheless, Buddhist monastic terminology and conventions were consistently adopted. Both in Nanjing and Hong Kong, and later in every other place where the mission established a monastery, a naming convention of Buddhist monasteries was followed: *shan* 山, meaning mount or hill, would form part of a monastery's name. Hence the names Ching Fong Shan, Tao Fong Shan, and T'ien Fong Shan. Monks who were baptized there received a name relating them to the respective mounts, with Ching (Jing), Tao (Dao) or T'ien (Tian) forming part of their new identity.

As the work developed in Nanjing, the plan was to establish the central monastery on a hill outside the city—which would form the Ching Fong Shan proper—as the *shangyuan* 上院 (“upper house” or head monastery); a property located in the city would be used as the *xiayuan* 下院 (“lower house” or branch monastery), also in conformity with Buddhist conventions. Throughout its history the *shangyuan* became nothing more than an interim place for worship, recreation, and informal gatherings. It is also noteworthy that the first simple chapel in Nanjing—the Ashoka Hall (Alunjiatang 阿輪迦堂)—was named after the great Buddhist emperor, perhaps because he was a symbol of tolerance and peaceful coexistence between religions.<sup>15</sup>

All the institutions were consistently called *conglin* 叢林, which is a concept used for major Buddhist monasteries. One might suspect that Reichelt was unaware of the implications of such an ambitious term, but his choice was actually based on careful study. In his books on Chinese Buddhism he describes in detail different types of monasteries and temples and the terminology used, concluding that *conglin* is the most prominent word for monasteries where monks are in residence and receive education.<sup>16</sup> In Reichelt's understanding, these larger monasteries attracted “the best men, men with feeling of responsibility and a social spirit,” while ordinary temples tended to attract more indifferent monks.<sup>17</sup> His choice may be criticized or even ridiculed, but it is a clear expression of his ambition to establish a monastery by which the real truth-seekers in the Buddhist community could be drawn to the life-transforming experience of Christianity.

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<sup>15</sup> Seen in a photograph taken by N. N. Thelle in 1922–23, private collection. The inscription was apparently removed later.

<sup>16</sup> K. L. Reichelt, *Kinas religioner* [China's religions] (Stavanger: Det Norske Missionselskap, 1922), 170.

<sup>17</sup> K. L. Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism* (Shanghai: Commercial Press, 1928), 264.

Another expression used by Reichelt also reflects the same intention: *daochang* 道場, literally a “Dao-place,” is one of the traditional Buddhist terms for “training ground.” It is used to refer to the sacred place where the Buddha himself reached enlightenment (Sanskrit: *bodhi-maṇḍa*). Sometimes it refers to sanctuaries where Buddhas and Bodhisattvas are worshipped, or more generally to a sacred place for seeking awakening. The term is also used for *maṇḍala*. In Reichelt’s imagination the term emphasizes the formative power of such a place. For him the Dao not only refers to the “Way” of Chinese philosophy or the Buddhist Dharma, but also refers to the central ordering principle of the cosmos, almost synonymous with the Johannine Logos, the “Word” that was incarnated in Christ. An expression reminiscent of both Buddhist and Christian expressions, *daochang* was used to refer to “a place where the great religious laws underlying the universe are operating for the salvation of all living beings.”<sup>18</sup> Referring to Ching Fong Shan as a *daochang*, Reichelt describes it in his flowery language as “an area where the great saving law of life is working,” and similarly describes the interim place in Shanghai as “a square or a circle where ‘the Word’ is at work.”<sup>19</sup> Later, perhaps inspired by E. Stanley Jones’s (1884–1973) ashram movement in India and Chinese spiritualistic lay movements such as Daoyuan 道院, Reichelt describes the centre as an “open court,” a gathering place where “the broadminded type of religious people in the Far East” could meet for religious talks.<sup>20</sup> Similar expressions were used in Reichelt’s opening words in the Tao Fong Shan guest book, where he welcomed all visitors to “this open court of the universal, the cosmic, the all-embracing [*sic*] Saviour Jesus Christ.”

In addition to the chapel, there would always be a hall of hospitality for pilgrims, which had been called by such names as Guadanyuan 掛單院<sup>21</sup> or Yuanshuitang 圓睡堂;<sup>22</sup> later it was consistently called Yunshuitang 雲水堂—*yunshui* (cloud-water) being the most common name

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<sup>18</sup> K. L. Reichelt, “Indigenous Religious Phrases That May Be Used to Interpret the Christian Message,” *CR* 58 (1927): 126.

<sup>19</sup> *Buddhistmissionen* [Journal of the Mission to Buddhists; hereafter cited as *BM*], 1, no. 4 (1926): 51; 4, no. 4 (1929): 57.

<sup>20</sup> K. L. Reichelt, “Buddhism in China at the Present Time and the New Challenges to the Christian Church,” *International Review of Missions* 26 (1937): 165. For the role of Daoyuan and other lay movements, see my article “Karl Ludvig Reichelt—pionéren som kom inn fra kulden.”

<sup>21</sup> *Guadan* 掛單 is a traditional word for wandering monks who stay for a night in a monastery, hanging (*gua*) all their possessions by the bench (*dan*) in the hall of hospitality.

<sup>22</sup> Meaning the “Hall of Perfect Sleep (or Rest).”

for Buddhist wandering monks in China, Korea, and Japan.<sup>23</sup> From the very beginning the pilgrims' hall was established according to Buddhist conventions. On both sides of the room there would be two raised platforms, where the monks could spread bedding; above these were shelves on which to place their modest belongings. Here they could meditate, study, read, and sleep. Between the platforms were an incense-burner and candle sticks, and on the wall a crucifix and calligraphic inscriptions of scriptural quotations, such as "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son . . ." and "Come unto me all ye that labour and are heavy laden . . ." <sup>24</sup> The only available photograph from this first pilgrims' hall, however, shows scrolls that have mixed Buddhist and Christian contents. The inscriptions are not complete: one seems to refer to life on earth as an endless karmic cycle of painful rebirths; another perhaps refers to the (divine?) life leaping forward to immortality like a grain of wheat that bears fruit.<sup>25</sup> One young monk would be in charge of the hall.

While Ching Fong Shan was never completed according to the initial plans, the establishment of Tao Fong Shan was an opportunity for further implementation of the plans in respect to the outward structure. Reichelt had earlier established close contact with the Danish architect Johannes Prip-Møller (1889–1943), who specialized in Buddhist architecture in China.<sup>26</sup> Reichelt's ideas and Prip-Møller's expertise then combined to produce the plans for a unique Christian monastery modelled on Buddhist ones. Reichelt's original drawings in 1919 still provided the basic framework,<sup>27</sup> but they had to be radically modified in

<sup>23</sup> The term "cloud-water" suggests the image of Buddhist pilgrims walking with clouds and drifting with water in search for a master. The term has also become more institutionalized, designating the training hall for young novices and trainees.

<sup>24</sup> N. N. Thelle, "The Christian Mission to Buddhists," *CR* 58 (1927): 572; idem, *Fra begynnelsen til nu* [From the beginning until now] (Oslo: Den Kristne Buddhismisjons Forlag, 1939), 22–23, 52–53. The first interim pilgrims' hall was established in Nanjing, on June 14, 1923, soon to be moved to better locations.

<sup>25</sup> Photograph taken by N. N. Thelle in 1926, private collection. The inscription is rather obscure, and my reading is assuming that Reichelt or his coworkers here interpreted *shenxian* 神仙, the Daoist "immortal" or sage, as an expression of the hope of eternal life, immortality, or sanctity. With Reichelt's interest in the Gospel of John, it probably alludes to the words of Jesus in 12:24–25, where he speaks of the grain of wheat that resurrects to bear abundant fruit, and of the person who abandons his life to keep it unto life eternal.

<sup>26</sup> Prip-Møller established himself as an authority on Buddhist architecture in his monumental *Chinese Monasteries: Their Plan and Its Function as a Setting for Buddhist Monastic Life* (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1937); republished in Hong Kong in 1967 and 1983 by the Hong Kong University Press.

<sup>27</sup> This can be seen in the drawings used for collecting funds for the new monastery in

order to fit the new structure onto a rather narrow ridge of the purchased piece of land in Shatin, which is located in the New Territories of Hong Kong (see figures 2 and 3 below).

Most of the plans were realized in the 1930s: a chapel with a meditation crypt, a guest hall, a pilgrims' hall, a school and dormitories, residences for missionaries and Chinese staff, and other necessary facilities. But two major buildings were never put up according to the plans, namely the library and the large worship hall. The worship hall was designed to be built on the open ridge facing Shatin Valley, in accordance with Buddhist conventions. The library was conceived as a smaller, but still impressive, building located between the school and the worship hall (see figure 4 on page 15, drawn by Prip-Møller). Everything was intended to serve the purpose of receiving Buddhist monks and visitors from other religious communities, for short visits or for longer periods of study, in an atmosphere of spiritual friendship and Christian worship.

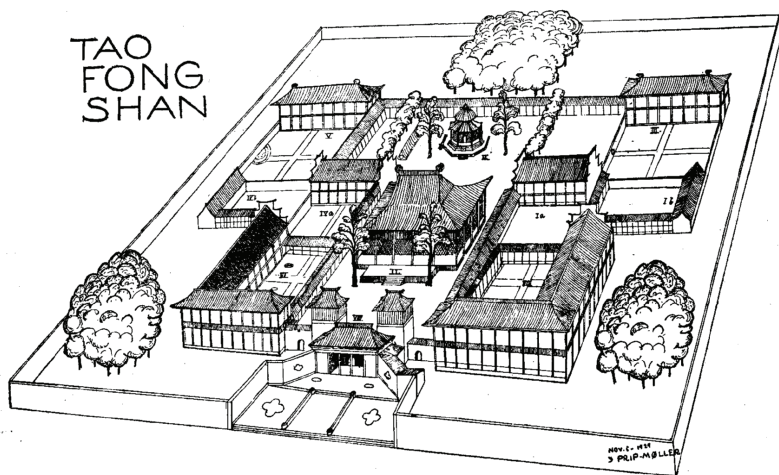


FIGURE 2: Johannes Prip-Møller's first plans for Tao Fong Shan in 1929, which followed the original drawings in 1919 and which had to be radically modified in order to fit the structure onto a narrow ridge of the purchased piece of land in Shatin, Hong Kong.<sup>28</sup>

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the monthly of the mission, *Buddhistmissionen*; see also sketches in Reichelt's booklet, *Tao Fong Shan* (Oslo: Den Kristne Buddhistmisjons Forlag, 1930); Hans Helge Madsen, *Prip-Møllers Kina* [Prip-Møller's China] (Copenhagen: Arkitektens Forlag, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Published in *BM* 5, no. 1 (1929): 36.

Prip-Møller's speech at the foundation ceremony reveals his sensitivity towards Chinese traditions. He did not necessarily follow the Chinese principles of *fengshui*, but yet as an architect he pursued the aim "to uncover what was already present there" rather than improve the environment. He and his colleagues "put the ear to the ground" in order to hear "what it had to tell [them]." The buildings should be thoroughly Chinese, representing Buddhist architectural styles from various parts of China, which are united into a harmonious whole "like crystallized music." Prip-Møller was concerned that the buildings should not hinder the spirit of the work and the spirit of the people towards whom the work was directed.<sup>29</sup>

At Tao Fong Shan some new terms were used in addition to those already mentioned. As one enters the portal one will see the inscription *daofeng jingjie* 道風境界, "the area of the Dao-wind." People trained in Chinese traditions would immediately understand it as a place for the study of the Dao. In Reichelt's interpretation it implies that this is the sacred ground where the "wind of the Word" is blowing, which is understood as the spirit of Christ filling every nook and corner of the monastery.<sup>30</sup> The expression seems to be a synonym of *daochang* (see above), a "new and good sphere of life" where one who has made "an earnest decision to begin a good life" will meet spiritual guides who, by "karmic relations" or "divine providence," will nurture further growth and spiritual enlightenment.<sup>31</sup>

Corresponding to this, leaving the monastery through the same portal one will see another inscription, which reads: *daofeng daqian* 道風大千, literally "Dao-wind great thousand." *Daqian* is a thoroughly Buddhist expression, based on an understanding of the total interpenetration of all elements in the myriads of realms in the Buddhist cosmos.<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Details about Prip-Møller's intentions and visions may be found in Johannes Prip-Møller's speech at the ceremony, in *BM* 6, no. 10 (1931): 166–67; see also his article "Arkitekturens Plads i Ydre-missions Arbejde" [The role of architecture in foreign missionary work], *Nordisk Missionstidsskrift* [Nordic Missionary Journal] 1936, 118–37; and details in Madsen, *Prip-Møllers Kina*, 157–66; Riisager, *Lotus-blomsten og korset*, 350–52.

<sup>30</sup> In his booklet *Broderhjemmet på Tao Fong Shan* [The brother home at Tao Fong Shan] (Oslo: Buddhistmisjonens Forlag, 1937), 5, K. L. Reichelt strongly emphasizes the area as a place where the visitors should experience the transforming power of the spirit of Christ. See also N. N. Thelle, *Fra begynnelsen til nu*, 61.

<sup>31</sup> Reichelt understood the Buddhist notion of karmic relations as an equivalent to divine providence. See his detailed reflections on Buddhist terminology in "Indigenous Religious Phrases," 125, 127.

<sup>32</sup> See Junjirō Takakusu, *The Essentials of Buddhist Philosophy*, ed. W. T. Chan and

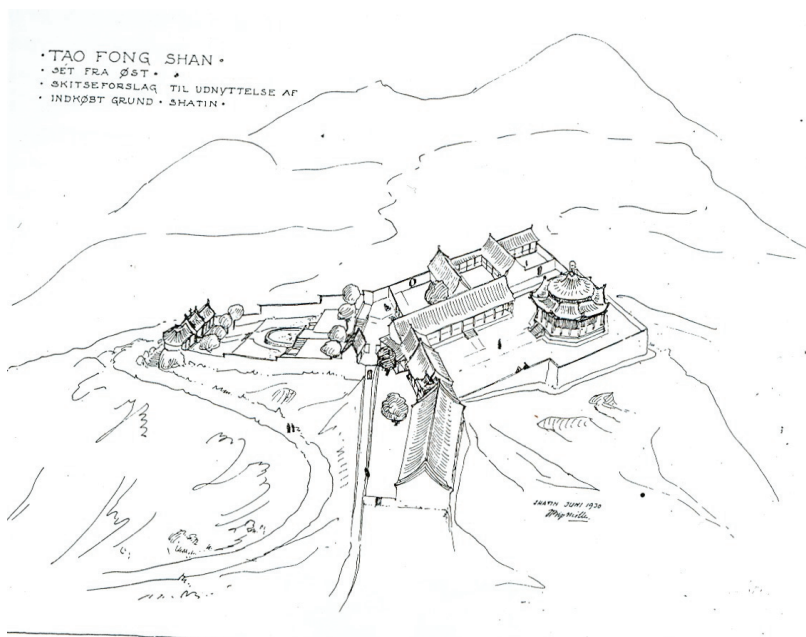


FIGURE 3: A sketch of the central buildings of the monastery, done by Johannes Prip-Møller.<sup>33</sup>

A Buddhist would perhaps read the expression as a vision that the Dao is penetrating the entire cosmos, or as a vow to realize that vision. For Reichelt and those who have become acquainted with his way of thinking, the idea is obviously that the wind of the Word—namely the spirit of Christ—should accompany those who are leaving the monastery and blow into the entire world.<sup>34</sup> In a similar way, the side chapel in the Pilgrims’ Hall, which is also the first interim place for common worship, is called Zundaoting 尊道廳, literally “hall for revering the Dao.”

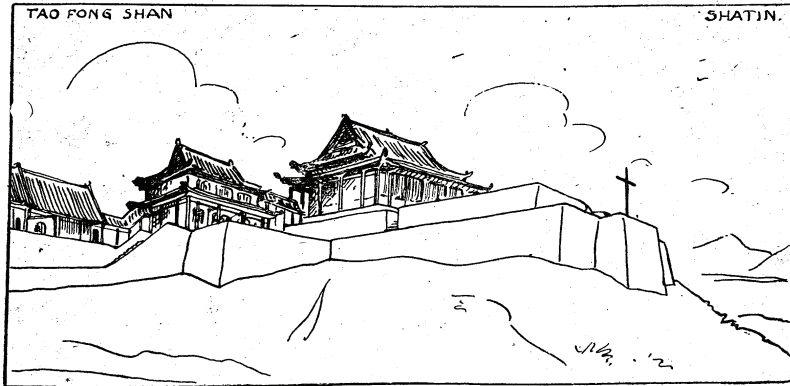
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Charles A. Moore (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i, 1947), 137–40.

<sup>33</sup> Sketch from Reichelt, *Broderhjemmet*, 6.

<sup>34</sup> See Reichelt, *Broderhjemmet*, 6, where he emphasizes the vision that the pilgrims who were educated at Tao Fong Shan should “return to the world, to the people with the gospel of the living Christ.” This was expressed in the symbolism of roof adornment on the chapel where, instead of the traditional animals and mythological figures, small statues of monks were placed as if they were moving out towards the world.

For Reichelt the object of reverence was Christ, the incarnated Dao or Logos, but the visitors might find the name somewhat confusing.



樓書藏暨殿聖大山風道

FIGURE 4: Two buildings that were never realized at Tao Fong Shan: the library and the central temple hall.<sup>35</sup>

Another place of worship was the Lotus Crypt or Lianhuadong 蓮花洞, built within the very foundation upon which the meditation chapel was to be built (the lotus is one of the central Buddhist symbols for spiritual search). The inscriptions in the crypt and the later use of it as a place of penance and renewal are completely dominated by Christian motives, but this must be elaborated in another connection.<sup>36</sup>

The chapel proper, which is still often called the Christ Chapel, was originally intended as a place for meditation and quiet worship, but since the main worship hall was never built, it has remained the central worship hall. In the 1930s there were no pews in the chapel, only cush-

<sup>35</sup> From the Chinese publication *Tao Fong Shan*, n.d., published at Tao Fong Shan in the 1930s.

<sup>36</sup> The name was, according to Reichelt, suggested by the first monks who visited the crypt, commenting that this was certainly a place where “the lotus flower would open” (*kai lianhua* 開蓮花), an expression of a new birth, spiritual awakening, or conversion. See Reichelt, *Broderhjemmet*, 17, and idem, “Indigenous Religious Phrases,” 124.

ions for worship and meditation. Participants would either be standing or kneeling as in a Buddhist temple hall.

The name attached to the chapel was an interesting—and for most visitors certainly quite confusing—mixture of Buddhist and Christian expressions: *Jingzun baodian* 景尊寶殿, literally the “Treasure Hall of the Luminous Honoured One.” *Jingzun*, literally the “Luminous Honoured One,” is an expression borrowed from the Nestorian Church of the Tang, which in turn had borrowed traditional Buddhist expressions in its attempt to find Chinese names for Christ and God. The Nestorians found it appropriate to apply in various ways the name of Bhagavat, which is one of the ten traditional names of the Buddha and which has been rendered as *Shizun* 世尊 (literally “World-honoured One”) in Chinese. They directly referred to Christ as *Shizun*, and also used derivative expressions such as *Tianzun* 天尊, “the Heaven-honoured One,” or the already mentioned name *Jingzun* (*jingjiao* 景教, the “Luminous Religion,” was the common name of Nestorian Christianity in China).

*Baodian* (“treasure hall”) is probably the most common expression in Chinese for the main worship hall enshrining the Buddha, who is one of the “Three Treasures” of Buddhism. The Buddhist treasure halls would in addition have images of Bodhisattvas, arhats and other divinities. The most common name for these halls is, consequently, *Daxiong baodian* 大雄寶殿, literally the “Treasure Hall of the Great Hero,” the Buddha himself being the great hero.<sup>37</sup> Never before had a Christian worship hall or church been called a *baodian*,<sup>38</sup> and without knowledge of the Nestorian background of the term *Jingzun*, many visitors would have been quite confused about the identity of the sanctuary. From Reichelt’s point of view that would probably pose no problem as it invites dialogue about the true object of worship. Reichelt sometimes called Christ “the hero from Golgotha,” and his choice of that expression, albeit commonplace in Norwegian missionary rhetoric,<sup>39</sup> might also have been inspired by Buddhist terminology. The use of Buddhist terminology for Christ will be discussed in greater details in the analysis of liturgical texts in the subsequent article.

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<sup>37</sup> The term corresponds to *Vīra* or *Mahāvīra* in Sanskrit.

<sup>38</sup> Both the Nestorians and Jesuits applied another term for their institutions, *si* 寺, one of the most common Buddhist terms for monastery or temple. But I have not come across any use of *baodian* 寶殿 for a Christian place of worship.

<sup>39</sup> See, e.g., *K&S*, 1900, 1–2.

## 4. MONASTIC LIFE

It is perhaps exaggerating to describe the activities going on in the institutions under discussion as monastic life. For the mission consistently emphasized that its intention was not to establish a secluded monastic community. Moreover, neither Reichelt nor his missionary coworkers were celibates, even though he himself was somewhat monkish: for many years he stayed in China as a missionary while his wife and child were in Norway.<sup>40</sup> Nevertheless, the daily rhythm and activities of the institutions to a great extent corresponded to Buddhist monastic traditions: the food they had was always vegetarian and the rhythm they fell into followed a fixed pattern of worship, meals, teaching, meditation, practical work, and conversation. The members of the community formed a “brotherhood” that received monks and novices as fellow brothers. The ceremonies included solemn vows, somewhat in correspondence with Buddhist rituals.<sup>41</sup> In all formal occasions such as worship and prayer, receiving guests and visiting monasteries, the members of the community put on their “brother robes”, which were sometimes called “worship gown.”<sup>42</sup> In fact, one of the most common names by which the institutions were known was “Brother Home,” indicating that all those who were searching for truth, especially the religiously committed people, were spiritual brothers. Corresponding to this, monks and other truth-seeking brothers were consistently called *daoyou* 道友 (“friends in the Dao”). In fact, the Chinese name of the

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<sup>40</sup> It was emphasized again and again that the institution only had “the externals of monastic life,” or “resemblance of a Buddhist monastery,” and did not aim at a “permanently secluded monastic order.” See, e.g., Reichelt, *Kinas Buddhister for Kristus*, 25; Louis Hodous in *The Christian Occupation of China*, ed. Milton Stauffer (Shanghai: China Continuation Committee, 1922), 31; “Grundregler og arbeidsplan for Den kristne Mission blandt Kinas Buddhister” [Rules and strategy for the Christian Mission among China’s Buddhists] (Oslo, 1926); N. N. Thelle, *De ti første år i den kristne buddhistmisjon* [The first ten years in the Christian mission to Buddhists] (Oslo: Den Kristne Buddhistmisjons Forlag, 1932), 18. The reason was obviously not only the fear of being accused of syncretism, but also a surprising ambivalence towards Buddhist monasticism.

<sup>41</sup> See, e.g., Reichelt, *Kinas Buddhister for Kristus*, 19–21. The ceremonies in liturgy books used in Nanjing and Hong Kong will be discussed in the subsequent article.

<sup>42</sup> Norwegian: *broderkappe* or *broderdrakt*. It was a mixture of a Chinese traditional gown, a Western priestly robe, and a Buddhist monk’s robe. See, e.g., *NMT*, 1925, 148–49; N. N. Thelle, Private Diary, September 2, 1923.

mission was, literally, the “Christian Association of Friends in the Dao” (Jidujiao daoyouhui 基督教道友會). The brotherhood and friendship were also extended to people who were not monks, but the monastic community was the mission’s central concern.

The official title of Reichelt, at least at Tao Fong Shan, was *yuan-zhang* 院長 (“institute director”), which, given the monastic character of the institution, could also be understood as more or less equivalent to “abbot.” Some other (albeit unofficial) titles may suggest that Reichelt was actually regarded by many as a sort of abbot, including *fashi* 法師 (“Dharma master”) and even *kaishanzu* 開山祖 (“founding patriarch”).<sup>43</sup> An interesting remark he made in a book describing Buddhist monastic life may give a hint about his ambitions and frustrations: having read an enthusiastic report about the strict rules of Buddhist monasticism, he scribbled one of his many characteristic comments in the margin: “Like this it should have been at Tao Fong Shan!” “Our problems at TFS!”<sup>44</sup> Coming from a pietistic tradition in which monasticism was regarded with scepticism, and working among Buddhist monks many of whom were searching for ways out of their monastic life, Reichelt would have found it obviously difficult to maintain the ideals and conventions borrowed from monastic traditions.<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, the vision of a monastery with a spiritual brotherhood remained a dominant principle until it faded after the Pacific War (1941–45).<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> *BM* 3, no. 5 (1928): 89 describes Reichelt as “the Christian abbot from Nanking”; see also Daosheng in *Tao Fong Shan* (a little leaflet printed in the early 1930s), 10; Reichelt, *Kinas buddhister for Kristus*, 25; and Tao Wen Chang, *Forvandling: En kinesisk buddhismester bliver kristen* [Transformation: a Chinese Buddhist master becomes a Christian] (Copenhagen: Gads Forlag, 1993), 61.

<sup>44</sup> In Reichelt’s copy of Dwight Goddard, *The Buddha’s Golden Path: A Manual of Practical Buddhism* (London: Luzac & Co., 1930), 132, 134.

<sup>45</sup> In addition to reports by the missionaries, such as N. N. Thelle, *En buddhistmunks vei til Kristus* [A Buddhist monk’s way to Christ] (Oslo: Gads Forlag, 1940); and K. L. Reichelt, *Fromhetstyper og helligdommer i Øst-Asia* [Pious characters and sanctuaries in the Far East], vol. 2, published in English as *The Transformed Abbot* (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 1948); see also the authentic report about monastic life in Tao Wen Chang’s above-mentioned *Forvandling*.

<sup>46</sup> Future plans for the monastery is described in Reichelt, *Broderhjemmet*, 20. Reichelt in fact refers to “our Christian monastery” as late as 1949, in *Fromhetstyper og helligdommer i Øst-Asia*, vol. 3 (Oslo: Dreyers Forlag, 1949), 307.

## 5. SANCTUARIES AND INTERIOR DESIGN

The external design of Reichelt's Christian monasteries was predominantly characterized by Buddhist conventions—at least that must have been the first impression for many. Upon detailed examination, however, their Christian identity usually emerges more clearly, or, perhaps, a Christian interpretation of the monasteries appears all the more compelling. First of all, it must be made clear that there was no attempt to conceal the missionary character of Reichelt's work, whose purpose was *jidujiao fojia budao* 基督教佛家佈道; that is, to be a Christian mission to Buddhists.<sup>47</sup> The lotus cross, the central symbol of the mission, was borne by the members of the brotherhood, displayed above the gate, carried in processions, and used in numerous other places and occasions. For first-time visitors the symbol might be understood as a sign of Buddhist–Christian syncretism. Yet it was consistently used to stand for the belief that the aspirations of Buddhism as symbolized by the lotus were fulfilled in Christianity.

As to the interior design and various types of embellishment, both Buddhist and Chinese conventions were to a great extent adopted to create a familiar atmosphere for visitors. But the foci of attention were clearly Christian. The crucifix and the biblical calligraphic inscriptions found in the pilgrims' hall were fine examples that have already been mentioned. The chapels, designed in various ways in different periods and locations, would always have a crucifix, a statue of Christ, or a Christian painting placed at the centre in addition to some conspicuously inscribed biblical verses. The verse consistently used for the central tablet right above the altar was the opening words of the Gospel of John: "In the beginning was the Word." Since "Word" (or Logos) has been rendered in the Chinese Union Version as *Dao*, the inscription on the tablet literally reads: "In the beginning was the Dao" (*taichu you dao* 太初有道). One of Reichelt's favourite themes was that the Dao was the divine Logos, the word or the wisdom that had been incarnated in Jesus Christ; it was hoped that the Christian implication would soon

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<sup>47</sup> The term is seen in some early photographs of the front gate of the monastery at Nanjing and on the stationery used by the mission, and corresponds to the English name of the mission: Christian Mission to Buddhists. Later, such terms as Brother Home, Friends of the Dao, or Christian Monastery, which have been mentioned above, were preferred but no attempt was ever made to conceal the Christian identity of the place.

be clarified to the visitors. Sometimes another important verse of the same biblical book (1:14) would also be found displayed on a tablet: “The Dao/Word became flesh” (*dao cheng roushen* 道成肉身).

The two vertical tablets on both sides of the altar would probably create more confusion. On the right side was the words *lingguang puyao* 靈光普耀, “the light of the Spirit shines universally.” This is a reference to the universal presence of the Holy Spirit or to “the true light” of Christ, which, according to John 1:9, enlightens every person. Many of the visitors would probably recognize it as a slight revision of one of the most common inscriptions in Buddhist temples that refers to the universal activity of the Buddha continuously enlightening all sentient beings—*foguang puyao* 佛光普耀, literally “the light of the Buddha(s) shines universally.”<sup>48</sup>

On the left side was another inscription that would probably need even more explanation, at least in order to convey the intended Christian message. It reads: *dayuan cihang* 大願慈航, “the great vow (is) a ship of compassion” or “the great vow compassionately ferries (people) over (to the other shore).” For Buddhist visitors, these words would immediately evoke familiar images of the compassionate Bodhisattva Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara), who has vowed to carry all sentient beings over to the other shore by his/her “ship of salvation” (see figure 5). In Reichelt’s Christianized understanding, the inscription was an invitation “to participate in the sacred calling to save the lost”<sup>49</sup> or to “join the great vow to bring the lost into ‘the boat of salvation.’” He probably understood it as a Chinese equivalent of the Great Commission.<sup>50</sup>

These inscriptions were used in Nanjing and later in Hong Kong, and fell into disuse only after the Pacific War.<sup>51</sup> Their possible interpretations and the hermeneutical questions involved in the use of expressions such as those contained in them will be discussed in greater details in my subsequent article.

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<sup>48</sup> Or, more exactly, “shines universally” or “shines everywhere.” I have also seen similar inscriptions where *fo* 佛 (Buddha) is replaced with *shen* 神, which means God, gods, spirits or divine.

<sup>49</sup> *NMT*, 1924, 27.

<sup>50</sup> N. N. Thelle, “The Christian Mission to Buddhists,” *CR* 58 (1927): 573. The symbol of the “ship/boat of compassion” was also used by the Nestorian Christians (e.g., in the Nestorian stele), and Reichelt might have been inspired by their use.

<sup>51</sup> For details on the discussions about the changes, see Rolv Olsen, “Winds of Change: The Christian Worship Services of the Christian Mission to Buddhists” (licentiate diss., Lund University, 2001).

Another set of calligraphic inscriptions, which are found in a photograph of one of the chapels in Nanjing and which are later used at Tao

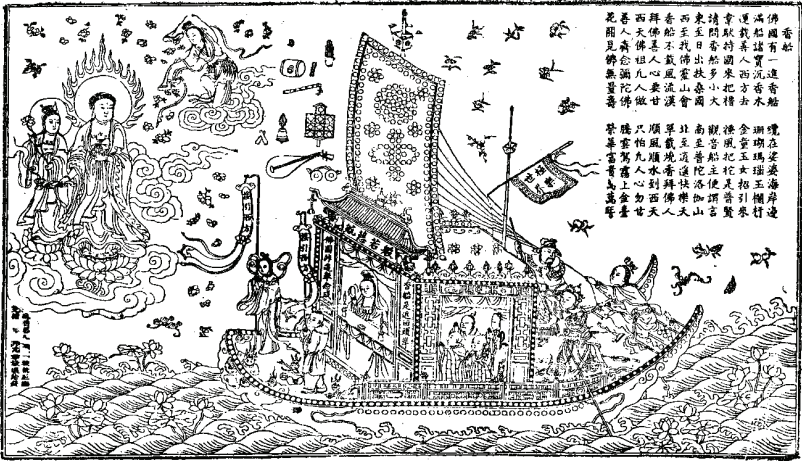


FIGURE 5: The woodcut print showing Guanyin’s “Wisdom Ship of Compassion” or “Fragrant Ship” crossing over to the other shore, where Amitābha Buddha and his attendants are waiting. On the bow the Jade Lady and the Golden Child hold streamers declaring that they are “drawn” or “guided” towards the West—or the Land of Bliss—as it is written on another banner.<sup>52</sup>

Fong Shan, may also invite quite interesting interpretations.<sup>53</sup> The inscriptions, exhibited vertically on each side of the altar, have parallel structures and may allude to both Buddhist, Daoist, and Nestorian traditions:

<sup>52</sup> Similar expressions related to Amitābha and his guiding power will be analysed in the subsequent article about the liturgical texts developed by Reichelt and his associates. The print is taken from Reginald Fleming Johnston, *Buddhist China* (London: John Murray, 1913), 104.

<sup>53</sup> The photograph from 1925 is taken in the chapel of the “upper house” of Ching Fong Shan, outside the city walls (N. N. Thelle, private collection). The same inscription is found at Tao Fong Shan in connection with a funeral, in the interim chapel, and in a scene from a teaching session; see *BM* 6, no. 4 (1931): 62; 12, no. 6 (1937): 89; photograph from N. N. Thelle’s private collection, 1932–34.

頓超幔裂 聖意西來  
 普度門開 景風東扇

I have not found any direct translation of these inscriptions nor any reference Reichelt or his associates made to them. The photograph I have got is too dark to reveal the first character of the first inscription, but my own guess as to what it was has been confirmed by Chinese who were at Tao Fong Shan in the 1930s. A literal translation might be as follows:

The veil of immediate crossing over is torn in two.  
 The holy will has come from the West.  
 The gate of universal salvation is opened.  
 The luminous wind is blowing towards the East.

There are strict correspondences of words both between the first and third lines and between the second and fourth lines. The parallel expressions are: “veil” (*man* 幔) and “gate” (*men* 門); “immediate crossing over” (*dunchao* 頓超) and “universal salvation” (*pudu* 普度); “torn in two” (*lie* 裂) and “opened” (*kai* 開); “holy will” (*shengyi* 聖意) and “luminous wind” (*jingfeng* 景風); “has come” (*lai* 來) and “is blowing” (*shan* 扇); “[from] the West” (*xi* 西) and “[towards] the East” (*dong* 東).

The opening sentence obviously alludes to the biblical image of the veil in the temple in Jerusalem, which was torn in two when Jesus died (Matt. 27:51). According to the Epistle to the Hebrews that symbolizes the saving act of Jesus, who by his death paved the way for entering the heavenly sanctuary beyond the veil (Heb. 6:19; 10:20). With Reichelt’s strong interest in the symbolism of the veil,<sup>54</sup> it is not surprising that it has appeared in this inscription, even though it might have been difficult for the Buddhist visitors to understand what it is about. A Christianized paraphrase of the sentence in Reichelt’s spirit may be thus: the veil of salvation is torn in two (and the passage to the heavenly kingdom is opened).

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<sup>54</sup> Inspired primarily by biblical images mentioned, but perhaps also by esoteric interests in the mysteries hidden behind the veil. See my comments in “Karl Ludvig Reichelt—pionéren som kom inn fra kulden.”

On the other hand, the expression for “immediate crossing over” or “suddenly going beyond,” *dunchao* 頓超, would certainly be more familiar to Buddhists than to Christians. The concepts of *dun* (“sudden” or “immediate”) and of its opposite *jian* 漸 (“gradual”) represent two understandings of the way to enlightenment. One is *dunwu* 頓悟, which lays emphasis on a person’s abrupt awakening without passing through the process of practice. The other, *jianwu* 漸悟, lays emphasis on gradual awakening through a long process of discipline and practice. The two understandings of awakening resulted from doctrinal discussions in fifth-century China and are found in the Chan/Zen, the Tiantai, the Pure Land, and other schools. Although *dunchao* has not been as frequently used as *dunwu*, it is also a classical Buddhist term denoting crossing over to the other shore of transcendental wisdom or the land of the Buddha, and represents doctrinal discussions not unlike those about the concept of sudden or gradual enlightenment. For Reichelt, who held that only the Pure Land School had the spiritual qualifications to emulate Christianity,<sup>55</sup> *dunchao* or “immediate crossing over” would conjure up the image of the “compassionate ship” and particularly the compassion of Amitābha Buddha.<sup>56</sup> Combined with the symbol of the veil torn in two, this Buddhist expression was transformed to testify to the radical grace of salvation in Christ, who had offered access to the heavenly sanctuary to anyone who believed.

The second part of the first line suggests that the saving act described above is an expression of the divine will revealed with the coming of the Christian mission from the West.

Somewhat in contrast to the reference to the veil in the first inscription, the beginning of the second would be very familiar to the Buddhists, who would recognize in it a characteristic expression of the self-understanding of the Mahāyāna as the *puḍu men* 普度門—the great “gate of universal salvation.” We have already referred to the image of salvation as reaching beyond to “the other shore” of transcendent wisdom and bliss, and *du* 度 is a favourite term for both “reaching across” and “ferrying (people) across.”<sup>57</sup> Reichelt was aware of the Buddhist symbolism, and one-sidedly stressed the saving activity implied in the

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<sup>55</sup> Reichelt, *Truth and Tradition*, 156–57.

<sup>56</sup> See, e.g., Nakamura Hajime 中村元, ed., *Bukkyōgo daijiten* 仏教語大辭典 [A large dictionary of Buddhist terms] (Tokyo: Tōkyō Shōseki, 1981), 965. In Japanese Pure Land Buddhism the radicality of the crossing over is emphasized in a corresponding expression *ōchō* 横超 (Chinese: *hengchao*), or “direct (sidewise) crossing over.”

<sup>57</sup> *Du* is actually one of the technical terms used for Sanskrit *pāramitā*, “transcendent,” the wisdom (*prajñā*) which is on the other shore (*pāramitā*).

expression. In his interpretation it became an efficient way of conveying the divine intention that salvation be given to all humankind.<sup>58</sup> One may also guess that Reichelt's predilection for the term was inspired by his closest Chinese associate in the first years, Kuandu, who was also his most important guide to understanding and using Buddhist terminology. In fact, his name, Kuandu, is an expression of the same vision as conveyed in the inscription, meaning "generously crossing (people) over (to the other shore)," and the use of the Buddhist expression might have been suggested by him.<sup>59</sup> In Reichelt's Christianized interpretation, the ultimate goal of reaching the other shore was to have the wisdom of seeing God "face to face."<sup>60</sup>

The fourth line has at least two related references. First, "the luminous wind is blowing towards the East" is actually a direct quotation from the Nestorian stele, where the point was to describe how Nestorian Christianity (the "Luminous Religion") was blowing towards the East like "a luminous wind," which corresponded to the legend about Laozi, who, centuries before, had "ascended towards the West" on his black steed.<sup>61</sup> Without any reference to Laozi, the fourth line is just a parallel to the second: just as the divine will is revealing the message from the West, the Spirit is blowing like a luminous wind towards the East. Second, inspired by the Nestorian Church, Reichelt adopted the expression *jingfeng* as the name of his mission institution in Nanjing, as we have already seen. Reichelt often applied this symbolism to explain his vision of the monastery that should become "a mountain where the strong and flaming wind will burst out."<sup>62</sup>

In this way, both the inscriptions and the name of the institution in Nanjing express a strong missionary appeal. It was affirmed by Kuandu, who, in greeting Scandinavian supporters, referred to the same expression: once more the luminous wind is blowing towards the East, in particular into the religious world of China, bringing East and West together in the great work of proclaiming the Gospel and glorifying God.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> K. L. Reichelt, "Indigenous Religious Phrases," 126.

<sup>59</sup> Reichelt's own flowery explanation of Kuandu's name is "The one who leads as many as possible with him in the ferry-boat to eternal life"; see Reichelt, *Kinas Budhister for Kristus*, 8. He often referred to the role of Kuandu; e.g., *NMT*, 1920, 9; *NMT*, 1925, 107. See also Kuandu's letter in *BM* 1, no. 4 (1926): 50.

<sup>60</sup> K. L. Reichelt, "Indigenous Religious Phrases," 126.

<sup>61</sup> See earlier references to the monument.

<sup>62</sup> *K & S*, 1924, 363–64.

<sup>63</sup> In a letter to Scandinavian supporters of the mission, translated by Reichelt and pub-

Another set of scrolls, used in the chapel in Nanjing, adopted the image of Guanyin (Avalokiteśvara) rescuing people from the sea of pain in their portrayal of Christ as the Saviour. The inscription on the right scroll refers to Christ's great compassion that "saves sentient beings in the sea of suffering," and the left scroll proclaims that the "one who with perfect freedom is seeing" (*Guanzhenzizai* 觀真自在) is God who is "in heaven." One of the classical names of Guanyin is *Guanzizai* 觀自在, "the one who freely sees (those who are in need)." The slight revision of the name by adding *zhen* (meaning true or truly) is probably only to emphasize that *true* salvation, which people anticipate or yearn for in their prayers to Guanyin, is realized in Christianity, where God as the heavenly Father is keeping his protecting eye on those who are lost in the sea of pain.<sup>64</sup>

In his letters and notes Reichelt often refers to the Buddhist converts who were eager to find appropriate Buddhist expressions for Christian truths and to write these in beautiful calligraphy.<sup>65</sup> There were certainly other similar tablets and calligraphic scrolls, but the above-mentioned examples suffice to demonstrate some basic strategies and ways of thinking. A closer look at the liturgies and hymns developed by Reichelt and his associates will demonstrate in greater details how this tradition developed.

Other ritual utensils and furniture also helped to create the atmosphere. A large Chinese bell tolling outside the chapel would call people to worship. It was quite different from "the hard, harsh, clanging bells" Westerners usually imported in that it had a deep and mellow tone, as an observer comments.<sup>66</sup> The same observer, a good friend and sup-

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lished in *BM* 1, no. 4 (1926): 50.

<sup>64</sup> N. N. Thelle's private photographs dated 1924–25. The allusion to Guanyin is enhanced by the fact that a scroll depicting Guanyin coming to save people in the sea of pain was exhibited in the chapel, as seen in several photographs from this early period.

<sup>65</sup> *CR* 51 (1920): 495; *NMT*, 1920, 59; *K & S*, 1924, 285–86. At Tao Fong Shan there are still several tablets made in the 1930s that have inscriptions with Buddhist and Christian rhetoric. I have two couples of such scrolls from the Nanjing period, referring to the virtues of the lotus that opens up. The initial characters are, in fact, alluding to the Chinese name of my father, Liande 蓮德, "The Virtue of the Lotus," but it is uncertain whether they were ever displayed. A similar pair of scrolls, displayed in the mission chapel attached to the Anglican cathedral in Hong Kong, allude to Reichelt's name, Xiangde 香德, "The Fragrant Virtue," as seen in a photograph from the 1930s in N. N. Thelle's private collection dated 1932–34.

<sup>66</sup> Twinem, "A New Brotherhood," 643. A copy of the bell from Nanjing, cast in Shanghai in 1940, is still in use at Tao Fong Shan. It certainly has a tone somewhat different from Western bells, but looks like a mixture of a Western church bell and a Chinese Buddhist bell, adorned with the lotus cross, the star of David, with the Chi-

porter of the work in Nanjing, gives a quite accurate description of the chapel, which also reflects the considerations of those who designed the sanctuary:

The altar is beautifully made in Chinese style. It has a red lacquer finish and is richly adorned with golden symbols—the lily of purity, the cross of sacrifice,<sup>67</sup> the sun of righteousness,<sup>68</sup> the fire and water of the Spirit's cleansing, the swastika of cosmic unity and perfect peace,<sup>69</sup> the fish of Eastern and Western sanctity, and the Greek monogram for Christ.<sup>70</sup> The other furnishings and apparatus used in worship are chosen to call up the holiest associations in the minds of the worshippers. The two tall candlesticks on the altar are in the form of the sacred white crane. The red candles, so common in Chinese ceremonies, are lighted at the beginning of the service to flood the altar with light. The smoke and the fragrance of the incense between the candle-sticks rise up as a symbol of aspiration. The novices and leaders of the worship move quietly and reverently about in black gowns conducting the ceremonies. A small hand-bell is tapped to call the worshippers to meditation and to signal at other points in the service. In all things the ritual is meant, as is stated in the constitution, "to contain what is essential in the Christian doctrine and on the other hand include some parts of the Mahayana ritual which are in perfect harmony with the Christian doctrine."<sup>71</sup>

A somewhat confusing element, apart from some of the inscriptions and the liturgies, was perhaps the baptismal font which, when not used, was covered with a pagoda-like tower.<sup>72</sup> Reichelt primarily interpreted the pagoda as a symbol of stages of spiritual growth. This is certainly

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nese character for "joy" (xi 喜), and Christian inscriptions such as "Glory be to God."

<sup>67</sup> Probably referring to the lotus cross.

<sup>68</sup> "The sun of righteousness" is designed with rays that spreads out almost to the sides of the altar. It seems to correspond to the inscription about the universal light of the Spirit.

<sup>69</sup> In spite of its overwhelming association with Buddhism in the Far East, Reichelt maintained that the swastika was a common religious symbol of cosmic union, also being an early Christian shape of the cross; but he had to accept its removal after the Pacific War. See, e.g., his *Truth and Tradition*, 175; Olsen, *Winds of Change*, 94.

<sup>70</sup> Among other symbols at the altar were a triangle, symbolizing the trinity, and a branch of the tree of life. The triangle has a shape that looks exactly like the "signature of Christ" in the syncretistic association Daoyuan, or the Logos Society, with which Reichelt had a lot of contact. Reichelt's might have been inspired by that.

<sup>71</sup> Twinem, "A New Brotherhood," 644.

<sup>72</sup> Donated by Mrs. Mary Twinem, widow of the above-mentioned Paul D. Twinem; see the official Nanjing Diary of the mission, April 4, 1924.

one aspect of the Buddhist symbol, but his emphasis on spiritual development might also have to do with the influence of theosophical ideas.<sup>73</sup> The fact that a pagoda or stupa is primarily a place for the sacred ashes or remains of the Buddha and other saints, and hence a symbol of death, might suggest that the pagoda-like cover was used to enhance the symbolism of baptism as a rite of identification with the death and resurrection of Christ. As far as I have seen, however, this symbolism was never hinted at, and would hardly have functioned better than the above-mentioned symbolism.

## 6. CONCLUDING REMARKS

A real evaluation of Reichelt's monasteries will have to wait for a more detailed analysis of the liturgies. But it seems reasonable to conclude this first article with preliminary comments on (i) some of the criteria for choosing Buddhist forms; (ii) the possible inspiration from sources other than Buddhism; and (iii) the ultimate motives for the monasteries.

### *"A Refined, Religious Atmosphere"*

The explicit motives for using Buddhist forms and conventions have already been mentioned: to establish a meeting ground where Buddhist monks and lay people could encounter Christians in a familiar and congenial atmosphere. With other missionaries and Chinese Christian leaders Reichelt was convinced that Christianity had to be indigenized and to adapt itself to Chinese traditions. Likewise, in order to appeal to Buddhists Christianity somehow had to be attuned to Buddhist conventions. Reichelt and his colleagues not only searched for concepts and ideas that could convey Christianity intellectually, but wanted to create a community spirit and a ritual atmosphere that appealed to Buddhists. As we shall see in the analysis of liturgies in the subsequent article, Reichelt did not regard this as borrowing alien elements, but a process

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<sup>73</sup> The esoteric/theosophical interpretation is more obvious with one of Reichelt's co-workers, Axel Hamre, who commented that the pagoda symbolized "the spiritual evolution from plane to plane under the cross of Christ"; see *BM* 3, no. 5 (1928): 86.

of reclaiming elements that Buddhism had originally received from Christianity.

Notably when it comes to community life and cultic expressions, Reichelt seemed to be driven not so much by rational deliberations as aesthetic attractions. His own descriptions of the spiritual life in his monasteries and his criteria for evaluation are consistently concerned with the atmosphere, spiritual mood, and good feelings with respect to the community and its various activities. In particular, the adjective *stemningsfuld* appears in most descriptions of the sanctuaries, worship, meditation, and other activities. A literal translation of this Norwegian word would be “full of atmosphere” or “filled with feelings,” suggesting a warm, emotional, and aesthetic mood. Sometimes “evocative” might be the best translation. The worship services should be as “full of atmosphere as possible, following a ritual suited to the Buddhists.”<sup>74</sup> When the altar, designed according to Buddhist traditions, arrived in Nanjing, Reichelt described it as “delightful, ornamental, and evocative.”<sup>75</sup> An altar with light, incense, and a handbell creates “the right mood.”<sup>76</sup> He is “moved” to see the devotion (Norwegian: *andakt*) with which visitors participate; the worship is “full of atmosphere”; the altar service “with light and incense and evocative ritual catch their interest”; and the hour of prayer and meditation is “delightful” (Norwegian: *deilig*).<sup>77</sup>

Others joined Reichelt in giving such descriptions, perhaps inspired by his own emotional expressions. The above-mentioned Prip-Møller referred to the familiar atmosphere that even new visitors felt when they participated in the worship in Nanjing. The worship, with readings, hymns, and ritual, was so familiar to the Chinese forms that they “did not pay attention to it” and could hence concentrate on the essential content.<sup>78</sup> Another visitor remarked that he had never seen “deeper devotion than in this simple, little room.”<sup>79</sup> From his Buddhist observation post in Kyoto, D. T. Suzuki 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966) printed an enthusiastic report about Reichelt’s work in Nanjing, referring in par-

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<sup>74</sup> Reichelt, *Kinas Buddhister for Kristus*, 25.

<sup>75</sup> Reichelt’s letter to N. N. Thelle, July 20, 1923; “evocative” is my translation of *stemningsvækkende*.

<sup>76</sup> *NMT*, 1923, 292.

<sup>77</sup> *NMT*, 1924, 121–22.

<sup>78</sup> Prip-Møller, “Arkitekturens Plads i Ydre-missions Arbejde.”

<sup>79</sup> Dr. Henry Hodgkin, quoted in *K & S*, 1924, 363.

ticular to the form of worship with its “refined, religious atmosphere indigenous to the religious soul of China.”<sup>80</sup>

Reichelt’s emphasis on emotional and aesthetic mood is not surprising in view of his background in Norwegian Lutheran pietism with its predilection for experiential and emotional piety.<sup>81</sup> The same predilection for emotional aspects of religion was obviously one of the qualities that enabled Reichelt to evaluate Buddhism so highly and to establish trusting relations with Buddhist leaders all over China. My point is not to question the value of Reichelt’s approach, but only to suggest that it may explain some of his naivety in choosing Buddhist conventions and rituals for his own purposes. His conviction that the Mahāyāna was a form of Buddhism initially influenced by Christianity often induced him to an overly optimistic Christian interpretation of Buddhist forms. His predilection for evocative rituals and pious moods probably weakened his ability to critically evaluate the forms he adopted.

### *Other Models for the Christian Monasteries?*

My description of the Christian monasteries in Nanjing and Hong Kong shows beyond doubt that they were primarily modelled after the ideas and principles of Buddhist monasteries. Some questions remain unanswered, however: Was the strategy conceived as an original idea by Reichelt himself? Did his inspiration come from elsewhere?

My preliminary conclusion is that the concrete strategy, albeit conceived by Reichelt himself, was to a great extent inspired and informed by his encounter with the monk Kuandu, which has already been mentioned. His interest in Buddhism was stirred early in his missionary career, and the same may perhaps be said about his wish to develop a special form of mission among Buddhist monks. I have found no evidence, however, that he had a concrete strategy for such a mission before he met Kuandu in 1919. There are, nevertheless, some historical conditions and contemporary ideas and movements that have to be considered to understand the context in which Reichelt developed his strategies.

We have already seen that the Nestorian Church in China exerted a strong impact on Reichelt. He was particularly interested in the history of the Nestorians from the Tang, documented in the well-known Nes-

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<sup>80</sup> *Eastern Buddhist* 4, no. 2 (1927): 196.

<sup>81</sup> See, e.g., Riisager, *Forventning*, 151–69; *Lotusblomsten og korset*, 71–76, 311–16.

torian stele as well as in scriptures that had recently been discovered from excavations in Dunhuang (1907). He adopted the Nestorians' lotus cross as the symbol of his mission, lauded their attempt to apply Buddhist and Daoist terms for Christian preaching, and regarded Nestorianism as an important historical factor in the development of Mahāyāna Buddhism. He even included one of the Nestorian hymns in the liturgy book of Tao Fong Shan. Both direct and indirect influences of Nestorianism on his work with liturgies and worship are obvious, as we shall see in the second article. When it comes to his Christian monasteries for Buddhists, however, there seems to be no direct link to Nestorianism, even though the Nestorians had used the Buddhist term *si* 寺, often translated as “temple” or “monastery,” for their churches and monasteries.

The Roman Catholic mission, particularly the work of Matteo Ricci (1551–1610) and other Jesuits in the late sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, was certainly present in the background to Reichelt's own preoccupation with missionary strategies of adaptation and dialogue. But the Catholic mission to China hardly played any direct role. One of the reasons is certainly that the Jesuits, after several years of dialogue with Buddhists, eventually concluded that Buddhism was no worthy rival and therefore chose Confucian scholars as their real dialogue partners.

A great number of Reichelt's predecessors and contemporary missionary colleagues were “converted missionaries” in the sense that they had a deep and enduring fascination with Chinese culture and religion. Several of them—notably Timothy Richard (1845–1919)—certainly gave stimulation for Reichelt's own development and his Christianized understanding of Buddhism, but none of them had developed anything comparable to Reichelt's monasteries.<sup>82</sup>

What seems to be most relevant for our consideration of possible models for Reichelt's monasteries is the fact that a number of contemporaries, both foreigners and Chinese, began to suggest the need for Christian (Protestant) centres for retreat, meditation, and dialogue in the 1920s. The most conspicuous vision was formulated by Dwight Goddard (1861–1939), who was a missionary around 1900 but returned

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<sup>82</sup> See, e.g., Lian, *Conversion of Missionaries*. The only institutional expression of dialogue with Chinese culture was the International Institute established by Gilbert Reid, but it was more an institute for study, conferences and public discussions; being “international, inter-racial and inter-religious,” it also promoted harmony, goodwill and universal brotherhood. See *China Mission Year Book 1912* (Shanghai: Christian Literature Society, 1912), 363–64.

to China in the 1920s to pursue Buddhist studies. He was to a great extent helped by Reichelt, accompanied him on his travels, and stayed for extended periods in the mission institution in Nanjing. Goddard wanted to create a meeting place where Buddhists and Christians in fellowship could seek “light and reality,” and described this as a hospice in Nanjing or Hangzhou, designed after Buddhist models. It should be a place for fellowship and dialogue, rest and meditation and retreat, conferences and lectures. In addition there should be a library with Buddhist literature for the use of missionaries and overseas researchers. A Buddhist–Christian journal should be published, and Buddhist and Christian scholars should jointly study the earliest contacts between Buddhists and Christians. The ultimate goal was, according to Goddard, to unite Buddhism and Christianity in one common Chinese (native) church.<sup>83</sup> His plan was never realized, and there is no evidence that Reichelt’s strategy was influenced by Goddard, while the opposite would be more possible, even though the profiles and purposes of their plans differed quite a lot.

There were other contemporaries of Reichelt who suggested the need for similar institutions. The 1920s were a period when Chinese Christians eagerly advocated the indigenization and sinification of Christianity, several of whom began to regard Buddhism as an important dialogue partner. Wang Zhixin (Wang Chih-hsin) 王治心 (1881–1968) advocated that churches, in addition to sanctuaries for worship, with incense and other indigenous practices, should have rooms for cultivation and lecturing, where the speakers should spend the day before in meditation and prayer. T. C. Chao (Zhao Zichen 趙紫宸, 1888–1979), who was to become one of the most prominent Chinese theologians, proposed that a church should have a retreat house, in which one could cultivate the Dao, and even suggested a concrete layout of a church complex patterned after that of Buddhist monasteries.<sup>84</sup> Francis Wei (Wei Zhuomin 韋卓民, 1888–1976), another theologian involved in the indigenization movement in the twenties, later proposed the establishment of Christian pilgrim centres similar to those Buddhist and Daoist ones; they would serve as centres for devotion and training for

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<sup>83</sup> Goddard’s vision is described in a small pamphlet, *A Vision of Christian and Buddhist Fellowship in the Search for Light and Reality* from 1924, quoted in James Bissett Pratt, *The Pilgrimage of Buddhism and a Buddhist Pilgrimage* (London: McMillan & Co., 1928), 747–48; see also Lian, *Conversion of Missionaries*, 224–27.

<sup>84</sup> Jonathan T’ien-en Chao, “The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement, 1919–1927: A Protestant Response to the Anti-Christian Movement in China” (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1986), 258–59.

religious leaders.<sup>85</sup> These ideas were, however, formulated after Reichelt had established his centres, and were never realized. But at least their proposals may suggest that the idea of retreat houses and centres for spirituality and dialogue, even with Buddhist colouring, was not entirely alien to Chinese Christians in the 1920s.

With Reichelt's wide ecumenical orientation, one might also expect that he was familiar with Protestant retreat houses and monastic orders, for instance those in the Anglican tradition. At a later stage, he was certainly aware of such institutions, and regarded the work of Stanley Jones and his ashram movement in India as a fraternal movement, but I have not found any evidence that Reichelt had any direct contact with such movements in the initial stage of his work in Nanjing.<sup>86</sup>

*Paradoxical Purpose: A Monastery Aimed at Liberation  
from Monastic Life*

I have already touched on the tensions between the deep sympathy with Buddhism that led to the establishment of Christian monasteries for Buddhist monks, and the attempt to convert the monks to Christianity. Part of the tensions had to do with a paradoxical ambivalence over the evaluation of monastic life in general, and of Buddhist monasticism in particular. I will conclude this article by amplifying the paradoxicality of Reichelt's monasteries as to their purpose.

First, from the very beginning it was clear that the Christian monasteries never aimed at a permanent secluded community of monks, or a separate church of converted monks. Reichelt's first appeals and descriptions might be understood in that direction, as he used such an expression as "a separate Christian church among Buddhists," and called the first community a "Christian Brotherhood among Chinese Buddhists." We have seen how the institutions were modelled after Buddhist conventions, but it was consistently emphasized that they only had the "externals of monastic life" that "corresponded to" or "resem-

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<sup>85</sup> Lai Pan-chiu, "Influence of Chinese Buddhism on the Indigenization of Christianity in Modern China," *Ching Feng*, n.s., 1, no. 2 (2000): 150–54.

<sup>86</sup> His contact with Stanley Jones was established in 1928; Riisager, *Lotusblomsten og korset*, 303–6. Reichelt's sense of affinity with monastic brotherhoods may be seen in his contact with the Christa Seva Sangha in Poona in 1932, see his article in *Christa Seva Sangha Review* 2 (July 1932). He gives a broad description of various ashram movements in *Fromhetstyper og helligdommer i Øst-Asia*, vol. 3, 237–80, referring to Tao Fong Shan both as "our Christian Ashram" (*ibid.*, 239) and later as "our charming 'Christian monastery'" (*ibid.*, 307).

bled” a Buddhist monastery.” That was corroborated by the unison report of the local supporters of Reichelt’s work in the missionary community.<sup>87</sup>

Second, with the evangelistic purpose of the work, the establishment of the Christian monasteries was basically part of an evangelistic strategy to create meeting points with Buddhist and Daoist monks in order to convert them. The mission’s rhetoric emphasized friendship, dialogue and mutual respect, but there was no attempt to conceal the intention behind the project, nor was the agenda for evangelism a hidden one. The mission’s ultimate purpose was a peaceful conquest by entering “the Buddhist castle and *conquer* (not defeat!) Buddhism *from within*,” or to be a “transformer” that brings the Buddhists back to society as liberated people.<sup>88</sup> Other missionary supporters described its purpose as to bring about an “interpenetration” of Buddhism and other religions with the riches of the Christian revelation, or, more bluntly, as a “constant infiltration of Buddhist and Daoist monasteries.”<sup>89</sup>

Third, behind this rhetoric one may discern a fundamental scepticism of monastic life in general and of Buddhist monasticism in particular. To some extent this might express the need to avoid suspicion from other missionaries or from the Scandinavian supporters about syncretism, or even about Catholic sympathies. But the real issue was primarily a deep-rooted feeling that Buddhist monasticism was doomed. In spite of his admiration of and fascination with Buddhist monasteries, Reichelt had from the very beginning of his missionary career regarded monastic life quite negatively. During his first extended visit to a large monastery in 1905 he found it painful to look at “the young boys whom the monastic atmosphere had not yet been able to rob of the last piece of youthful spirit and glow,” a youthfulness that seemed to disappear when he watched their “fossilized faces” during meditation.<sup>90</sup> Fifteen years later—after years of studies and intimate contact with monks—that same attitude somehow seemed to be intact. He desperately wanted to “pull the disturbed and yearning monks out of the obscure semi-darkness of Buddhism, where the souls are so often torn between the many different and contradictory systems of sal-

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<sup>87</sup> See note 40.

<sup>88</sup> K. L. Reichelt, “Det nye missionstiltak blandt Kinas buddhister” [The new missionary enterprise among China’s Buddhists], *Kirke og kultur* [Church and culture] 28 (1921): 444–45; italics original.

<sup>89</sup> Hodous, *Christian Occupation of China*; Stephen Sturton, quoted in Loren E. Noren, “The Life and Work of Karl Ludwig Reichelt,” *Ching Feng* 10, no. 3 (1967): 22.

<sup>90</sup> *NMT*, 1906, 61.

vation, or are lured into a dull, mechanic worship intoxication.”<sup>91</sup> Brought out into “the full daylight of Christianity,” they would not only find the meaning of life in the new community in the church, but would be liberated from the monastic life and given back to society as useful members.<sup>92</sup> An important strategy of the Christian monasteries, therefore, was to offer converted monks training that prepared them for an active life when they were back to society, as pastors or evangelists. They were also provided with training in various kinds of secular skills such as nursing and printing.

To be fair to Reichelt, one should note that his criticism about monastic life to a great extent corresponded to that of Buddhist reform movements, which could often be much harsher than he in their rejection of contemporary monastic life in China.<sup>93</sup> It is not surprising, then, that many of the monks who were converted were actually motivated by their eagerness to find ways out of what they regarded as meaningless monastic traditions.

In view of the inherent tensions and paradoxes, one wonders why the Christian monasteries managed to attract thousands of Buddhist and Daoist wandering pilgrims and other guests in Nanjing in the 1920s and in Hong Kong in the 1930s. The diaries and reports from the modest monastery in Nanjing describe a steady stream of monks who were impressed by the unheard-of hospitality and friendship among the Christian brothers, and were marvelling at the atmosphere of worship and contemplation so close to their own traditions. It was reported that the monastery in Nanjing was found (numbered 19) in the prescribed list of pilgrims’ “courses.”<sup>94</sup> And it was reported from Hong Kong that sometimes monks from as many as fifteen provinces gathered at Tao Fong Shan. Even from the distant city of Kyoto, D. T. Suzuki ex-

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<sup>91</sup> Reichelt, *Kinas Buddhister for Kristus*, 25.

<sup>92</sup> Reichelt, *ibid.*; *NMT*, 1921, 179; 1923, 207; *idem*, “Det nye missionstiltak,” 445. Fifteen years later he still used similar terminology when he argued that the aim of the Christian monastery at Tao Fong Shan was to “help them, redeem them, and liberate them in order that they may do something for human beings and be builders of the kingdom of God that now is in the making also in the East”; see Reichelt, *Broderhjemmet*, 20.

<sup>93</sup> See, e.g., Welch, *Buddhist Revival in China*.

<sup>94</sup> Munroe Scott, *McClure: The China Years of Dr. Bob McClure: A Biography* (Toronto: Canec Publishing and Supply House, 1977), 158, refers to Reichelt’s own statement. I have not seen similar reports elsewhere, and it is hard to believe that Reichelt’s monastery was registered in an official list, but perhaps it reflects the unofficial evaluation among Buddhist monks.

pressed his sympathy by printing a report about the Brother Home in his journal, *The Eastern Buddhist*:

The main reason for this success is the fact that all people who come there are met with as Tao-yu . . . that is, as friends in religion. . . . the Christians acknowledge the fact that in spite of all differences there exists a strong and precious platform, on which all enlightened and sincere people can meet and communicate . . .<sup>95</sup>

The present article has offered some perspectives on the Christian monasteries for Buddhist monks. With the next article, which deals with liturgies and hymns, we will have more material for a broader evaluation.

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<sup>95</sup> *Eastern Buddhist* 4, no. 2 (1927): 196.



## System of Harmony According to Confucius and Paul: Music, Goodness, Beauty \*

YEO KHIOK-KHNG

In the last issue of this journal, my article examined the concept of musical harmony according to Confucius and Paul. It looked at Confucius's understanding of harmony with respect to the formation of virtue (goodness) and community through music as a distinctive form of *yue* 樂 (“aesthetic delight” or “harmonious beauty”). It also analyzed Paul's understanding and his churches' usage of lyrical music in the formation of “body of Christ.” This article continues the discussion but reads Confucius and Paul intertextually and focuses on their different views of ethics and ritual. I intend to show how insightful it is to see music as a metaphor of harmony and beauty as a way to read Confucian ethics (the *Analects*) and Pauline theology (Galatians) in light of each other. The article ends with a brief hermeneutical suggestion of resourcing Confucius's and Paul's teachings to enable Chinese Christian community to express its faith through a ritual that is fully Chinese and fully Christian.

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## 1. DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CONFUCIUS AND PAUL ON MUSIC

The *Analects* does not provide an analysis of what music is or how music works; it only gives anecdotes relating how music contributes to the life of virtue within a community. Paul's writings do not contain abundant information on his appropriation of music *per se*, but the role of music in relation to words is significant in Pauline churches as they express hymnically their faith and unity in Christ and in turn experience the oneness of the body of Christ in a manner which only music has the power to give.

Not only does the New Testament not discuss lyrical music, but, unlike the *Analects* of Confucius, does not make use of music really or metaphorically to speak about ethics or the common good. We do see early Christian hymn and songs (as texts, not as music) providing expression—often in creedal forms—of Christian faith and belief and therefore of what Christians should be of their behaviours (Gal. 5–6) and of one mind about (Phil. 2:5–11). But, we do not see lyrical music used as the means toward harmony/naturalness as in Confucius. While there may be some implied use of music for admonition and instruction in Colossians, this reading elides the distinction the writer makes between teaching and admonishing in wisdom and singing with gratitude, although the writer of Colossians does point to the “aesthetic delight” of wisdom, gratitude, and thanksgiving—comparable in some ways to Paul's description of the gifts of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23.

Though music and poetry in their various forms play important roles in forming the respective communities of Confucius and Paul, their views on the role of music in the formation of virtues contain subtle differences. Whereas Confucius believes the virtue of the community can be formed by rituals (such as that of filial piety) and music (such as singing of the *Odes*), Paul does not believe that in the Christian rites (such as baptism and the Lord's Supper) in and of themselves are the objective basis for the new life in Christ.<sup>1</sup> H. D. Betz points out that “Schlier's sacramentalism . . . is wrong,” because for Paul

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<sup>1</sup> Taken from H. D. Betz, *Galatians: A Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Churches in Galatia* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979), 187.

the objective basis upon which the Christian existence rests and of which Paul reminds the Galatians is the official declaration of adoption, a legal act which took place at baptism. But this legal basis is only the conclusion of previous events: the christological–soteriological events named in Gal 1:4; 2:20; 3:13; 4:4–5; the gift of the Spirit (3:2–5; 4:6); and the faith of the Galatians in Christ. . . . In other words, the objective basis of which Paul speaks is faith in Christ, but not the sacrament as a *ritus ex opere operato*.<sup>2</sup>

This is of interest because we note even among biblical scholars disagreement on Paul’s understanding of the Christian rite. Heinrich Schlier, a Roman Catholic, views the baptismal rite in a way similar to Confucius’s understanding of rite (*li* 禮) and music (*yue* 樂); Betz, a Protestant scholar, opposes Schlier’s interpretation. Depending on one’s assumption of the relationship between liturgical rites and morality, one may affirm or reject the commensurability between Confucius’s and Paul’s understandings of rites in the formation of virtues.

Schlier’s view is not a modern understanding. In the context of gnosticism, mystery religions, and many primitive religions that dwell on the power of magic, the language of “putting on Christ” sounds like divine infusion, possession, and transformation through the acts of ritual. Betz points out that Paul seems to be “aware of the danger of ‘cultic formalism’ inherent in pre–Pauline baptismal theology, and seems to argue against that background in Romans [6:3–8]. . . . and critically in 1 Cor 1:13–17.”<sup>3</sup> Paul believes that the baptismal rite is grounded in “faith in Christ” and that in turn is grounded in the work of Christ and the gift of the Spirit. While the baptismal rite and the sacrament of the Love Feast can express the work of Christ and the gift of the Spirit and draw community together, they are not the divine means by which virtue is imparted. Paul has trouble accepting the baptismal ritual as the magical means of imparting the essence of God into believers. In contrast, while Confucius is aware of the danger of formalism in ritual (*li*) and music (*yue*), he does believe in their power as two essential means for forming virtue.

Besides these significant differences, Confucius (explicitly) and Paul (implicitly) share a common view of music as a system of harmony that can bring about reconciliation and fellowship in a community.

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid., 187.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 188–89.

## 2. RITUAL, MUSIC, HARMONY

The Confucian language of poetry, ritual, and music may provide a prism for looking at the theology of Paul as found in his letter to the Galatians. In Confucius's mind, the ideal state could be achieved only if the individual, and most particularly the emperor and his retinue, were "stimulated by poetry, formed by ritual, and perfected by music" (*Analects* 8:8: *xing yu shi, li yu li, cheng yu yue* 興於詩, 立於禮, 成於樂); and, as we shall see, although these terms are absent from Paul's thought, the reality to which they point is present. Paul's alarm is caused not only by the Galatians' deviation from his teaching as such, but by the consequent disharmony produced in the Christian communities both in Galatia and in Antioch.

Confucius uses "poetry, ritual, and music" as the formal rubrics of activities that create propriety in relationships. Paul, on the other hand, does not employ rubrics so much as talk about the acts themselves. His language from time to time is poetic, that is, he has a sense of rhythm and juxtaposition. This is in addition to his use of poetry which was probably sung, as in the Christological hymns. If, for Confucius, by personal commitment and practice the individual is "lifted by poetry, formed by ritual, and perfected through music," then, in Paul, the Christian, through faith is lifted by the gospel, formed by the communal rituals of baptism and table fellowship (the Eucharist), and is perfected by the "song" of the love of God and neighbour, thereby rediscovering the "naturalness" of being refashioned in the image and likeness of God, that is, in the image of the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

In the social context of the gathered community of faith, ritual provides the formal (in the sense of "form") framework in which music is performed. Ritual seeks to regulate behaviours, attitudes, and feelings, or at least to inspire them. Music is a ritualized cultural pattern that calls vocal harmony into being, and through its expression brings about social harmony within the community. Music sets a text (e.g., the *Odes*) and unites cognition and emotion, thought and feeling. Song and poetry draws the individual away from rigidity, conflict and isolation and toward harmony and naturalness. According to Confucian ethics, appropriate ritual action produces harmony within a society, creating an integrated community. Today one might question whether Confucius's ideal would lead to little more than social conformity; but the purpose of ritual, as he understood it, is not primarily to bring about "required

propriety”; rather, it is to point ahead of itself to the creation of harmony or naturalness. In Galatians 2 Paul provides a contrast between harmony and disharmony, naturalness and unnaturalness, although of course he does not use these terms. Peter serves as the example of disharmony (Gal. 2:11–14): while eating with gentiles in one context, he now, out of fear, refuses to join with them in table fellowship.

Paul may have suggested the Love Feast (Eucharist) and unconditional acceptance of one another as the way of Christ for a mixed community to stay together. The reference “the agape” (*tēs agapēs* “through [the] love) in Galatians 5:13 can mean the Eucharist (Love Feast) or God’s love as exemplified on the cross. Tom Rands argues that the “definite article . . . suggests that Paul had a special kind of love in mind . . . . A close reading of the context supports an interpretation of ‘the Agape’ as a short hand term referring to the love feast.”<sup>4</sup> It can refer to the love feast but it is not limited to it. The immediate context of Galatians 5 suggests not the problem of the common meal at Antioch (although the Antioch incident is one of the main problems faced in Galatians, especially in chapter 2). The problem in Galatians 5 is that of the freedom of the believers. The definite article may also refer to the love explicitly manifested in the Christ event. The phrase *dia tēs agapēs* (“through [the] love”) recalls Galatians 5:6 where it is said that Christ’s faith and the believer’s faith are expressed through love. “The love” here refers to the unconditional love of Jesus on the cross, and the love feast is the ritual that seeks to concretize in a symbolic yet real way a communal life of self-sacrificing love. This is Paul’s vision of creating a new community in Christ where communion (*koinōnia*) and mutual service (*diakonia*) define the daily ritual of its members. “Love” is intentional action that reaches out and relates to others with the purpose of sharing with and building up of others (cf. 1 Cor. 8:1). The sending of God’s Son and Spirit unto the world is an act of divine love as God seeks to relate and reach out to humanity, in the most intimate and personal of ways. In Galatians 5, Paul writes that the purpose of the freedom God gives is to reach out to others. In other words, love has its goal in human freedom and human freedom is defined as “love in service to others” (Gal. 5:13). Human freedom bounded by self-interest only results in bondage and destruction. This “freedom for

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<sup>4</sup> Thomas Alden Rand, “The Rhetoric of Ritual: Galatians as Mystagogy” (PhD diss. [Joint Garrett/Northwestern Program in Religious and Theological Studies], Northwestern University, 2000), 160; see also idem, “A Call to Koinonia: A Rhetorical Analysis of Galatians 5:25–6:10,” *Proceedings of the Great Lakes and Midwest Societies of Biblical Literature* 15 (1995): 79–92.

others” models the shared life of God in Christ and the Spirit—a life that is beautiful and good.

Harmony or naturalness, presented as an aesthetic category within an ethical system, is joined to *the beautiful and the good*, together to be held in unity and directed toward the creation of a virtuous community. Harmony cannot be created by beauty alone, no more than harmony can be created by force. Thus, Peter’s “unease” at dining with the gentiles, even though they are “believers,” disrupts the beauty (fellowship) and the goodness (virtue) of the church in Antioch.<sup>5</sup> Harmony or naturalness is evidence of a virtuous community; beauty and goodness need and affirm each other.

Confucius’s understanding of naturalness and harmony brings to mind Paul’s words in Galatians 2:20: “It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me.” Harmony and naturalness are the “hard-wire”—the basic pattern—of heaven which human society ought to emulate. Harmony or naturalness comes as perfection in those who bear the image and likeness of Christ. Abraham (Gal. 3:16–18) believes God, responds in obedience, and is “reckoned as righteous” (Gal. 3:6), i.e., as one whose actions are “natural” because they are in harmony with the Divine will.

Christ is the perfect image of God, and the God who is in Christ dwells in the Christian (Gal. 2:20). This indwelling of the Divine Spirit within the Christian constitutes the source of Christian perfection, that is, perfect love. For Christians, harmony or naturalness are practices of a life lived out of perfect love—language which is similar to the language of “internal coherence” (*he* 和) in Confucian’ thought. Paul’s primary images of harmony, such as “unity in Christ” (Gal. 3:28) and being “joint heirs” in the family of God (Gal. 4:5–7), are about believers, in community, forming the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12), the dwelling place of God (2 Cor. 6:16), built upon the foundation or cornerstone of Christ (Eph. 2:20). For Paul the image of the body/family of Christ is both reality and metaphor, as in Confucius music is both reality and metaphor; in both ritual practice leads to the reality of personal and social harmony.

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<sup>5</sup> I thank my colleague at Garrett-Evangelical Theological Seminary, Dr. Ron Anderson, for helping me see the connection here between Confucius and Paul.

### 3. MUSIC AS SYSTEMS OF HARMONY AND BEAUTY

Though we do not have Paul's deliberation on music in a manner comparable to what Confucius has done in the *Analects*, it is not *music per se* that is important in our search for intertextual connections between Galatians and the *Analects*. Interest here lies in the analogical relationship between *systems of harmony* in the two texts. Whereas Confucius uses the ethics of *li* (ritual propriety) and *yue* (music), Paul uses singing and confession in the rituals of baptism and the fellowship meal based on a theology of the cross—the crucified Christ. The cross is a system of harmony because of the virtue and work of Christ whose sacrificial love rejects fear, transcends enmity, and mends division. The cross is a system of harmony also because it brings about final resolution between life and death. This idea of resolution is expressed in terms of freedom and deliverance from the “evil aeon” (1:4) and “cosmic elements” (4:3, 9) in Galatians. The cross and its unconditional love reconcile God and humanity and bring about unity of Jews and Gentiles. The cross as a system of harmony does not rely on traditions of the law or *li*, but on grace and the work of God. Both systems of harmony (music and the cross) bring about concord in the community—and the cross also brings about the reconciliation between God and humanity. Both systems of harmony are aesthetic representations of transcendence—unity in diversity. Both systems work in the rhythmic, transformative process of mending differences (presence and absence, movement and rest, Jew and Gentile, male and female) and move toward mutual honouring. Both systems engender the language that allows people to participate in awe (ecstasy), holiness (otherness), and grace (gift). Both systems bring participants into doxology. In a discussion of the beautiful and the holy, Don E. Saliers relates liturgical music to doxology:

Our means of participation in doxology to God is not by abstract rules but embodied cultural forms that open up levels of reality they do not “contain” in themselves. The very means of singing, praying, and ritual enactment confer something beyond a sum of the various component parts of liturgy. There are rules as well, but these are part of the discipline enabling the arts to become “artless” in the Christian

assembly. . . . St. Basil, in preaching on the Psalms, refers to them as, “a bond of unity harmoniously drawing people to the symphony of one choir.”<sup>6</sup>

Confucius’s notion of music and Paul’s theology of the cross are powerful in the sense that they strike the resonating cords of the heart, and create a beautiful community of the people of God.

This broad metaphorical understanding of music as a system of harmony and beauty is helpful in seeing the role music plays in Paul’s theology and in the building of a community. The experience of joining in a lyrical/musical expression of faith, as in the utterance of a hymn to Christ, is one of *unity*. What is created and experienced is something unavailable to individuals as individuals. Early Christians experienced consciously and subconsciously their unity with and in Christ as they said or sung their hymns to Christ; they experienced the “body” of Christ by and when they became a body in song. To reinforce the “harmony” the Gentile Christians now enjoy with the Jewish believers as “Sons of God” in the new creation through Christ, Paul uses an organic metaphor of the *body* in 1 Corinthians—*body* as a music metaphor of harmony. In Galatians the body metaphor is not explicit, although Troy W. Martin has convincingly shown that the metaphor of “brother body” appears in the language of “brothers” in Galatians 4:28 and 5:13.<sup>7</sup> Martin reads “brothers” in the texts as referring to different groups of people: in 5:13 “brothers” describes non-Jewish Christians who are formerly pagans, and in 4:28 describes Jewish Christians that include the troublemakers who desire to live under law.<sup>8</sup> Martin contends that the intention of Paul in using the word “brothers” in both cases as nominative (describing) rather than vocative (calling) is not to “call the Galatians to freedom as a goal or end in itself but to be brothers on a condition of freedom.”<sup>9</sup> Martin continues to explain the significance of the “brother body” metaphor in relation to the common blood they share in the body of Christ:

Paul describes both the Galatians, who are non-Jewish Christians, and the agitators, who are Jewish Christians, as brothers who have an

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<sup>6</sup> Don E. Saliers, *Worship as Theology: Foretaste of Glory Divine* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 209.

<sup>7</sup> Troy W. Martin, “The Brother Body: Addressing and Describing the Galatians and the Agitators as Ἀδελφοί,” *Biblical Research* 47 (2002): 5–18.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 11.

obligation and right to share in the Eucharist. Paul's description of both groups as brothers is appropriate to his description elsewhere of the church as the body of Christ. Plutarch describes brothers as being "one body according to nature (*ἀδελφοὶ δὲ τοῦ κατὰ φύσιν σώματος*)" since their bodies are built from the "frothed blood" [semen] of their father and/or from the "congealed blood" [menses] of their mother. Thus, Paul's description of Christians as brothers is congruent with his description of the church as a body since all share the same blood in the Eucharist just as brothers share the same blood from father and/or mother. Even though the phrase is not used in Galatians, the church could be described as the "brother body," a body that is extremely difficult to repair once it has been torn apart.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the fact that we have moved from lyrical music in the liturgical context to a "brother body" of Christian rites in Paul's theology, both are concerned with edification and harmony of a community of faith.

It is significant that Paul uses a broad understanding of music, including the metaphorical, as a system of harmony to create a community of concord. Although the ideas are articulated later in church history, Basil of Caesarea, Boethius, and Calvin all see the harmonious role of music in building the Christian community after the virtue of Christ. Basil writes,

What did the Holy Spirit do when he saw that the human race was not led easily to virtue, and that due to our penchant for pleasure we gave little heed to an upright life? *He mixed sweetness of melody with doctrine* so that inadvertently we should absorb the benefit of the words through gentleness and ease of hearing, just as clever physicians frequently smear the cup with honey when giving the fastidious some rather bitter medicine to drink. Thus he contrived for us these harmonious psalm tunes, so that those who are children in actual age as well as those who are young in behaviour, while appearing only to sing, would in reality be training their souls.<sup>11</sup>

Calvin believed that the use of the "organ for praising God and lifting up our hearts to Him, to console us by meditating upon His virtue, goodness, wisdom, and justice, a thing more necessary than one can

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 17–18.

<sup>11</sup> "Homilia in psalmum," in James McKinnon, ed., *Music in Early Christian Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 65.

say.”<sup>12</sup> On the metaphorical understanding of music, Boethius (480–524), a Roman Christian philosopher, writes,

There are three types of music. The first type is the music of the universe (*musica mundana*), the second, that of the human being (*musica humana*), and the third type is that which is created by certain instruments (*musica instrumentis constituta*) such as the kithara, or tibia or other instruments which produce melodies.<sup>13</sup>

Andrew Wilson-Dickson comments,

Thus even the humble *musica instrumentalis constituta* was linked through the music of the human soul ultimately to the music of the spheres, for all three were part of the same divinely controlled system. [Humankind] had therefore to strive to make music which synchronized with this harmoniously vibrating universe and which would therefore form a worthy part of God’s great symphony of proportions.<sup>14</sup>

The best “musical instrument” is the human voice (not made by human hands). Voices expressed melodically are not only found in the singing of songs, but also in the speaking or utterance of languages, especially those that are tonal—pitched with accents—such as Greek and Chinese. Whether literal or metaphorical, music in Confucius’s thought and harmony in Paul’s theology create a united “body of Christ,” seeking to redeem a chaotic and fallen world.

#### 4. CAN BEAUTY SAVE THE WORLD?

Can the beauty of music save a fallen world? Both Confucius and Paul

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<sup>12</sup> Foreword to *Geneva Psalter*, in Oliver Strunk, *Source Readings in Music History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1950), 347.

<sup>13</sup> Andrew Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music: From Gregorian Chant to Black Gospel: An Authoritative Illustrated Guide to All the Major Traditions of Music for Worship* (Oxford: Lion, 1992), 40, quoting from *Music in the Western World*, selected and annotated by P. Weiss and R. Taruskin (New York: Schirmer Books, 1984), 9.

<sup>14</sup> Wilson-Dickson, *The Story of Christian Music*, 40.

are positive in their view of the role music played to bring their respective communities together.<sup>15</sup> This is seen particularly in Paul's aversion to the discord and unreason of speaking in tongues in the Corinthian churches. Because unintelligible ritual speech does not build up the church, lifeless speech, like wooden ritual, does not produce harmony or naturalness. It is as if we were presented with "beauty without goodness"—angelic language that does not edify the congregation. So Paul seems to argue that the internal harmony of Spirit and mind required for intelligible speech is also required to produce social harmony and support the common good. Confucius emphasizes the beauty and goodness of *shao* 韶 music for it expresses the benevolent virtue of the king which in turn brings about social harmony and prosperity. Confucius regards beauty as a virtue. In the Bible beauty is not listed as a virtue. Rather, beauty in the Hebrew Scriptures is a divine attribute: The psalmists often praise the beauty of God along with his glory in the context of the liturgical assembly (Ps. 27:4, 96:6; cf. Isa. 4:2, 28:5). In the New Testament beauty is not mentioned as a divine attribute.<sup>16</sup> Perhaps this is because the crucifixion of Christ is often misunderstood as an evil, as Albert L. Blackwell writes: "Agape or self-giving love, which Christian tradition identifies with God as revealed in Christ, is not identical with harmony as we usually conceive it. The way of Christ is 'the way of affliction.'" <sup>17</sup> I disagree with Blackwell here, for precisely at this point of Christ's suffering salvation is accomplished, the wall of enmity between Jews and Gentiles is torn down, and reconciliation completed. The self-giving love of Christ is the virtue that engenders faith, hope, and love—the Christian virtues.

Although the Bible does not list beauty as a virtue, the early church expresses the conviction of the power of Christian music to bring about reconciliation in a divisive world. J. Gelineau explains this point well:

Amid the great diversity of rites, languages, cultures, and confessions within Christianity, music remains a privileged meeting point. When the liturgy is sung or set to music, the Christian assembly is more inviting. To those separated by the unfortunate divisions of the past, or

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<sup>15</sup> Of course, music can also enslave or distract us. Music can draw us away from God to its own beauty, thus becoming an idol "in human form, with human beauty, to be set up in a shrine" (of human heart?) (Isa. 44:13).

<sup>16</sup> The word "beauty" appears in Romans 10:15 which quotes Isaiah 52:7: "How beautiful are the feet of them that bring good tidings."

<sup>17</sup> Albert L. Blackwell, *The Sacred in Music* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1999), 163.

who are unable to surmount their own isolation, music offers a sign of reconciliation and of communion.<sup>18</sup>

Given what Confucius has to say about music in the context of rites and virtue, we can ask the same question about the positive contribution of music to the Christian life. Confucius emphasizes the harmonizing effect of music on community. Some music can hurt and divide community, but music can also heal and pull community together. Salvation in Galatians is essentially about different ethnic groups becoming the people of God *via* baptism and unconditional love (instituted by the Eucharist meal). Consequently, since music was employed in these liturgical contexts, it would not be out of line to suggest that music was used to harmonize factions within the community.

## 5. MODERN IMPLICATIONS

This discussion of music as understood by Confucius and Paul has a modern bearing on Chinese communities in China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong who are divided by the straits, by political ideology and by economical development. Confucian vision of building an aesthetic society through stylized ritual and harmonious music speaks the truth that the ultimate goal of politics is not realization of democracy, freedom, equality but the participation, transformation, and enjoyment in Beauty (aesthetic world).<sup>19</sup> Building an aesthetic society does not advocate the rule of law but first and foremost, the rule of Beauty, whose curriculum is an benevolent government, graced by music and ordered by rituals.

What unites the Chinese people across the straits seem to be pop culture, especially popular music. There was a saying in the 1970s and 1980s that Deng Xiaoping 鄧小平 ruled during the day and Teresa Teng (Deng Lijun 鄧麗君) ruled at night; the people may have listened to the political speeches of Deng Xiaoping during the day, but all of them listened to singer Teresa Teng at night. It is a known fact that pop

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<sup>18</sup> J. Gelineau, "Music and Singing in the Liturgy," in Cheslyn Jones, Geoffrey Wainwright, *et al.*, eds., *The Study of Liturgy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 507.

<sup>19</sup> Chen Zhaoying 陳昭瑛, "Kongzi shi yue meixue zhong de zhengtixing gainian" 孔子詩樂美學中的整體性概念 [The integrative concept of Confucius's poetic and musical aesthetics], <http://www.npobook.org.tw/Special/pdf/0401chen.pdf>, 1.

concerts held in these “three regions” (China, Taiwan, and Hong Kong) are able to overcome political divides. Music is a language that transcends boundary and touches human hearts, regardless of age, intellect, gender, or ideology.

If pop culture has so much to offer in the task of national reconciliation and in the building of Chinese communities across the straits, Chinese Christians can contribute even more. Culture without theology is like a corpse, or worse, a narcissistic idol or violent demon. Culture then does not have the spiritual resources to critique and renew itself. Yet theology without culture is like an anemic illness, for theology cannot feed on itself, it has to feed on “the nitty gritty” of life.<sup>20</sup>

Christian traditions have long incorporated music as an artefact of worship. Chinese Christians can learn from pop culture and Christian traditions to express their theology, so that both their rituals and their music can be instruments of God’s grace. What can Chinese Christians do to help Chinese across the straits to form a new identity in the new creation of God in Christ? Can the Christian rituals of baptism, and the Eucharist, and Christian hymns and songs, as well as acts of mercy and service shape the new Chinese identity in the years ahead, which politics alone seems helpless to do? Those who have read David Aikman’s *Jesus in Beijing* know that God is forming his new creation in China through the body of Christ.<sup>21</sup> God has inspired a young peasant woman called Xiaomin 小敏 nearly a thousand hymns with tunes. She did not complete her secondary school education and she is illiterate in music, yet the collection of her songs and music entitled “Canaan Hymns” (Jia’nan shige 迦南詩歌) have brought unity, revival, and hope among Chinese churches that are still being persecuted. The “Canaan Hymns” use lyrical music to create social harmony, enhance worship life, and proclaim the new world order inaugurated by Christ.<sup>22</sup> Though the post-denominational church movement characterizes the Chinese church, the different practices of observing Holy Communion (Eucharist) still divide Chinese Christianity. It remains a fact that Chinese Christians disagree among themselves regarding the ritual of baptism.

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<sup>20</sup> See also similar understanding of Stephen Neill on religion and culture, “Religion and Culture: A Historical Introduction,” in John Stott and Robert T. Coote, eds., *Gospel and Culture: The Papers of a Consultation on the Gospel and Culture* (Pasadena, Calif.: William Carey Library, 1979), 1.

<sup>21</sup> David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery, 2003).

<sup>22</sup> See the introduction of the “Canaan Hymns” in [www.chinasoul.com/cross/script/script4.htm](http://www.chinasoul.com/cross/script/script4.htm).

As far as church music and singing is concerned, many Chinese churches are adamant that singing traditional hymns and spiritual songs with Western country music is acceptable, while singing hymns with traditional Chinese music or spiritual songs with popular music is prohibited. Many encourage the use of violin, harp, and organ, but object to the use of indigenous Chinese musical instruments such as the *erhu* 二胡 (a two-string instrument played with a bow), the *zheng* 箏 (a zither with 13 to 17 strings tuned to pentatonic scale), and the *sheng* 笙 (a mouth organ that has 17 to 19 pipes seated on a wind chamber). A sociological explanation of this phenomenon is that the initial phase of the gospel proclamation in a new place requires the people to form a new identity as they seek differentiation from their own culture. Contextualization of the gospel in its mature form will usually come later. A sign of hope is witnessed in Chinese Christianity when many of the scores of the “Canaan Hymns” are in Chinese style—presented with folk accents and in pentatonic scales. Many pieces were performed for recording purposes using both Western and Chinese musical instruments.

Chinese Christians need to reflect on what Christian theology *and* Chinese wisdom can contribute toward their own political culture and identity. As we have explained earlier, Confucian ethic grants resources to Chinese Christians to emphasize rites and music in their political power of forming virtues and community. Confucius once said, “Practice the calendar of the Xia, ride on the plain chariot of the Yin [Shang Dynasty], and wear the ceremonial cap of the Zhou, but, for music, play the *shao* and the *wu*” (*Analects* 15:11).<sup>23</sup> Pauline theology also grants resources to Chinese Christians. In particular Paul’s theology of the cross, his political eschatology, his understanding of community as arising from being-in-Christ, the new law of the Spirit, and the rituals of baptism and the love feast are resources for Chinese Christians to use in building the body of Christ in their midst. Communal practices of Chinese Christians, although expressive of faith, point ahead, as does music in Confucius, to the creation of harmony and naturalness. The transformed lives of Chinese Christians is not for the sake of faith alone; rather they are in Christ for the sake of the world. It is this parallel between Paul and Confucius that enables the

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<sup>23</sup> *Analects* 15:11: 子曰：「行夏之時，乘殷之輅，服周之冕，樂則《韶》《舞》。放鄭聲，遠佞人；鄭聲淫，佞人殆。」*Shao* was the music performed at the ceremony when emperor Yao abdicated and Shun became the next ruler; *wu* was the music performed at the ceremony when King Wu became the ruler. Yang Bojun 楊伯峻, *Lunyu yi zhu* 論語譯注 [Commentary of the *Analects*] (Taipei: Wunan, 1992), 349.

author to use a Chinese cultural framework that, rather than being discarded or set in opposition to Christian faith, facilitate a Chinese appropriation of the gospel. In doing so, it is hoped that the resources of Confucius's ethic and Paul's theology will enable Chinese Christian community to express its faith through forms of word, song, and ritual that is "fully Confucianist and fully Christian."



# Transcending Differences between Christianity and Buddhism with Love: The Life and Literary Works of Xu Dishan

CHAN WAI-KEUNG

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Xu Dishan 許地山 (1893–1941) was born into a Buddhist family but chose Christianity as his religion. As a Christian, he married a Buddhist wife, Lin Yuesen 林月森. Not long after he married, he entered a seminary for theological studies; yet he started his academic career as a scholar of comparative religion.

He had deep connections with both Christians and Buddhists in his daily life. Some have even considered his literary works as Buddhist but others see him as a Christian author. Xu Dishan stressed literature as an expression of a writer's particular experiences.<sup>1</sup> But fiction is by

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<sup>1</sup> See Xu Dishan 許地山, “Chuangzuo de sanbao he jianshang de siyi” 創作底三寶和鑒賞底四依 [The three gems of creation and the four guidelines of appreciation], in *Xu*

nature imaginary and it is difficult to extract a writer's experiences and perspectives from his literary output. Because of this, this essay will begin with his life and ideas, elements which are relatively clear and easy to verify; these go on to build a foundation from which to understand his literary works.

## 2. XU DISHAN'S IDEA OF RELIGION

Xu Dishan's personal name is Zankun 贊堃<sup>2</sup> and his penname Luo Huasheng 落華生,<sup>3</sup> while Dishan 地山 is his *hao* 號 (meaning nickname or literary name).<sup>4</sup> He was born on February 4, 1894.<sup>5</sup> Although Xu Dishan was a Christian, his understanding of religion was not necessarily the same as most believers because he was also a scholar of religion. In the next sections, we will first try to understand his views on religion, for this will help in our understanding of his treatment of the differences between Christianity and Buddhism.

### 2.1 *Xu Dishan's Understanding of Religion*

Xu Dishan set down a definition of religion for his contemporaries. He writes, "religion is the appropriate attitude adopted or shown by

*Dishan sanwen quanbian* 許地山散文全編 [A complete collection of Xu Dishan's essays], ed. Chen Pingyuan 陳平原 (Hangzhou: Zhejiang wenyi chubanshe, 1992), 282.

<sup>2</sup> See Chan Wai-keung, "Jidujiao yu Zhongguo zongjiao xiangyu: Xu Dishan yanjiu" 基督教與中國宗教相遇——許地山研究 [The encounter between Christianity and Chinese religions: a study of Xu Dishan] (PhD diss., The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2002), Chap. 2, Section 1.

<sup>3</sup> Zhou Sisong 周俟松, "Xu Dishan nianbiao" 許地山年表 [A chronology of Xu Dishan's life], in *Xu Dishan yanjiuji* 許地山研究集 [Essays on Xu Dishan], ed. Zhou Sisong and Du Rumiao 杜汝森 (Nanjing: Nanjingdaxue chubanshe, 1989), 476–77. In addition, Xu's penname had to do with what his father spoke about the peanut (*luohuasheng* 落花生). For details see Mao Dun 茅盾, "Luohuasheng lun" 落花生論 [On Luo Huasheng], in Zhou and Du, *Xu Dishan yanjiuji*, 186; see below, §2.3.

<sup>4</sup> Zhou Sisong, "Xu Dishan nianbiao," 477.

<sup>5</sup> Xu Dishan said: "On February 4, 1894, or during the *chou* 丑 hours [1–3 a.m.] of the 28th day of the 12th month in the 19th year of the Guangxu 光緒 reign, I was born at Kuiyuan 窺園—which is located beside the shrine of Koxinga—in the prefectural capital of Tainan, Taiwan" (Xu Dishan, "Wo de tongnian" 我的童年 [My childhood], in Zhou and Du, *Xu Dishan yanjiuji*, 56).

human beings in all their mental and behavioural activities.”<sup>6</sup> Xu’s definition of religion seems very broad; it rests on human beings and is not concerned with the sacred or the divine. Yet he limits religion to “the appropriate attitude.” This raises a question: Could what appears to be religion yet also seems to manifest an “inappropriate” attitude (e.g., planchette) be considered religion?<sup>7</sup> For even if Xu Dishan considers the practice of planchette to be without much religious value and criticizes it as superstition,<sup>8</sup> it remains undeniable that planchette is, notwithstanding his “narrow” definition, a form of religion.

Xu Dishan also writes, “thoughts or practices that qualify as religion must (i) [hold that] human life consists of activities pertaining to the blending of, and reconciliation between, the spiritual and the material; (ii) create a perfect life by means of religious faith.”<sup>9</sup> In his contention,

human lives are neither purely spiritual nor purely material. If we favour one between the two, our lives will definitely be harmed. If we favour the spiritual, we will feel antipathy towards life. If we favour the material, life will become painful and comfortless. Religion is responsible for mediating these two conflicting sides so that living a happy life can become possible.<sup>10</sup>

Xu Dishan also believed that the objective of religion is to better the individual and, more generally, society—and that religious practices must not be performed out of the desire for bliss or avoiding punishment. He writes,

I think that religion is to motivate people to assume the duty to rehabilitate and improve society and individual lives. Even if there exists no heaven or hell, they should not shirk this duty. If there exists heaven or hell, religious believers should not do it for the purpose of

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<sup>6</sup> This is from Xu Dishan, “Zongjiao de shengzhang yu miwang” 宗教的生長與滅亡 [The growth and extinction of religion], *Dongfang zazhi* 東方雜誌 = *Eastern Miscellany* 19, no. 10 (1922): 31.

<sup>7</sup> Xu writes, “practitioners of planchette are often selfish, looking out only for their own interest.” Xu Dishan, *Fuji mixin de yanjiu* 扶箕迷信底研究 [A study of the superstitious practice of planchette] (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1966), 107.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>9</sup> “Zongjiao de shengzhang yu miwang,” 29.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

escaping the punishments of hell; nor should they avoid doing evil for the purpose of enjoying heavenly bliss.<sup>11</sup>

Furthermore, Xu Dishan believed the goal of spreading the gospel to be neither God's pleasure nor one's own happiness, but the betterment and moral cultivation of all. He says,

The purpose of evangelism is but to uplift human life so that it can move by all means into a completely sinless and unblemished and absolutely holy world. We have had neither good grounds nor proof to deny that life is meaningful. Yet, whether life is meaningful is a difficult question to which there is no solution but religious faith. Having acquired religious faith, we must then ask ourselves for what cause we should bring about the absolutely perfect world according to our ideals and faith. Is it for getting pleasure, or showing God's power and glory? Regardless of all possible answers to this question, I for one will only be impelled to it by compassion and a sense of dissatisfaction with the present and the past. It is my aim that the welfare and capacity for virtue of all will grow.<sup>12</sup>

Xu's perspective lends a functional flavour to his views about religion. In his view religion is not created by a person but is a product of society, formed after going through many people and after a long time;<sup>13</sup> religious feelings, moreover, are generated from ideals in reaction to desires and afflictions, as well as a wish to seek after peace and health.<sup>14</sup>

In summary, Xu Dishan thought that the goal of religion is to improve human beings and human society. It is perhaps this perspective that allowed him to coexist harmoniously with believers of other, non-Christian religions. What he sought was not the authenticity and uniqueness of any religious faith; nor was he in pursuit of absolute truth or a theology free of inconsistencies. Rather, he sought to improve humankind and human society.

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<sup>11</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>12</sup> Xu Dishan, "Rensheng wenti de jieda yu women de xinyang" 人生問題底解答與我們底信仰 [Answering the question about life, and our religious faith], *Xiehe xuebao* 協和學報, no. 21 (1937): 92.

<sup>13</sup> Xu Dishan, "Women yao shenme yang de zongjiao" 我們要甚麼樣的宗教 [What sort of religion do we want], transcribed by Liu Fang 劉昉, *Shengming yuekan* 生命月刊 = *The Life* 3, no. 9, (May 1923): 1.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

## 2.2 *Taking Human Beings as Foundation*

It is clear that human beings form the foundation for Xu Dishan's religious thinking; God is in his view a model that human beings choose for themselves: that is why it should not control nor restrain human reason. So Xu writes: "What we call God is but an expression of mankind's highest ideals. Human beings have established him as a model, who is not to be seen as authoritarian or restraining human reason."<sup>15</sup> Human beings need God as they are neither the best nor the most perfect and freest of all creatures in the universe; thus, we search for a superior "God" to obey outside our own intellect.<sup>16</sup> Xu Dishan's doctrine of God is fundamentally anthropocentric in the sense that God exists to satisfy the needs of human beings.<sup>17</sup> In dealing with interreligious relationships, he attached most importance to human relations rather than intricate doctrinal issues.

## 2.3 *Valuing Practical Function*

Xu valued practicality. He says, "We don't acquire any learning for learning's sake; rather, we acquire it so that it can be used. . . . We always presume that knowledge alone is not knowledge; it must be put into use before it is considered such."<sup>18</sup> In his famous essay "Luohuasheng" 落花生, Xu has recorded an incident about the piece of land behind his house that his mother thinks a pity to leave wild and uncultivated; so she suggests planting some peanuts. After several months, there is a harvest and she makes some dishes from the peanuts. At dinner, Xu Dishan's father asks the children to list the benefits of peanuts. After Dishan and his older brother and sister finish, their father says,

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>16</sup> For details see Xu Dishan, *ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> A writer has written in a Christian periodical in Hong Kong: "Of [Xu Dishan's] twenty-three short stories approximately a third involve religion in the content. Although his final concern was not religion but 'human beings,' religion was a means by which he expressed his perspective on human beings" (Ge Wenwei 葛文偉, "Huainian Xu Dishan" 懷念許地山 [In memory of Xu Dishan], *Jidujiao zhoubao* 基督教週報 = *Christian Weekly*, no. 1401 [June 1991]: 3). I agree that Xu Dishan's final concern is the welfare of human beings, but in his contention, religion cannot be torn apart from humans. For him, religion is an integral part and even the largest part of human existence. For details, see Xu, "Women yao shenme yang de zongjiao," 2.

<sup>18</sup> Xu Dishan, "Yuanshi de ru, rujia, yu rujiao" 原始的儒、儒家、與儒教 [The pristine *ru*, ruism and the ruist religion], *Shengming yuekan* 3, no. 10 (June 1923): 15.

“The uses for peanuts are indeed numerous; but there is one thing about it that is especially precious. This small nut is not like apples, peaches and pomegranates, with their fruits hung high on the branch, brilliant red and fresh green, making people envious on seeing them. The peanut hides its fruit in the ground and it can only be dug up when it is ripe. You will occasionally see one peanut shrunken and growing on the ground; you cannot immediately judge that it has no nut. You can only know after you have looked at it.”

We all replied: “True.” Mother also nodded her head. Father continued: “You should be like the peanut because it is useful, not great and a thing of beauty.” I said: “Then one needs to be a person who is useful rather than a great person of reputation and social standing.” Father said: “This is my hope for all of you.”

We talked until late into the night, then scattered. All the peanut dishes were finished but my father’s words are still imprinted on my heart.<sup>19</sup>

Not only did Xu Dishan remember his father lauding the virtues of the peanut; to be useful yet humble became a guiding principle of his life.

Xu Dishan believed that religion yielded this-worldly enjoyments,<sup>20</sup> and that believers must practice their religious ideals. He says, “All people in a religious community must use their religious ideals and express them in action.”<sup>21</sup> Valuing practicality, Xu believed to be crucial one’s attitude towards this-worldly life; he valued practical virtue and thought that the criteria for accepting a religion depended on its attitude towards life rather than its theology or rituals.<sup>22</sup> He valued whether a religion is of help to human beings more than new discoveries in theory. This valuing of the practical over the theoretical made Xu Dishan value the practice of love more than the theoretical clash between Christianity and Buddhism.

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<sup>19</sup> Xu Dishan, “Luohuasheng,” in *Xu Dishan xuanji* 許地山選集 [Selected works of Xu Dishan] (Beijing: Renmin wenzue chubanshe, 1982), 1:89.

<sup>20</sup> For details see Xu Dishan, “Women yao shenme yang de zongjiao,” 3.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 1.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

## 2.4 Valuing Morality

From Zhang Zhuling's 張祝齡 (1877–1961) we know that Xu Dishan believed Jesus to be the evidence of God's revelation not because of Jesus's metaphysical nature but because of his virtuous deeds. It is from Jesus's earthly moral life that we could infer his essence and form both before and after the Incarnation; his invisible divine nature could thus be verified by his "actualized" human nature.<sup>23</sup>

Xu Dishan valued moral character and was likely influenced by his father, who was a person of noble and virtuous sentiments: he courageously resisted the Japanese in Taiwan; though the family was poor, he was not enticed by nor succumbed to them.<sup>24</sup> But Xu Dishan already had a loving heart when he was a child. According to Zhou Lingzhong 周苓仲, Xu Dishan's daughter, when he was four,

Father ran to the door to play. There was a beggar who wanted money from him. Father said: "I do not have any money, but my mother would." So he took the beggar up to the bedroom. Grandmother was so angry she wanted to hit someone. Another time he was also playing at the door; he was wearing a silver chain belt that held up his vest, and a poverty-stricken child saw it and envied his having such a good-looking chain when he himself did not.

Father said: "That is very easy, I will take it off and give it to you, then you will have it." When it was night and time to go to sleep, Grandmother saw that the silver chain had disappeared, and gave him a good spanking, and insisted that he retrieve it. It had not mattered to him that he had been spanked but he refused to take it back.<sup>25</sup>

Xu Dishan's emphasis on living a virtuous life might also have to do with the cultural values pervading contemporary society; it was advo-

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<sup>23</sup> Zhang Zhuling 張祝齡, "Duiyu Xu Dishan jiaoshou de yi ge huiyi" 對於許地山教授的一個回憶 [A reflection on Professor Xu Dishan], in *Zhuidao Xu Dishan xiansheng jinian tekan* 追悼許地山先生紀念特刊 [Tributes to Xu Dishan] (Hong Kong: Quangang wenhua jie zhuidao Xu Dishan xiansheng dahui choubuihui, 1941), 14.

<sup>24</sup> For details, see Zhou Sisong 周侯松, "Sui Dishan Taiwan xing" 隨地山台灣行 [Accompanying Dishan on his tour of Taiwan], in Xu Naixiang 徐迺翔 and Xu Mingxu 徐明旭, comps., *Xu Dishan xuanji* 許地山選集 [Selected writings of Xu Dishan] (Fuzhou: Haixia wenyi chubanshe, 1985), 712–13.

<sup>25</sup> Zhou Lingzhong 周苓仲, "Fuqin de tongnian: Xu Xu Dishan 'Wo de tongnian'" 父親的童年——續許地山〈我的童年〉 [Father's childhood: a sequel to Xu Dishan's "Wo de tongnian"], in Zhou and Du, *Xu Dishan yanjiuji*, 59–60.

cated by many intellectuals of his times. For instance, Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942) writes, “We should throw away old beliefs to seek the new belief. What is the new belief? It is Jesus’s sublime and great moral character, as well as his enthusiastic and profound feelings.”<sup>26</sup> Seen as a root of Western civilization, Christianity enjoyed a vogue at the beginning of the New Culture Movement; it was hoped that it could save China. The Chinese YMCA came up with the famous slogan: “build character to save the country” (*ren’ge jiu guo* 人格救國); it was suggested that the universal love and ethos of self-sacrifice in Christianity could save China and rebuild the spirit of its people.<sup>27</sup> Xu Dishan likewise suggested that the value of religion in the modern age lay in its beneficial influence on one’s attitude towards life:

Modern religion, as it stands, is definitely not what satisfies us. Our approval or rejection of it should neither be based on theological doctrines nor outward rituals, but rather on the religionists’ attitude towards life. If an appropriate attitude towards life is not present, even if many rituals have been performed and many sacred utterances chanted, this is also not religion.<sup>28</sup>

Xu Dishan believed that human reason had “illuminating revelation” and could serve as one’s measure of morality. However, universal ethical standards for all mankind are in his contention to be provided by religion. He says,

Essentially, human reason has illuminating revelation; on the basis of reason and experience, it may evaluate future results. This is how an individual establishes his own standards as to his morality. And yet ethical standards for all humans can only be provided by religion.<sup>29</sup>

Xu Dishan valued the appropriate attitude towards life and thought that universal moral standards must be provided by religion. He often

<sup>26</sup> Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀, “Jidujiao yu zhongguoren” 基督教與中國人 [Christianity and the Chinese people], *Xin qingnian* 新青年 7, no. 3 (1920): 15–22 (here 19), cited in Lam Wing-hung (Lin Ronghong 林榮洪), *Fengchao zhong fen qi de Zhongguo jiaohui* 風潮中奮起的中國教會 [Chinese churches striving and emerging amidst waves] (Hong Kong: Tiandao shulou, 1985), 42.

<sup>27</sup> See Leung Ka-lun (Liang Jialin 梁家麟), *Fu lin Zhonghua: Zhongguo jindai jiaohui shi jiang* 福臨中華——中國近代教會十講 [Blessings arrive in China: ten studies on modern Chinese churches] (Hong Kong: Tiandao shulou, 1988), 123–28.

<sup>28</sup> “Zongjiao de shengzhang yu miewang,” 42.

<sup>29</sup> “Women yao shenme yang de zongjiao,” 4.

contributed to *Shengming yuekan* 生命月刊, a monthly periodical published by Zhengdaotuan 證道團, whose mission was precisely to help the ethical needs of the Chinese people.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.5 *The Present World and Not the World to Come*

At the start of the twentieth century, many missionaries to China began expressing concern for social issues in the country. They believed that the Christian gospel not only belonged to the world to come, but also to the present.<sup>31</sup> Xu Dishan likewise valued the present world even more than the world to come. He writes,

The religious practice of the Chinese people mostly has to do with seeking happiness and avoiding woes in the afterlife. They do not know that religion brings humans felicity in present reality.<sup>32</sup>

Xu Dishan believed that religion must concentrate on this-worldly life rather than life after death. He writes, “Religions in the past focused on karmic consequences after death. Actually, religions are of use for the living. A religion loses its greatest value if it fails to place importance on [this-worldly] life.”<sup>33</sup>

Xu gave most importance to this-worldly life and did not consider the religious rhetoric about the next life or going into heaven as important. Moreover, he writes,

the people in the Kingdom of Heaven should all be strong and healthy. The Beatitudes teach that those who are persecuted for righteousness are blessed because the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs. Christ does not say that the entire Kingdom of Heaven is the abode of losers, weak or reward-seeking people. That means one should strive for righteousness even at the cost of one’s life. And so Christ teaches that “blessed are the pure in heart.” To be “pure in heart” is not seeking the Kingdom of Heaven for one’s own bliss. Using a hundred

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<sup>30</sup> For details see Zha Shijie 查時傑, *Minguo jidujiao shi lunwenji* 民國基督教史論文集 [Studies on Chinese Christianity in the republican era] (Taipei: Yuzhouguang, 1993), 459.

<sup>31</sup> Lam Wing-hung (Lin Ronghong 林榮洪), *Zhongguo shenxue wushi nian: 1900–1949* 中國神學五十年：1900–1949 [Fifty years of Chinese theology: 1900–1949] (Hong Kong: Zhongguo shenxue yanjiuyuan, 1998), 92–93.

<sup>32</sup> “Women yao shenme yang de zongjiao,” 3.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

years of good works to earn eternal bliss of the Kingdom of Heaven can still be considered an act of greed. Being bullied but not rousing himself, hoping only for consolation to be offered in the Kingdom of Heaven—this can be considered as timidity. If the Kingdom of Heaven were full of such people, I would prefer not to enter.<sup>34</sup>

Because of the great emphasis Xu Dishan put on the this-worldly significance of religion, whether one could enter heaven was not an important question for him. Moreover, he also thought that one's religious deeds could make hell go out of existence and bring heaven into existence.<sup>35</sup> His focus on this-worldly life instead of afterlife allowed him to keep his eyes on this-worldly issues such as how Christians and Buddhists could coexist harmoniously, rather than whether the dead would enter the Buddhist paradise or the Christian heaven.

### 2.5 *Short Summary*

The goal of religion is to Xu Dishan to improve human beings and society; religion must be human-oriented, serve to preserve morality, emphasize this-worldly needs and be practical. He also thought that religious people ought to put their ideals into practice.<sup>36</sup> Xu Dishan believed bearing witness to be extremely important to evangelism; “to bear witness,” writes he, “is the only way to lead a person to faith.”<sup>37</sup> Xu's religious thinking we have discussed above enabled him to live peacefully with Buddhists. Accordingly, love can transcend the religious differences between Christians and Buddhists.

## 3. LOVE IN XU DISHAN'S FICTION

Xu Dishan's fiction is filled with eulogies to love. Lewis S. Robinson contends that it is forgiveness and love that characterizes Christianity

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<sup>34</sup> “Rensheng wenti de jieda yu women de xinyang,” 92.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*, 91.

<sup>36</sup> See details in “Women yao shenme yang de zongjiao,” 1.

<sup>37</sup> “Rensheng wenti de jieda yu women de xinyang,” 89.

in Xu's fiction.<sup>38</sup> Among his stories, however, "Ming ming niao" 命命鳥 (The fate of a bird) and "Nü'er xin" 女兒心 (A daughter's heart) show most clearly his fiction's Buddhist flavour and also illustrate most prominently the theme of self-sacrificing love. One scholar goes so far as to say that in "Nü'er xin," "Xu Dishan completely affirms Buddhism, promoting the Buddhist teaching on guiding people into moral enlightenment and on the spirit of self-sacrifice."<sup>39</sup>

"Nü'er xin" describes a magistrate who, rather than suffer the humiliation of surrendering, kills his entire family to preserve his honour during the Wuchang 武昌 uprising at the end of the Qing dynasty. His daughter escapes death and hides in a tree; he thinks that she has fallen into the well and died. He passes a monastery intending to commit suicide but is dissuaded by an old monk. When the daughter has grown up, she seeks her father everywhere. Once, when she is standing at a train station she meets a monk; she feels that he is like her father. Later, she runs into him again on a boat. She becomes preoccupied; being careless she knocks over a night lamp and sets the boat on fire. The monk goes about putting out the flames selflessly and is sacrificed.<sup>40</sup> His self-sacrifice is undoubtedly the high point of the story. It can be said that Xu Dishan has illustrated the Buddhist spirit of self-sacrifice with the monk's actions.

In "Shangren fu" 商人婦 (The merchant's wife), "Zhui wang lao zhu" 綴網勞蛛 (The web-spinning toiling spider) and "Yuguan" 玉官 Xu Dishan uses Chinese Christian women as central characters. The protagonist of "Shangren fu," Xiguan 惜官, is a woman who becomes a Christian convert. The leading female character in "Zhui wang lao zhu," Shangjie 尚潔, is a devout Christian. The eponymous protagonist, Yuguan, becomes a Bible woman. These three women are all "abandoned" by their husbands and encounter much suffering thereafter; in

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<sup>38</sup> Lewis S. Robinson, "Ershi shiji Zhongguo xiaoshuojia yan zhong de jidujiao" 二十世紀中國小說家眼中的基督教 [Christianity in the eyes of twentieth-century Chinese novelists], translated into Chinese by Huang Jingxuan 黃濤萱, in *Wenxue yu zongjiao: diyi jie guoji wenxue yu zongjiao huiyi lunwenji* 文學與宗教：第一屆國際文學與宗教會議論文集 [Literature and religion: essays from the first international conference on literature and religion], ed. Furen daxue waiyuxueyuan 輔仁大學外語學院 (Taipei: Shibao chuban gongsi, 1987), 352.

<sup>39</sup> Zheng Weiming 鄭煒明, "Xu Dishan de fojiao wenxue" 許地山的佛教文學 [Xu Dishan's Buddhist literary works], *Beijing daxue xuebao: zhexue shehuikexue ban* 北京大學學報·哲學社會科學版 = *Journal of Peking University (Philosophy and Social Sciences)*, 1993, no. 6:97–98.

<sup>40</sup> See details in Xu Dishan, "Nü'er xin" 女兒心, in *Xu Dishan xuanji*, 2:179–220.

the end, however, their love surmounts their difficult situations.<sup>41</sup> Being two of Xu Dishan's early works, "Shangren fu" was published in 1921<sup>42</sup> and "Zhui wang lao zhu" in 1922.<sup>43</sup> "Yuguan" was published posthumously in 1947 and is his longest and final fictional piece.<sup>44</sup> "Shangren fu" and "Zhui wang lao zhu" are both his representative works but "Yuguan" is his most outstanding one. In his *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, C. T. Hsia even goes as far as to say, "Without 'Yü-kuan' it could be said that Lo Hua-sheng's [Xu Dishan] quest for a perfect fable to embody his vision of the good life had ended in failure . . . But in 'Yü-kuan' he did achieve a small masterpiece, a rare spiritual testament in an age of crude ideology and rampant materialism."<sup>45</sup>

"Shangren fu" is about Xiguan who marries Lin Yinqiao 林蔭喬, an owner of a candy store. One day, he gambles away a lot of money and loses even all the assets in his store. Lin wants to go to Singapore to start anew and Xiguan gives him her jade bracelet for travel expenses. Lin does not return home after a long time, so Xiguan goes to look for him. When Xiguan arrives in Singapore, she discovers that his store is doing very well and that he has married a Malay woman. After a few days, Xiguan is sold to an Indian Muslim, Ahuye 阿戶耶, who has six wives including Xiguan. His third wife, Agali 阿噶利, is especially good to Xiguan and teaches her Arabic and Bengali; she also uses the Qur'an to comfort Xiguan and teaches her to pray to Allah when she is troubled.

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<sup>41</sup> C. T. Hsia (Xia Zhiqing 夏志清) wrote in a brief introduction (in Chinese) to Xu's fiction: "Like Xu's other well-known short stories, the heroines in "Shangren fu" and "Yuguan" both come from families of limited means and take life as it comes, not blaming heaven or others. Both of them perceive their adversities in a larger framework of meaning which only becomes visible in their deeds inspired by charity and forgiveness. . . . Xu Dishan too was full of sympathy for Chinese women who were bound within tradition. What distinguishes him from [those other novelists] is that [in Xu Dishan's fiction] they are characterized by charity and ennobled by Christian forgiveness." Joseph S. M. Lau (Liu Shaoming 劉紹銘) and Huang Weiliang 黃維樑, eds., *Zhongguo xiandai zhong- duanpian xiaoshuo xuan* (1919–1949) 中國現代中短篇小說選 (1919–1949) [Selected modern Chinese short stories and novellas (1919–1949)] (Hong Kong: Gongkaidaxue chubanshe, 1994), 1:57–58.

<sup>42</sup> See "Shangren fu," in Lau and Huang, *Zhongguo xiandai zhong- duanpian xiaoshuo xuan*, 1:71.

<sup>43</sup> See "Zhui wang lao zhu" in *Xu Dishan xuanji*, vol. 1.

<sup>44</sup> See Yuguan in Lau and Huang, *Zhongguo xiandai zhong- duanpian xiaoshuo xuan*, 1:111.

<sup>45</sup> C. T. Hsia, *A History of Modern Chinese Fiction*, 3rd ed. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), 87–88.

There is a young widow, Ha'na 哈那, whose mother is not good to her and Xiguan gives her alms. Later, Ahuye dies and Xiguan takes the son she has with him and flees. She meets a Christian named Elizabeth and often participates in evening prayers. Elizabeth counsels Xiguan to go to school. After graduation, Xiguan becomes a teacher. Later, Xiguan returns to Singapore to look for her husband because she cannot believe that he could have sold her; even if he had wanted to sell her, she believes that he would finally regret it and repent. When looking for him, Xiguan meets the narrator and tells him that she has felt an invisible providence directing and opening up a path for her amidst uncertainty. She also says that the two books that has moved her the most are *The Pilgrim's Progress* and *Robinson Crusoe*. When the ship docks, the author helps Xiguan look for Lin and discovers that because Lin has sold his wife to an Indian, the local Chinese have turned against him; business is so bad that he has moved away. After Xiguan finds out, she wants to stay behind in Singapore to search for a few more days, and if she cannot find him, she will return to India. She asks the narrator to find her mother and tell her what has happened when he is in China. The narrator finally goes to Xiguan's home and finds her mother.<sup>46</sup>

The protagonist in "Zhui wang lao zhu" is a devout Christian who kneels and silently recites verses from the Bible or chants evening prayers. She is accused of having an adulterous relationship with a man and her husband, Zhangsun Kewang 長孫可望, suspects her virtue. Later, she rescues a thief who breaks into her house and hurts himself. When Zhangsun returns home and sees the thief, he misunderstands the situation, thinking that the thief and Shangjie are having an affair. He is very angry and knifes Shangjie in the shoulder, injuring her. He even writes to the church to demand divorce. Shangjie does not receive any financial support from Zhangsun; her daughter is forbidden to leave with her. Shangjie leaves for the Malay Peninsula by herself and missionizes the pearl gatherers. The minister at Shangjie's church resigns as a result of the incident. He works as a tailor during the day and a baker during the night, but still missionizes in many places. Later, Zhangsun is transformed by the minister; he realizes his own mistake, regrets it and goes to Shangjie personally to apologize. Finally, Shangjie returns home and Zhangsun banishes himself to Penang for self-examination.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Xu Dishan, "Shangren fu," 59–71.

<sup>47</sup> Xu Dishan, "Zhui wang lao zhu," 180–201.

Shen Congwen 沈從文 (1902–88) wrote that “‘Zhui wang lao zhu’ tells about a Christian woman who, with Buddhist compassion, saves a thief who is hurt climbing over a wall.”<sup>48</sup> I have reservations about Shen’s interpretation of Shangjie’s deed because the compassion out of which Shangjie rescues the thief comes from her Christian rather than Buddhist faith. “Zhui wang lao zhu” describes it thus:

The gratitude he [the thief] feels in his heart can make him forget that he is a criminal; on the contrary he feels that he is one of the most loved and cared young men in the world. This is probably the first time he has experienced such treatment in his life. He moans a little and says in a low voice: “May the Bodhisattva bless this compassionate missus!”<sup>49</sup>

The thief may have Buddhist (or popular religious) thinking which is why he says, “May the Bodhisattva bless this compassionate missus!”<sup>50</sup> But Shangjie is a devout Christian and compassionate love is what Christianity always stresses. That her compassion possibly comes from her Christian faith is therefore very natural; moreover, she says straightforwardly that her compassion is taught to her by the church:

Shangjie feels that [the husband] does not like her treating the thief in this way. But her compassion is given by heaven, and she feels that to argue in this way contravenes neither her faith nor what she has been taught. So she answers: “Yes, school taught me to do this, the church also taught me to do this . . .”<sup>51</sup>

As a literary critic points out, “Xu Dishan’s writings are filled with Christian all-encompassing love, no matter whether it is forgiving love, sacrificing love, or a love that loves others as does one love oneself, and so on. They all illustrate Christian selflessness, magnanimity and spirit of persistence.”<sup>52</sup> In the same way, another critic says, “Xu Dishan was a rare modern writer who is admittedly the first that truly had

<sup>48</sup> Shen Congwen 沈從文, “Lun Luo Huasheng” 論落華生 [On Luo Huasheng], in Zhou and Du, *Xu Dishan yanjiuji*, 220.

<sup>49</sup> Xu Dishan, “Zhui wang lao zhu,” 187.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 189.

<sup>52</sup> Yang Jianlong 楊劍龍, *Kuangye de husheng: Zhongguo xiandai zuojia yu jidujiao wenhua* 曠野的呼聲——中國現代作家與基督教文化 [Cries in the wilderness: modern Chinese writers and Christian culture] (Shanghai: Shanghai jiaoyu chubanshe, 1998), 63–64.

a religious disposition and sentiment.”<sup>53</sup> He feels that both Xiguan and Shangjie have universal love.<sup>54</sup>

Xiguan is full of love; she helps Ha’na with the love of the Good Samaritan.<sup>55</sup> More importantly, she forgives her husband for mistreating her, thinking that it could not have been he who has sold her and hoping at the same time that he will repent.<sup>56</sup> Thus, Xiguan displays Christian forgiveness, love, hope and other like qualities. In an article on Xu Dishan’s “philosophy of love,” Xu Zhenglin 許正林 writes,

the religious sentiment expressed in [Xu Dishan’s] literary works is a Christian sentiment—the sentiment of love. In Xu Dishan’s religious philosophy, the word “love” implies offering, tolerance, patience, sacrifice, selflessness, longing for improvement and other such qualities.<sup>57</sup>

Shangjie also displays the virtue of love. She rescues a thief and forgives her husband. In view of her exemplary acts of love, Xu Zhenglin comments,

In Xu Dishan’s religious conception, more ubiquitous is the Apostle Paul’s “love command.” Paul says: “Love is to ceaselessly endure and to be graciously kind; it is not to be jealous, not to brag, not to be arrogant, not to act unbecomingly; not to seek one’s own benefits, not to be easily provoked, not to reckon others’ wrongs, not to rejoice in unrighteousness but to rejoice only in truth; it bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things” (1 Cor. 13:[4–7]). We almost need not explain what this passage means, for we can discover all its deep meanings simply by placing it side by side with “Zhui wang lao zhu” to carefully study Shangjie’s moral character in the light of the passage. . . . Shangjie’s rough experience and her thought and mentality in dealing with all this have revealed

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<sup>53</sup> Ma Jia 馬佳, *Shizijia xia de paihuai: jiduzongjiao wenhua he Zhongguo xiandai wenxue* 十字架下的徘徊——基督宗教文化和中國現代文學 [Meandering under the cross: Christian culture and modern Chinese literature] (Shanghai: Xuelin chubanshe, 1995), 31.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 33–40.

<sup>55</sup> See Luke 10:25–37.

<sup>56</sup> Xu Dishan inserted an authorial note in “Shangren fu,” which reads: “Xiguan firmly believes that her husband Yin could not bear to do this; and that even if it was his idea, he would one day repent” (“Shangren fu,” 69).

<sup>57</sup> Xu Zhenglin 許正林, “Xu Dishan: ‘Ai’ de zhexue yu jiushizhuyi” 許地山:「愛」的哲學與救世主義 [Xu Dishan: his philosophy of ‘love’ and idea of salvation], *Jinling shenxue zhi* 金陵神學誌 = *Nanjing Theological Review*, no. 19 (1993): 52.

for us the biblical “love command” . . . A comparison with the Bible after reading “Zhui wang lao zhu” will reveal that Shangjie is not so much a real person as a metaphor or a symbol that Xu Dishan uses to expound the Christian “love command.”<sup>58</sup>

“Yuguan” is about a Minnan 閩南 woman, Yuguan, who remains a widow because of her husband’s death in the first Sino–Japanese War. She is only twenty-one when he dies and her son is not quite two. Yuguan does not want to remarry because she wants to attain the reputation of a chaste widow with her name inscribed on a tablet. Yuguan’s family is poor and her husband’s cousin Fensao 糞掃 often comes to bother her; so she hides in the home of Xingguan 杏官, a Christian who lives on the same street. Xingguan tells Yuguan to go to work as a foreign woman’s amah, and Yuguan agrees. Fensao directs his displaced anger towards Xingguan and steals her daughter. He sells the child to the wife of a circuit intendant, and receives some cash and a job.

In turn, Xingguan’s husband Chen Lian 陳廉 vents his displaced anger onto Xingguan’s nephew because she has destroyed the ancestral tablet after converting to Christianity and it is her nephew who converts her. But Chen does not stop there; he hits the nephew. At this point, the minister of the church gets involved and acts on behalf of the nephew and wants the local government to arrest Chen, but he is able to escape.

Time passes and Yuguan becomes a Bible woman, missionizing everywhere. She runs into Chen Lian, not knowing that he is Xingguan’s husband. Their love grows gradually. Meanwhile, Yuguan’s son Jiande 建德 marries Xingguan’s other daughter Yayan 雅言, who has not been stolen. Later, Yuguan becomes aware of Chen Lian’s background. Yayan gives birth to a son and dies. Subsequently, Yuguan feels that since she is already a grandmother, she does not want to remarry. After Jiande has graduated from the seminary, the church sends him to America to further study. In the States, Jiande meets Xingguan’s stolen daughter, Annie Huang. Annie pays back all the financial support the church has given Jiande; he marries her and becomes an official but Yuguan and Annie do not get along. Then one day, Yuguan realizes her selfishness and vanity as well as her hypocrisies as a preacher; she realizes that she has not really enjoyed the benefits the Christian faith offers, and so she repents. The church makes her the

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<sup>58</sup> Ibid., 56–57; the biblical quotation (1 Cor 13:4–7) is translated from the Chinese Union Version.

principal of an elementary school, where she gives her utmost and the school is managed very well. The villagers and the church want to commend her and collect a lot of money to erect a stele in appreciation of her service. But Yuguan feels that the money should go to developing the school. Later, Jiande sends some money with which a bridge is finally built. It is named Yuze 玉澤 Bridge. At last, Yuguan tells Xing-guan of Chen Lian's whereabouts and goes to look for him herself.<sup>59</sup>

We can see from the three stories that Xu Dishan's works are full of Christian flavour; they illustrate and praise love. Xu Zhenglin goes so far as to say that Xu Dishan

also strenuously advocated a religion of "love" and extolled such human qualities as forbearance towards others and constancy in striving to achieve something better, in an attempt to achieve the social ideal of saving all sentient beings through every person's self-transcendence.<sup>60</sup>

In short, no matter whether the narrative world of Xu Dishan's fiction is Buddhist or Christian, it is the theme of love that features prominently in it.

#### 4. THE ENCOUNTER BETWEEN CHRISTIANITY AND BUDDHISM IN *KONGSHAN LINGYU*

Not many Chinese Christians of his times had so many Buddhist relatives and friends. Xu Dishan had a devout Buddhist mother, a Buddhist maternal uncle who was a monk, a Buddhist wife and so on. His personal faith did not seem to hinder his relationships with them. Insofar as the available materials are concerned, it is his relationship with his Buddhist wife that we have most details on. Xu had a harmonious relationship with Lin Yuesen and missed her deeply after she died. Xu Dishan's classmates recalled that he placed on his desk a jar of ashes and

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<sup>59</sup> Xu Dishan, "Yuguan," in Lau and Huang, *Zhongguo xiandai zhong-duan pian xiao-shuo xuan*, 1:72–114.

<sup>60</sup> Xu Zhenglin, "Xu Dishan," 55.

a bundle of hair, which were said to belong to her.<sup>61</sup> Li Jingchi 李鏡池 comments:

He and his wife had a good loving relationship; we can generally read about their conjugal love in *Kongshan lingyu* 空山靈雨 [Timely rain in a hollow valley]. In this collection of essays “She” 蛇 [Snake], “Xiao” 笑 [Smile], “Xiang” 香 [Fragrance], “Yuan” 願 [Wish], “Ai jiu shi xingfa” 愛就是刑罰 [Love is the punishment], “Huaxiang wuqi zhong de meng” 花香霧氣中底夢 [Dreams amidst fragrance of flowers and breath of mist], for example, were probably written about the things between them. It is very clear that “Biehua” 別話 [Parting words] commemorates Yuesen’s death; Suhui 素輝 is Yuesen and it is easy to see her thoughts and feelings from those parting words. . . . “Ailiu xizhang” 愛流汐漲 [Love flowing into the night tide], the last essay of *Kongshan lingyu*, is probably an elegy to his wife’s memory.<sup>62</sup>

If we see the narratives in *Kongshan lingyu* as recorded memories of the author and Lin Yuesen, then we can say that in his memory, they had a most harmonious conjugal relationship. Even if the essays in *Kongshan lingyu* are merely seen as a projection of Xu Dishan’s ideal conjugal relationship, he has at least expressed in them his hope that spouses of different religions can live together harmoniously.

We do not see in *Kongshan lingyu* a Christian husband forcing his Buddhist wife to become a Christian; nor do we see a husband discriminating against and rejecting the wife’s religious beliefs. On the contrary, in “Xiang” it is recorded that once, because the wife knows that the husband enjoys the fragrance of incense, she asks someone to buy some eaglewood incense sticks. When they converse with each other sometime later, he asks her to explain what the Buddhist dharma is. She replies: “What is the Buddhist teaching? Each and every colour, each and every sound, each and every fragrance, each and every taste, each and every touch, each and every action, each and every thought—these are all the Buddhist dharma. Only the love for fragrance is not.”<sup>63</sup>

<sup>61</sup> Wang Jiaowo 王皎我, “Guanyu Xu Dishan xiansheng de ji jian xiaoshi” 關於許地山先生的幾件小事 [A few trivial incidents about Xu Dishan], in *Zhuidao Xu Dishan xiansheng jinian tekan*, 40.

<sup>62</sup> Li Jingchi 李鏡池, “Wu shi Xu Dishan xiansheng” 吾師許地山先生 [My teacher Xu Dishan], in Lu Weiluan 盧瑋鑾, ed., *Xu Dishan juan* 許地山卷 [Xu Dishan’s tome] (Hong Kong: Xianggang zhonghua wenhua cujin zhongxin, 1990), 53–54.

<sup>63</sup> Xu Dishan, “Xiang,” in *Xu Dishan xuanji*, 1:12.

In “Yuan” the couple talks about “making shade”:

“To sit under this tree, how comfortable it is. We come here every day, how wonderful!”

His wife said: “How can you . . .”

“Why not?”

“You should provide the shade, you should not be shaded.”

“Would you like me to be this sort of shade?”

“This sort of shade is nothing! I wish you to be a boundless precious, magnificent cover that can provide shade for all sentient beings; I wish you to be a pure wish-fulfilling gem that can brighten all sentient beings in the world; to become the demon-subduing golden pestle so that you can destroy all hindrances in the world; to be a many gemmed Yulan basin that can hold hundreds of tastes and nurture all those who hunger and thirst in the world. I wish you six arms, twelve arms, one hundred arms, millions of arms, countless may-your-wish-come-true arms to complete all things beautiful and good in the world.”

I said: “Extremely good, extremely marvellous! But I wish to become salt, which flavours, penetrating into all sorts of good, letting my own form melt away, recovering the face that was at the bottom of the ocean, so that all sentient beings can taste salt without seeing its material form.”

The wife said: “Only flavouring—can that satisfy all sentient beings?”

I said: “If the use of salt is only in adding flavour, it isn’t worth its name at all.”<sup>64</sup>

The wife hopes and thinks that her husband should be great, using Buddhist language, names and thought to express herself. The husband then uses the biblical symbol of salt as a response.<sup>65</sup> It is as if for Xu Dishan, to use interchangeably Christianity and Buddhism’s sayings, metaphors, symbols and concepts does not create any contradiction and conflict in belief or reason; and it appears as though Christian and Buddhist thought can be manifested along with each other harmoniously.

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<sup>64</sup> Xu Dishan, “Yuan,” in *Xu Dishan xuanji*, 13–14.

<sup>65</sup> See Matthew 5:13/Mark 9:49–50/Luke 14:34–35; cf. Yang Jianlong, *Kuangye de husheng*, 66.

If *Kongshan lingyu* can basically reflect the everyday life of Xu Dishan and Lin Yuesen, then this couple, being adherents of different religions, can be considered very loving and seen as cohabiting harmoniously. However, their faiths remain different in that the ultimate goals of Christianity and Buddhism do not appear to be the same. In “Biehua” Suhui says to her husband as death nears:

Well, after some time, you will put my corpse in the wild! When I no longer inhabit my body after I pass away, when and where can we communicate our love to each other? If we are going to dwell in heaven, then I do not think there will be a day when I will see you again. For our heavens are not the same. The one you will dwell in is not necessarily the one I am going to. What is worse, I do not qualify to dwell in any heaven at all. Although I do not believe in your God, I can yet believe in your truth. Even though truth has power, however, it would not bring us together eternally to help our frivolous cause.<sup>66</sup>

From this passage, the differences between the Christian husband and the Buddhist wife are reflected, which should feel all too familiar to Xu Dishan and Lin Yuesen. Because of this, one might suppose that Suhui in “Biehua” stands for Lin, whose thoughts and feelings are visible in this story.<sup>67</sup>

Also, Xu Dishan and the husband in “Biehua” share some marked similarities. For example, like Suhui and her husband, Lin Yuesen and Xu Dishan had one child. In “Biehua,” Suhui says to her husband before she dies,

“Father of Zhuer 珠兒, although this ring was not used for our engagement, it is the one you gave me. You can save it and give it to Zhuer’s mother to express the connection between her and me. Other than this, do not give my things to her; I fear that you might treat her as if she were me. Do not tell her about what we said before: I fear that she might feel suspicious, saying that you love your dead wife more than the living one.” She slipped the ring lightly on his left ring finger.<sup>68</sup>

The ring Lin Yuesen left behind was among her possessions that Xu

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<sup>66</sup> Xu Dishan, “Biehua,” in *Xu Dishan xuanji*, 1:92.

<sup>67</sup> Li Jingchi, “Wu shi Xu Dishan xiansheng,” 53–54; see above, note 62.

<sup>68</sup> Xu Dishan, “Biehua,” 1:91–92.

specially preserved.<sup>69</sup> To equate Suhui and Lin Yuesen is, however, only a conjecture, yet both couples are faced with the same question: If the Christian heaven and the Buddhist pure land are reached by different paths and are located in different places, then how would Xu Dishan himself have handled this?

Not long after Lin Yuesen's death, Xu Dishan wrote a story titled "Qibaochi shang de xiangsi" 七寶池上的鄉思 (Thoughts of the ancestral home on Seven Treasures Pond). In this poetically written story, love is seen as more important than paradisiacal bliss. Things belonging to the pure land, including precious trees, the precious image and the wonderful sound cannot make the acolyte forget her husband, who still loves her. Their love for each other makes the acolyte unable to enjoy happiness in heaven, and she becomes haggard instead, yearning to return to her husband to allay his sorrow. Even though Kalaviṅka plays the flute for her, she feels that the flute can neither turn into a fountain of love to extinguish love's raging flames all over her; nor can it make her husband forget her. So she craves to return to see him. Opining that the acolyte has been so overwhelmed by her sentience that she cannot be moved by any persuasion, Kalaviṅka tells her to return. Afterwards, Amitābha tells Kalaviṅka that the world is full of *sattvas* (sentient beings) and that when there is *sattva*, there will be *saṃsāra* (transmigration); when there is *saṃsāra*, there will be deliverance; when there is deliverance, there will be the land of bliss.<sup>70</sup>

Xu Dishan thus demonstrates that the world is full of sentient beings who value love more than the world of bliss; desiring love, they prefer to be transmigrated. No matter whether the emotions in this story are the emotions of Xu and Lin themselves, it expresses the belief that love can be more important than religious ideals of deliverance from transmigration and of the world of bliss.

The stories in *Kongshan lingyu* show that love can transcend and conquer the differences between believers of different faiths. In the midst of love, the husband does not mind that his wife's religious faith is different from his. He respects her religious beliefs, is interested in listening carefully to her views on Buddhism and accepts her use of Buddhist terminology to express her thought; he even uses Buddhist

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<sup>69</sup> Zhou Sisong has mentioned a green jade ring, which Xu Dishan was often seen to be wearing and which was left behind by Lin Yuesen ("Huiyi Xu Dishan" 回憶許地山, in Zhou and Du, *Xu Dishan yanjiuji*, 103). Mao Dun has mentioned a white jade ring that Xu wore on his thumb when he was a student at Yenching University ("Luo-huasheng lun", in Zhou and Du, *Xu Dishan yanjiuji*, 185–86).

<sup>70</sup> Xu Dishan, "Qibaochi shang de xiangsi," in *Xu Dishan xuanji*, 1:54–57.

terminology to communicate with her. “Qibaochi shang de xiangsi,” for example, illustrates the extraordinary belief that love is even more important than the world of bliss or the attainment of *nirvāṇa*. In Xu Dishan’s literary works, love—especially love between wife and husband—is what allows couples of different faiths to cohabit peacefully and overcome their religious differences. It can be said that his fictional works have manifested such an attempt to transcend or overcome the religious differences between Christians and Buddhists.

## 5. SUMMARY AND REFLECTION

Contemporary interreligious dialogue has often put too much emphasis on theology or doctrinal matters. Consequently, creative ways in which different religions or believers can interact more fruitfully and even transform each other have often been overlooked. An overemphasis on theological or doctrinal matters poses an obstacle to interreligious encounter when dialogue partners have their minds solely on maintaining or defending the uniqueness and genuineness of their own religions in theological terms.

Furthermore, ordinary Christian and Buddhist believers might find it difficult to participate in and thus benefit from such interreligious dialogue. If Christians have their minds on missionizing Buddhists in a peaceful way, Xu Dishan’s approach to interreligious dialogue—to transcend interreligious differences by love—is perhaps worth considering.

Xu Dishan did not choose to resolve the incompatibilities between Christianity and Buddhism in theoretical or theological ways. Instead, he tried to connect himself to the minds of the Buddhists by exploring the interpersonal relationships between his Christian and Buddhist characters as well as the moral questions they are faced with. If a Christian deeply loves a Buddhist (or vice versa) and values love even more than religious ideals such as going to heaven or attaining *nirvāṇa*, then we can imagine (as Xu Dishan did) a Christian living harmoniously with a Buddhist despite fundamental and irreconcilable differences between their religious beliefs. Even if Xu Dishan’s dialogic approach may fail to convert any Buddhists, it can still encourage Buddhists and Christians to live, work and solve problems together

harmoniously. Adopting this approach, Christians may also gain respect from Buddhists.

Xu Dishan's literary vision of peaceable coexistence, which is animated by the practice of love and which may facilitate interreligious contact, cannot in itself resolve the problems arising from the intellectual incompatibilities between the two religions. In actual religious dialogue, Christians will have to decide on their own and on an ad hoc basis how and to what extent they should accept Buddhists and what they believe. Without a theological baseline they might be in danger of introducing elements that do not fit into traditional Christianity.<sup>71</sup>

Christians—especially those who are neither trained nor well prepared to undertake a scholarly inquiry into the relationship between Christianity and Buddhism—may find Xu Dishan's way of perceiving religion and interreligious relationships particularly useful. After all, Christian–Buddhist encounter can be a practical matter that has to do with day-to-day life. It takes place not only on the theoretical level or between armchair thinkers, but also between corporeal beings who feel the same physical, psychological and existential needs and who are faced with myriad challenges confronting all mankind. It would be impractical to attempt to resolve all doctrinal incompatibilities between the two religions, yet it is not impractical that their adherents can become joined together by love. In the end, no matter what religion a person belongs to, if she so loves you that she gives up her life for you, would you still be unmoved only because she belongs to a religion different from yours? In Xu Dishan's life, thinking and literary works, a different path to building harmonious interreligious relationships has been suggested. In a religiously pluralistic society such as ours, it may still be worthy of consideration.

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<sup>71</sup> See Lai Pan-chiu, "Chinese Religions and the History of Salvation: A Theological Perspective," *Ching Feng* 40, no. 1 (1997): 15–40.



# Reinterpreting Christianity Buddhistically: Xu Songshi's Indigenous Theology

HO HING-CHEONG

## 1. INTRODUCTION

In early republican China, Zhang Chunyi 張純一 (1871–1955) and Xu Songshi 徐松石 (1900–99)<sup>1</sup> stood out among religious thinkers of their times who seriously engaged in doctrinal dialogue between Christianity and Chinese indigenous religions. Zhang received a classical education and was well versed in traditional schools of thought, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and Moism. After converting to Christianity, he sought to buddhicize it. A few other Chinese Christians who had a similar educational background (some of them for a time assumed leadership in Christian organizations) converted to Buddhism; rather than bringing about a doctrinal integration of the two religions, they subjected Christianity to vehement criticism, which unfortunately hin-

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<sup>1</sup> Xu Songshi is also known by his anglicized name, Princeton S. Hsu.

dered interfaith dialogue.<sup>2</sup> Unlike Zhang Chunyi and such other intellectuals, Xu Songshi endeavoured to build bridges between his Christian faith and indigenous traditions. His engagement in Christian–Buddhist dialogue resulted in two books, namely, *Jidujiao de fowei* 基督教的佛味 (Christianity’s Buddhist flavour) and *Shengdao qixin lun* 聖道起信論 (Christian awakening of faith), published in 1935 and 1940 respectively.<sup>3</sup> In *Yesu yan li de Zhonghua minzu* 耶穌眼裏的中華民族 (The Chinese nation through the eyes of Jesus), published in 1934, he sought to engage in Christian–Confucian dialogue.<sup>4</sup> Published under the title *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu* 中華民族眼裏的基督 (Christ through the eyes of the Chinese nation), his last major work on the dialogue between Christianity and Chinese culture in the first half of the twentieth century constitutes a summary of the previous three monographs.<sup>5</sup> If we are to categorize Xu’s work in spite of the pitfalls of understanding a historical figure through clearcut categories, it may be viewed as his evangelistic endeavour to bridge the gap between Christianity and Chinese culture and thereby to indigenize the former.<sup>6</sup>

Xu Songshi’s approach to connecting Christianity to Chinese culture diverges considerably from those of his contemporaries. Unlike both Wang Zhixin 王治心 (1881–1968), who believed the connections between Christianity and Chinese culture to be retrievable from China’s ancient doctrine of the Sovereign-on-High/God (*shangdi* 上帝), and Wu Leichuan 吳雷川 (1870–1944), who sought to demonstrate (albeit

<sup>2</sup> Nie Qijie 聶其杰, “Da Yang jun shu” 答楊君書 [Response to Yang], in *Pi Ye pian* 闢耶篇 [Against Christianity] (Shanghai: Nieshijiyuan xunkan she, [1926?]), 76–77.

<sup>3</sup> Xu Songshi 徐松石, *Jidujiao de fowei* 基督教的佛味 [Christianity’s Buddhist flavour] (Shanghai: Qingnianxiehui shuju, 1935; idem, *Shengdao qixin lun* 聖道起信論 [Christian awakening of faith] (Shanghai: Guangxuehui, 1940).

<sup>4</sup> Xu Songshi, *Yesu yan li de Zhonghua minzu* 耶穌眼裏的中華民族 [The Chinese nation through the eyes of Jesus] (Shanghai: Guangxie shuju, 1934). It was later republished under a changed title: *Jidu yan li de Zhonghua minzu* 基督眼裏的中華民族 [The Chinese nation through the eyes of Christ] (Shanghai: Guangxuehui, 1941).

<sup>5</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu* 中華民族眼裏的基督 [Christ through the eyes of the Chinese nation] (Shanghai: Guangxuehui, 1948).

<sup>6</sup> Ng Lee-ming (Wu Liming 吳利明) and Leung Ka-lun (Liang Jialin 梁家麟) suggest that indigenization (*bensehua* 本色化) of Christianity is not an end in itself: it loses its meaning if, instead of serving the purpose of missionizing, it merely aims to study the relationship between Christianity and Chinese culture. Ng, “Cong wenhua cengmian tantao bensehua wenti” 從文化層面探討本色化問題 [Indigenization from a cultural perspective], *Wenyi* 文藝, no. 3 (September 1982): 12–20; Leung, “Paihuai Ye ru zhi jian: jidujiao yu Zhongguo wenhua xiangguan yanjiu de pingjie” 徘徊耶儒之間——基督教與中國文化相關研究的評介 [Between Christianity and Confucianism: a review of related studies], *Jiandao xuekan* 建道學刊 = *Jian Dao: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, no. 5 (1996): 227–33.

in the framework of the then waning Confucian tradition) the applicability of Christian ethics for individual and social life,<sup>7</sup> Xu Songshi characteristically used Buddhist terms and doctrines to interpret the Christian God.

Xu's contribution to interfaith dialogue added a distinctive Christian voice in the contemporary intellectual scene. Intellectuals in republican China, until the early 1930s, exerted their utmost to develop a philosophy of life receptive to modernity. However, the role and value religion could have in human life were largely neglected by major thinkers of Xu's time, such as Liang Shuming 梁漱溟 (1893–1988), who maintained the pivotal position of Chinese culture; Hu Shi 胡適 (1891–1962), a vigorous advocate of complete, secular Westernization; and Chen Duxiu 陳獨秀 (1879–1942), a famous advocate of communism in republican China. All religions, Western and Chinese alike, are in their thought to be superseded by Western philosophy, science and differentisms. On the other hand, Xu's contemporary Christian intellectuals T. C. Chao (Zhao Zichen 趙紫宸, 1888–1979), Xu Baoqian 徐寶謙 (1892–1944) and Timothy Lew (Liu Tingfang 劉廷芳, 1891–1947) approached the relation between religion and life from the perspectives of theology, sociology of religion, and religious education respectively; their approaches to the issue were basically christocentric and their ultimate goal was the Church's self-examination. Although religious education was also one of Xu Songshi's fields of endeavour, his approach to religion and life, which stood in marked contrast to those of T. C. Chao, Xu Baoqian and Timothy Lew, was fundamentally theocentric. On the assumption that theism is in a sense common to all religious traditions, Xu Songshi inquired whether God could become the foundation for life and how different religions could enrich each other doctrinally and develop a modern and constructive philosophy of life. Furthermore, his work is oriented towards the Chinese people and culture rather than the Chinese Church alone. Consequently, his religious vision not just set him apart from contemporary secular seekers of modern philosophy of life, who were hardly aware of the significance of religion in the modern period, but also from contemporary Protestant intellectuals whose concerns were largely ecclesiocentric. Thus, Xu's thought has provided a wider, theocentric and interfaith perspective on the indigenization of Christianity in a Chinese context.

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<sup>7</sup> Wu Leichuan, "Jidujiao lunli yu Zhongguo de jiaohui" 基督教倫理與中國的教會 [Christian ethics and the Chinese church], *Zhenli yu shengming* 真理與生命 = *Truth and Life* 2, no. 2 (1927): 30–34.

This paper is to show, among other things, that there are more intellectual trajectories of Protestant Christianity in China (at least during the republican period) than could be subsumed under the much discussed themes of indigenization, contextualization and autonomy of the Chinese Church. The theme of interfaith engagement has suffered from neglect in the study on Christianity in twentieth-century China; in particular, Christian–Buddhist dialogue may add an as yet insufficiently explored aspect of the encounter between Christianity and Chinese indigenous culture during the first half of the last century.

Albeit relatively neglected by secular and religious intellectuals, Xu Songshi has made a significant contribution to the Christian–Buddhist dialogue of his time with his proposal to interpret Christianity buddhistically, which can be seen as his response to the stimuli coming from the New Culture Movement and his intellectual exposure overseas. The present paper seeks to show that it is in fact misleading to characterize his thought as conservative or fundamentalist;<sup>8</sup> rather, his reinterpretation of Christianity has been characteristically suffused with Buddhist thought and has in this way sharply distinguished him from conservative Protestant thinkers in the last century. To clarify his thought in respect of Christian–Buddhist dialogue, we shall set it in the intellectual matrix of the aftermath of the New Culture Movement, so as to show that his endeavours to reinterpret Christian theism with Buddhist ideas had much to do not only with his intellectual open-mindedness, but with his social and religious milieu as he might have understood them.

This paper concentrates on Xu Songshi's thought in the 1930s and 40s regarding Christian–Buddhist dialogue. Previous studies fell short of clarifying his thought on the two religions in those two decades, let alone elucidating his major contribution in the same period to buddhistic reinterpretation of Christianity.<sup>9</sup> Still more significantly, it was during that period that his thought attained full maturity and apparent distinctiveness in respect of interreligious issues—indeed it was his most intellectually productive time. After he moved south to Hong Kong in 1957, he was rarely involved in scholarly discussions relating to Chris-

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<sup>8</sup> Wu Zongwen 吳宗文, “Xu Songshi mushi xuean chu shu (er)” 徐松石牧師學案初述 (二) [A preliminary intellectual biography of the Reverend Xu Songshi, II], *Jidujiao zhoubao* 基督教週報 = *Christian Weekly*, no. 1822 (July 1999): 7; idem, “Xu Songshi mushi xuean chu shu (si)” 徐松石牧師學案初述 (四) [A preliminary intellectual biography of the Reverend Xu Songshi, IV], *Jidujiao zhoubao*, no. 1824 (August 1999): 7.

<sup>9</sup> Wu Rulin 吳汝林, “Jidujiao yu rujia sixiang de guanxi: Xu Songshi yu Xie Fuya guandian de yanjiu” 基督教與儒家思想的關係：徐松石與謝扶雅觀點的研究 [Christianity and Confucianism: a study on the perspectives of Xu Songshi and Xie Fuya] (MDiv thesis, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1987).

tian–Buddhist dialogue.<sup>10</sup> His later writings on the same issues, namely, *Jidujiao yu Zhongguo wenhua* 基督教與中國文化 (Christianity and Chinese culture) and *Jidu yan li de Zhonghua minzu* 基督眼裏的中華民族 (Chinese nation through the eyes of Christ), were written on the basis of his earlier treatises without notable advances.<sup>11</sup> Thus, a close study of his thought in the 1930s and 40s may best serve the purposes of this paper.

In what follows I will first recount how Xu Songshi came into contact with Buddhism and Christianity, and then explain how and why he chose to use the former to indigenize the latter. Before expounding his Buddhist reinterpretation of Christianity, I will set forth his understanding of Buddhism.

## 2. RELIGIOUS BACKGROUND

Xu Songshi (né Xu Zhenfan 徐振凡) was born in Canton; having lived to the age of 99, he died in San Francisco. His father was a holder of the *xiuca* 秀才 degree in the Qing; he had studied in Japan and engaged in revolutionary activities before becoming a merchant in Wuzhou 梧州. He had three sons and a number of daughters.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Leung Ka-lun has surmised that Xu Songshi promoted the study of indigenous theology by liaising with the Council on Christian Literature for Overseas Chinese and with the Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture (“Paihuai Ye ru zhi jian,” 233–34). When Xu Songshi sojourned in Hong Kong after 1957, however, he rarely participated in the scholarly meetings about indigenous theology that were organized by either of the institutions. His contribution to indigenous theology in that period consisted only in a few short writings; see Xu Songshi, “Bense jiaohui de zhen yi” 本色教會的真義 [What an indigenous church truly means], *Jidujiao zhoubao*, no. 399 (April 1972): 1; and idem, *Zhongguo bense jiaohui de jianli* 中國本色教會的建立 [Establishing the Chinese indigenous church] (Hong Kong: Jinxinhui chubanshe, 1975).

<sup>11</sup> Xu Songshi, *Jidujiao yu Zhongguo wenhua* 基督教與中國文化 [Christianity and Chinese culture] (Hong Kong: Jinxinhui chubanshe, 1962); idem, *Jidu yan li de Zhonghua minzu (zongjiaobijiaoxue yanjiu)* 基督眼裏的中華民族 (宗教比較學研究) [Chinese nation through the eyes of Christ (a comparative study of Chinese religions)], 2 vols. (Hong Kong: Jinxinhui chubanshe, 1974).

<sup>12</sup> According to Xu Songshi’s son Xu Shuanghong 徐雙鴻 (tape recording, April 2002), the name of Xu Songshi’s father was Xu Yuqi 徐玉其, alias Xu Wenru 徐溫如; the names of Xu Songshi’s elder and younger brothers were Xu Tongmin 徐同民 and Xu Zhenchi 徐震池 respectively. See Xu Songshi, preface to idem, *Yuejiang liuyu renmin shi* 粵江流域人民史 [An ethnological history of the Yuejiang basin] (Shanghai:

Xu Songshi read Confucian classics since childhood and developed an interest in Buddhist and Daoist thought in early youth. He thus came to believe that, with the Buddhist practice of obtaining pure karma and the Confucian teaching on loyalty and reciprocity, China could become strong and prosperous.<sup>13</sup> His high hopes for traditional Chinese thought were shattered by the New Culture Movement; he rejected Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism as superstitious, intellectually suppressive and stale, regarding them as apparatus by which the state might varnish over misrule and anesthetize the oppressed. Under the influence of the movement, Xu was convinced that only Western science and material civilization could be used to save China and that “no religion would be needed at all to make China strong and prosperous.”<sup>14</sup>

He first encountered Christianity in his first undergraduate year at the University of Shanghai (Hujiang daxue 滬江大學). He changed his attitude towards the religion, so he recounted, because of the great personality of Jesus. Enlightened by his classmates and “moved by the Holy Spirit” at an evangelistic meeting, he was converted to the Christian faith.<sup>15</sup> Also, his attitude towards indigenous culture and religions changed dramatically after a postgraduate year in the United States (1929–30).<sup>16</sup> Since then he realized that the Western states were in fact built upon the foundation of a national culture, and that China could not afford to do without its own cultural foundation as it emerged as a modern state. Hence his ambition to contribute to laying its cultural foundations as well as his lifelong commitment to clarifying and developing the relations between traditional Chinese culture and Christianity.

It is interesting to note the special name Xu Songshi used as a religious writer: Zhaoliu *jushi* 照流居士.<sup>17</sup> In view of the criticism he lev-

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Zhonghua shuju, 1939), 3. The name of Xu Songshi’s mother was Gan Shuci 甘淑慈, whom he mentions in his preface to *Taizu Zhuangzu Yuezuo kao* 泰族僮族粵族考 [A study of Thai, Zhuang and Yue peoples] (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1946), 5.

<sup>13</sup> Xu Songshi, *Yesu yan li de Zhonghua minzu*, 3.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Xu Songshi, *Gui zhu liushiwu nian* 歸主六十五年 [Sixty-five years after conversion] (Hong Kong: Jianshazui jinxinhui, 1999), 1.

<sup>16</sup> Xu Songshi, “Ketu ougan” 客途偶感 [Sudden thoughts of a journeyer], *Zhenguang zazhi* 真光雜誌 = *Truth Light Review* 31, no. 6 (June 1932): 80. He received an MA degree at George Peabody College for Teachers (Nashville, Tenn.) in 1930; his thesis was entitled “America’s Contribution to the New Education of China.”

<sup>17</sup> According to Xu Shuanghong (see above, note 12), the name Zhaoliu might have derived from a painting presented to Xu Songshi, on which two lines from Wang Wei’s 王維 (701–61) poem “Shan ju qiu ming” 山居秋暝 had been inscribed: 明月松

elled at those who unworthily assumed their identity as Buddhists, his use of the Buddhist title *jushi*<sup>18</sup> reflects his fondness for Buddhism and indicates his acquaintance with essential Buddhist doctrines. “As far as Buddhism is concerned,” he writes,

almost anyone who was born and grew up in a Buddhist family can be called a Buddhist believer. Even uneducated men and women who know nothing about Buddhist teachings may also claim to be Buddhists. So the so-called Buddhist population these days has included mere listeners (*tingshi* 聽士), mere admirers (*xiangshi* 向士) and mere seekers (*mushi* 慕士) of Buddhism; it does not consist entirely of true Buddhists.<sup>19</sup>

Thus, it is apparent that by the thirties, *jushi* had become a title commonly—yet in Xu Songshi’s view too lightly—used by soi-disant Buddhists. His assumption of the title might suggest that he regarded himself as a “lay Buddhist practitioner” who believed that there was truth in Buddhist teachings and who had no affiliation whatever with a Buddhist organization as does an ordained monk.<sup>20</sup>

Xu Songshi was active within the Baptist denomination since he was converted and baptized at the Baptist-supported University of Shanghai. He attended a Baptist church in Shanghai where he was ordained deacon and pastor. He was editor at the Shanghai office of the China Baptist Publication Society before being appointed principal of the Shanghai Tsung The Girls’ Middle School (Chungde nüzi zhongxue 崇德女子

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間照·清泉石上流。While the third characters of both lines happen to form the name “Songshi,” the fifth characters form the name “Zhaoliu.”

<sup>18</sup> Xu has categorized Christians and sub-Christians into nine groups in order of priority (the name of each of the groups has the suffix *shi* 士): pastors (*mushi* 牧士), devotees (*xianshi* 獻士), votaries (*xiushi* 修士), converts (*guishi* 歸士), believers (*xinshi* 信士), seekers (*mushi* 慕士), admirers (*xiangshi* 向士) and listeners (*tingshi* 聽士). Those belonging to the fourth group are also called *jushi* 居士. Those of the fifth group are generally called disciples (*mentu* 門徒) or lay believers (*pingxintu* 平信徒). Those belonging to the last four groups have not yet been accepted into full church membership. See *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 184–85. It seems unlikely that Xu used *jushi* in his Christian sense of the title, because he, having by then assumed deaconry at his church, had already risen to the “rank” of “pastors.”

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, 185.

<sup>20</sup> Xu Songshi, *Jidu yan li de Zhonghua minzu*, 72, 150. He points out that the lay Buddhist associations in China from the twenties to the forties were mostly inclined towards the Chan and the Pure Land schools.

中學), an institution affiliated to the University of Shanghai.<sup>21</sup> He also for a time edited the *True Light Review* (*Zhenguang zazhi* 真光雜誌), a magazine founded by the China Baptist Publication Society.<sup>22</sup>

### 3. EXPLORING THE RELATION BETWEEN CHINESE CULTURE AND THE CHRISTIAN RELIGION

A wealth of Western intellectual resources, both secular and religious, were on offer in the second and third decades of republican China. But Xu Songshi made use of none of them in his endeavours to reinterpret the Christian doctrines about God. It was rather in Buddhism that he discovered what he thought to be the best resources for that purpose. I will first explain, against the background of the intellectual climate in those two decades, why he chose to use indigenous cultural traditions to reinterpret Christianity, and then make clear why he mainly drew on Buddhist rather than Confucian resources to reinterpret Christian theism.

#### 3.1 *Interpreting Christianity with Chinese Culture*

Before he left for America to pursue further studies, Xu had been dismissive of and even hostile towards China's traditional culture and indigenous religions. For while he was studying in Shanghai, the New Culture Movement instilled in him a scientific mentality that inspired his negative attitude towards those "waning" traditions. During the decade between his conversion and his overseas study, Xu believed Christianity to be the only truth. An immediate effect of his new faith was that his hostile attitude towards Chinese traditional culture and indigenous religions was reinforced. He even regarded them as so pernicious

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<sup>21</sup> "Huixun: Shanghai chungde zhongxue jinxun" 會訊：上海崇德中學近訊 [Recent news of the Shanghai Tsung The Middle School], *Zhenguang zazhi* 27, no. 10 (October 1928): 24.

<sup>22</sup> In the same magazine Xu made public responses to the government's tightening control on religious instruction in church-supported schools and colleges in the wake of the Anti-Christian Movement: "Jiaohui xuexiao shifou ying yi dujing wei bixiuke" 教會學校是否應以讀經為必修科 [Should church schools and colleges make Bible courses compulsory], *Zhenguang zazhi* 25, nos. 4–6 (July 1926), 54–58.

cious that they might inflict irreparable damages to China, and trusted that Christianity alone, being the only truth, could save China. Some years later, he confessed that he held this belief at that time owing to “deluding words and prejudiced views.”<sup>23</sup>

His attitude towards Western civilization changed fundamentally as a result of his brief intellectual exposure in the United States, where he observed that Western humanism and materialism showed an inclination for perpetration of outrages as well as indulgence in sensualism.<sup>24</sup> Scientific civilization, on which the West prides itself and which was often regarded as the solution to the problems confronting the world, no longer held out much hope of fostering moral character and spiritual life unless supplemented by Eastern civilization, with Chinese and Indian cultures being the major representatives. Nonetheless, intellectuals such as Liang Qichao 梁啟超 (1873–1929) had earlier articulated what Xu for the first time realized, in his rather pessimistic remarks on the crisis of Western civilization in the wake of the First World War.<sup>25</sup> World-renowned thinkers such as Bertrand Russell (1872–1970)<sup>26</sup> and Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941),<sup>27</sup> both of whom visited China in the early 1920s, singly expressed a high opinion of some aspects of Chinese culture as to their potential contributions to the human race. But the distinctive voices these and other like-minded cultural figures added to the debate over the niche of Chinese culture in the modern age did not find wide acceptance among contemporary intellectuals in China, many of whom determined to join what then became the intellectual mainstream in the aftermath of the New Culture Movement and May 1919.

Xu Songshi’s attitude towards the status of traditional Chinese culture also had much to do with the three major intellectual controversies around 1920 on “Problems and Isms,” “Eastern vs. Western Culture” and “Science vs. Metaphysics.” Following these controversies, complete Westernization emerged as the dominant intellectual trend. Hence,

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<sup>23</sup> Xu Songshi, *Yesu yan li de Zhonghua minzu*, 4.

<sup>24</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 93–94.

<sup>25</sup> Liang Qichao, *Ou you xinying lu* 歐遊心影錄 [Impressions from the European trip] (Hong Kong: Sanda chuban gongsi, 1964).

<sup>26</sup> Russell once commented, “The distinctive merit of our civilization . . . is the scientific method; the distinctive merit of the Chinese is a just conception of the ends of life. It is these two that one must hope to see gradually uniting” (Bertrand Russell, *The Problem of China* [New York: Century Co., 1922], 205).

<sup>27</sup> See, for instance, a lecture Rabindranath Tagore delivered in China in 1924, “Civilization and Progress,” in *Lectures and Addresses* (London: Macmillan, 1955), 42–58.

few young intellectuals at that time undertook the task of exploring the idea of making use of indigenous traditions as departure points for cultural renewal. Xu followed the trend of Westernizing as did most of the New Culture youth, not having seriously taken into consideration the idea of maintaining the pivotal position of indigenous culture.<sup>28</sup> It was what he later experienced and observed in a Western country that made him realize the significant role of national culture in reinvigorating the modern state.<sup>29</sup> However, having withdrawn thereafter from the Westernizing camp, Xu did not unreservedly follow the line of staunch defenders of the absolute centrality of traditional Chinese culture. Rather, he placed the indigenous traditions in perspective, allowing them to be critically reviewed in the New Culture spirit.

Not only did his experience in the United States dispel his idea that Christianity holds the only truth in the world and that it is *the* salvation for China, it also encouraged him to abandon his negative views about traditional culture and indigenous religions. His affirmation of the key cultural role religious thought might occupy in the modern age constituted his response to the intellectual trends prevailing since the twenties. His four major monographs published in the thirties and forties, namely, *Jidujiao de fowei*, *Shengdao qixin lun*, *Yesu yan li de Zhonghua minzu* and *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, all underline the enormous importance of religion for life, society and culture while laying the main emphasis on the close connections between religion and Chinese culture. In these writings he critiqued the dominant attitudes towards traditional culture and religions, alerting his readers—especially the participants of the May Fourth and the New Culture Movements, the three major intellectual controversies and the Anti-Christian Movement—to their common shortcoming stemming from their deliberate denial of the rightful place of religion in the modern world and of the plausibility that religion could serve as a foundation for human life.<sup>30</sup> Xu also made a historical point about the profound enriching effects religion could exert on the history of ideas: the impetus Song and Ming intellectuals received from Mahāyāna ideas culminated in their times in the

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<sup>28</sup> Xu Songshi, *Yesu yan li de Zhonghua minzu*, 3.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> See Liu Changlin 劉長林, *Zhongguo rensheng zhexue de chongjian: Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi, Liang Shuming rensheng zhexue yanjiu* 中國人生哲學的重建：陳獨秀、胡適、梁漱溟人生哲學研究 [Reconstructing a Chinese philosophy of life: the philosophies of life of Chen Duxiu, Hu Shi and Liang Shuming] (Shanghai: Huadong shifandaxue chubanshe, 2001), 448–56; Dong Defu 董德福, *Shengming zhexue zai Zhongguo* 生命哲學在中國 [The philosophies of life in China] (Guangzhou: Guangdong renmin chubanshe, 2001), 86, 143–431.

Neo-Confucian synthetic theorizations of the relationships of human beings to the self, cosmos and society.<sup>31</sup>

In Xu Songshi's view, the then declining culture of the West was not to be transplanted in its entirety into China as though Chinese culture in the modern age could rest on that problematic foundation alone. Nonetheless, he averred that Christianity, which is an essential part of the cultural foundations of the West, might yet contribute to the modern Chinese culture then still in the making. Without taking hold of Christian theism as a foundation on which its culture might rest, China might risk suffering what the Western peoples suffered: it would be prone to be helplessly driven through the ages by political, social and intellectual fluctuations, and be doomed to fall into cultural decline when its people fall prey to technological subjugation and ravenous materialist pursuits.<sup>32</sup> On that supposition, Xu reasoned that Chinese culture would have to root itself in Christian theism if it was to continue to exist and develop. One of his immediate concerns, then, was how he could enable his compatriots to make sense of Christian theism in their own cultural context.

### 3.2 *Interpreting Christianity with Buddhist Thought*

Considering the respective natures of Confucianism and Buddhism, Xu Songshi chose to interpret Christian ethical thought with the aid of the former but mainly used the latter to interpret the Christian doctrines about God. Despite the fact that Confucianism was also one of the targets of fierce criticism from the New Culture intellectuals, he believed that it might still have lasting and practical value to contemporary society, especially regarding ethics. But it does not in his view constitute an adequate resource with which to contextualize Christian theism, since Confucius failed to have fully grasped and elucidated the notion of the transcendent Heaven. Owing to this innate defect, Xu argued, Confucianism lacks an elaborate theological underpinning, which could have been derived from its founder's rather rudimentary teaching on "knowing Heaven."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Xu Songshi, "Zhongguo zongjiao zhi mi" 中國宗教之謎 [What is mysterious about Chinese religions], *Zhenguang zazhi* 31, no. 8 (December 1932): 20–27.

<sup>32</sup> Xu Songshi, "Dongfang de maodun he xifang de maodun" 東方的矛盾和西方的矛盾 [Eastern and Western contradictions], *Zhenguang zazhi* 31, no. 10 (October 1932): 6–12.

<sup>33</sup> Xu Songshi, *Yesu yan li de Zhonghua minzu*, 141, 146.

Xu Songshi believed that a philosophy of life capable of enabling humans to cope with life not only must take a positive attitude towards the moral perfectibility of life, as does Confucianism; it must have in itself something fundamental as well as powerful enough to enable them both to subject their ideas to scrutiny and to realize their moral potential—which is none other than the Christian God. It is Buddhism rather than Confucianism that can fulfil the vital task of clarifying this indispensable factor of a philosophy of life, for the former is stronger in using logical reasoning for doctrinal formulation and exposition and is less frequently burdened with rigid adherence to the exegetical approach to scripture (*xungu* 訓誥).<sup>34</sup> In that sense, Buddhism can facilitate critical and creative reflection on the human self's relations to God, society and the phenomenal world better than Confucianism, without which human life would be less than whole and moral practice legalistic and spiritless. In Xu's view, Buddhist logical reasoning and metaphysical discourse are especially useful for contextualizing the Christian concept of a transcendent and immanent God. And yet he was well aware that Buddhist thought, owing to its pessimistic and otherworldly tendencies, might have limited usefulness for constructing a positive philosophy of life<sup>35</sup>—and that it is linguistically and conceptually constricted regarding its potential for reinterpreting Christian theism. Be that as it may, even though Xu did not see Buddhism as in any sense superior to Confucianism, he still found the former more apposite for the purpose of indigenizing the doctrines about God, whereas Christian morality has been contextualized in his thought mainly with reference to the moral discourse of Confucianism.

Xu believed Mahāyāna thought in its Chinese manifestation to be a more adequate resource with which to reinterpret the Christian God in a contemporary Chinese context, even though he conceded, at least insofar as that purpose is concerned, the potential usefulness of Western philosophies and the thought of intellectuals who insisted on the pivotal position of Chinese indigenous culture. But unlike Buddhism, Western philosophies occupy just an ancillary role in Xu's thought; the usefulness of Western thought partly lay in the immediate appeal it might have for his "Westernized" Chinese readers.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 56.

<sup>35</sup> Xu Songshi, *Yesu yan li de Zhonghua minzu*, 20.

<sup>36</sup> E.g., in his *Yesu yan li de Zhonghua minzu* Xu Songshi referred to what Hu Shi had written about the *Book of Changes* in his history of Chinese philosophy (ibid., 178), mentioned what the German philosopher Rudolph Christoph Eucken had said about the spiritual life (ibid., 225–27), made use of Kant's epistemological categories (ibid.,

## 4. BUDDHIST THOUGHT AS UNDERSTOOD BY XU SONGSHI

How Xu Songshi perceived Buddhism before and after its rehabilitation in his thought around 1930 not only hinged on his knowledge of the religion accumulated since childhood, but had much to do with his direct encounter with and close observation of anything Buddhist since his youth. It is to be noted that Shanghai, a hub for Buddhist laypeople at the time, was where he wrote his major works on interfaith dialogue. Having clarified the reasons he prized Buddhism in his indigenous theology, this section will discuss his comments on how the religion developed in the past as well as what it teaches.

4.1 *Pearls Hidden under the Sheaves*

Explaining why he valued Buddhism highly, first of all Xu Songshi attempted to correct some fundamental misunderstandings (not least by the Christians) about it. Chinese Christians would only show how ignorant and unscientific they really are, so he comments, to aver that Buddhism is just a vile superstition if they have neither made a comparison between different religions as to their strengths and weaknesses, gained some knowledge of the history of Buddhism in China, nor studied the Buddhist scriptures themselves.<sup>37</sup> And he states that, rather than Buddhism, it was popular superstitions, Western oppression and encroachment, and deficiencies in the education system that were to blame for China's decline.<sup>38</sup>

In an essay he wrote for the perusal of Christian converts, entitled "Shi yuan yi shao" 釋源一勺 (A ladleful of Buddhist origins), Xu Songshi guides his readers towards appreciating the strengths of Buddhism and understanding its contributions in China. The essay touches on topics such as the Buddha's life, the genesis of the major Buddhist schools, the history of Buddhism in China and the categorization of

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45) and cited Liang Shuming's remark on Confucian teaching on human life approvingly (ibid., 50).

<sup>37</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 91; idem, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 93.

<sup>38</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 88–89.

different collections of Buddhist scriptures.<sup>39</sup> A few quotes from the essay may pinpoint some of Xu's basic contentions about the Buddhist religion: "Śākyamuni never called himself god, nor would he have consented to being venerated as one. Thus, later devotees' worship of the Buddha is against his own will." "Insofar as its purely religious elements are concerned, Buddhism is inferior to Christ (*sic*)."<sup>40</sup> "Among the many Buddhist countries, it is China alone that has illustrated, in the greatest details and since the earliest times, both the exoteric and the esoteric teachings of Mahāyāna Buddhism. Hence, it is all too apparent that it will have to bear great responsibility for reforming world religions." "Studying the Buddhist scriptures, in which both good and bad elements are found, one would do well just to have a good hold of the Christian notions of God and the *tathāgata* divine sonship (*rulai shenzixing* 如來神子性) of our Lord Jesus Christ."<sup>40</sup> The last quote implies that if the doctrines about God and Jesus Christ as his *tathāgata* Son are upheld, the best elements of the teachings of various schools of Chinese Buddhism, which can facilitate the reform of world religions, might be extracted.

Xu did not stop at encouraging Christians and Buddhists to get to know each other and appreciate the bright history of each other's faith. He also pointed out some significant contributions of Buddhism to Chinese thought. Confucianism emphasizes the ethical relations between human beings that are conducive to building a harmonious society; by contrast, Buddhism emphasizes the enlightenment of human beings by cultivating the heart-mind, cutting off desires as well as seeking *nirvāna* through self-effort. Daoism and Buddhism have different concepts of nothingness or emptiness. Daoist thought emphasizes inaction and opposes human action, but does not deny the reality of the sensory forms of things. Buddhism teaches emptiness or unreality of human existence—indeed of all cosmic phenomena: the Satyasiddhi of Hīnayāna Buddhism teaches that all is void and that everything arises from the *hetupratyaya* (*yinyuan* 因緣), that is, causes and causal conditions; beyond them there is neither self nor things—all is just illusionary.

The Buddhist doctrine of "emptiness" and the this-worldly, practical teaching of Confucianism appear to contradict each other, yet both of them found a home in the formation of the ethos of the Chinese people. Xu has given an illustration of this point: the Chinese nation, in whose ethos Confucian utilitarianism and Buddhist nihilism have been well

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<sup>39</sup> Xu Songshi, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 93–108.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 96, 101, 107.

blended, is analogous to a warlord who, recently crushed by political defeat, hides in a monastery where he is seen holding a Buddhist scripture in the left hand and an intelligence report in the right; taking vegetarian food so as to refrain from slaughtering, he devises plans that may lead to massacres.<sup>41</sup>

Xu thought that Buddhism had grown to become a major religion in China not only because of imperial tolerance and pluralistic religious policy; it had much to do with the religious openness of Confucianism. Through past centuries Confucianism was absorbed into Buddhism and thus gradually transformed it, so that a Buddhism that has not put as much emphasis on ethical relations and charity could not have survived long in China—nor could a world of deities and immortals that is devoid of Confucian virtues such as loyalty and reciprocity. On the other hand, Neo-Confucianism grew into a major intellectual tradition since its founders had studied Buddhist and Daoist thought before returning to the Confucian classics and the teachings of Confucius and Mencius from a new, enlightened perspective.<sup>42</sup> Thus, at the dawn of the modern age Buddhism had already been thoroughly embedded in Chinese thought and become an integral part of the ethos of the Chinese people.

Xu endeavoured to help contemporary “Christians and Buddhist to realize that truth could be found in each other’s religion lest they erect barriers within a tiny area without a close study of each other’s religious thought.”<sup>43</sup> He pointed out the this-worldly dimension of the Buddhist view of life. Buddhism encourages people to attain mental tranquillity so as to escape life’s illusions. This may look passive but it is a positive response to the vicissitudes of life: if human beings are constantly in harmony with the dharma nature underlying all things and never give up doing good, they are already bringing forth the Pure Land in the world.<sup>44</sup> “The world-renouncing impulse of Mahāyāna Buddhism actually prompts Buddhists to strive to ferry the living across the sea of reincarnation. Indeed, it was only after he had renounced the world in his reclusion that Śākyamuni returned to the world, so as to enlighten men and women.” “Śākyamuni enjoined us to avoid evil rather than to escape the world; to escape the world in a negative, pessimistic fashion was not what he meant.”<sup>45</sup> Xu adds:

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<sup>41</sup> Xu Songshi, “Dongfang de maodun he xifang de maodun,” 1–4.

<sup>42</sup> Xu Songshi, “Zhongguo zongjiao zhi mi,” 20–27.

<sup>43</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 83.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 84–85.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 86–87.

“Buddhism’s activism is to lead one to actively cultivate good karma rather than worldly karma. . . . The joy Buddhism hopes for is surpassingly profound rather than of worldly nature. . . . The infatuation for worldly joy is itself a misery.”<sup>46</sup> Thus, Xu believed that the Buddhist attitude towards the world and life is not to be viewed as totally pessimistic and escapist, and that Buddhist compassion must be realized in manifold ways. He also pointed out that the spirit of the bodhisattva is altruistic because it does not seek enlightenment of oneself only, but of all; the self-giving compassion of the bodhisattva manifests in the inhibition of killing any living being, human and non-human alike.<sup>47</sup>

#### 4.2 *The Essence of Buddhist Thought*

In Xu’s understanding, Buddhism leans towards the belief that human nature is essentially defective. Śākyamuni taught two main principles: that there is no single dominant force over all dharma (since all things are merely illusionary thoughts resulting from the *hetupratyaya*), and that all dharma has no independent existence (the human self itself is an illusionary thought). All cosmic phenomena are in constant motion; in this perpetual process, they are governed by the *hetupratyaya*, and their perceptible expression constitutes the material appearance of things. Included among the myriad illusionary phenomena is human life; hence, human beings are mired in a process of endless transmigrations. Whence they came into being in the world is therefore the wrong question to ask.<sup>48</sup>

Without losing sight of Buddhism’s “obsession” with personal asceticism and of the pessimistic, escapist dimension of its view of life, Xu praised Buddhism for some of its teachings that he believed to be excellent.<sup>49</sup> First is the doctrine of cause and effect. The universe is

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., 88.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 89–91.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid., 53–54.

<sup>49</sup> His indigenous theology is in principle open to non-Christian religious thought insofar as the latter does not run counter to the “fundamental beliefs” of Christianity; see below, note 117. Moreover, he suggests that there are Buddhist, Daoist and Confucian teachings whose principles (*yanli* 原理) are to be adopted, yet whose given elaborations (*shiyi* 釋義) are to be questioned or even rejected, by Chinese Christians. He gave a characteristic example, namely, the Buddhist doctrine of *samsāra* or transmigration (*lunhui* 輪迴); he argues that it may be viewed as biblically supported in the light of Ezekiel’s vision of wheels (chapters 1 and 10) and Paul’s image of the whole creation groaning in labour pains and awaiting salvation (Rom. 8:19–26). However, the Buddhist explanation of the reality of *samsāra* (that is, the doctrine of

innately the dharma realm; it is from the karma power of ignorance that phenomena such as the five aggregates and the six elements came into existence, all governed by the law of cause and effect. The law of cause and effect applies to human life among others, in the sense that it causally connects an individual's succession of lives. It may thus encourage human beings to develop their Buddha nature, to overcome delusions and to perform deeds of good karma.

The second is the Buddhist teaching about the rational principle (*li* 理), which is immanent in the transformation of all cosmic phenomena under the law of cause and effect. To have comprehended, experienced and proven it is to become enlightened and qualified as a Buddha. Thus, one's Buddhist faith is more "scientifically" grounded if one's enlightenment is induced by reason and rigorous philosophical reflection on human and cosmic realities.

The third concerns the methods for accessing truth. To suit different levels of karma power and capacity for receiving enlightenment, there are methods of enlightenment to be adopted by different practitioners (see §5.2 below). Despite diversity of methods, all practitioners are to pursue the aim of seeking verity (believing through understanding) and rightness (verifying faith through practice), as well as attaining spiritual intuition (*ming* 明) in comprehending truth, and practical sincerity (*cheng* 誠) in cultivating themselves and experiencing truth.<sup>50</sup>

In Xu's view Buddhism and Christianity are similar in many ways. First, Buddhism believes that there is an ultimate reality in the universe; God, or the True and Eternal Being (*zhenchang* 真常), is the reality of the universe, yet God and the universe are neither temporally nor spatially distinct from each other.<sup>51</sup> But the two religions diverge as a result of their distinct understandings of the cosmic reality, which in turn result in their different attitudes towards life: the Christian God is always on the move to actualize his plans concerning the world and mankind, whereas the Buddhist cosmic reality is characterized by stillness; to avoid inducing any karma of ignorance, human beings should try to restore the *bhūtatatahātā* (*zhenru* 真如) or eternal reality (which is also called the Buddha nature) in their hearts and to conform their lives to it. Thus, the Buddhist eternal reality is not unlike God as the imma-

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the transmigration in the six ways) as well as the Buddhist method for overcoming it (that is, attaining the state of *nirvāṇa*) must be distinguished from the "principle" of the doctrine of *samsāra* itself (*Jidu yan li de Zhonghua minzu*, 32–33).

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 73–82. See further below, § 5.2.

<sup>51</sup> Xu Songshi, *Jidujiao de fowei*, 16.

ment Spirit-Wind. Second, a doctrine of heaven that points towards the future can be found in Buddhism. In the Buddhist heaven, which is a pure land of visible form being free of desires, believers can be in perfect harmony with the *bhūtatathatā*. Third, Buddhism does not display a single lopsided perspective on the human body. The Hīnayāna views the body as a burden to the practitioner because of its putridity. But according to the Mahāyāna, the human body has a wonderful and glorious form and does not necessarily prevent the practitioner from attaining the Buddha nature or reaching the pure land. The Christian perspective on the body may be viewed as similar: Paul viewed it both as burdened with carnality (or sinfulness) and as the divine Spirit's temple. Fourth, Mahāyāna Buddhism's positive attitude towards love and self-sacrifice as well as its idea of bodhisattva spirit are akin to the Christian teaching of God's universal love. Fifth, not unlike Christianity, Buddhism advocates both equality between human beings and peaceful coexistence and teaches that human beings will pay for their own deeds through karmic retribution or heaven and hell.<sup>52</sup>

Xu, however, pointed out a fundamental difference between the two religions. Since Buddhism knows no God, he argued, Buddhist believers lack the unlimited motivating force to sustain their love, self-giving services to others, hope, vitality, purity and ideal of equality. "The *bhūtatathatā* that Buddhism knows," he explains, "is nothing more than a detached effectuation of the matrix of causes and effects (*kuairan yinguo zuoyong* 塊然因果作用). The practice of love, then, is merely detachedly effectuated by accommodation [to the law of cause and effect] (*kuairan de suishun zuoyong* 塊然的隨順作用). This is how, as the saying goes, even the tiniest discrepancy could make a world of difference."<sup>53</sup>

Buddhism can contribute to Christianity as it did to the development of Confucianism. It helped to bring about a revival of the latter in the Song and Ming by inspiring the Neo-Confucian exponents, and to inaugurate an era of *li* or reason by bringing an end to the predominance of the exegetical approach to Confucian classics. In Xu's view, insights from Buddhism could similarly help to bring an end to the predominance of the literal meaning of scripture (to be laboriously sought by means of philological exegesis) in Christianity (see §5.3 below).

Buddhism offers a serious alternative, Xu also pointed out, to traditional Christian soteriology prevalent in the last two millennia, accord-

<sup>52</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 83–91; idem, *Jidujiao de fowei*, 28–29.

<sup>53</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 91–92.

ing to which salvation is to be sought from without the believer. With the insights gained from Buddhism, especially the doctrine of Buddha nature (that is, a person's innate potentiality of attaining enlightenment), he reconceptualized the relation between human beings and God: since God's Spirit and nature are accessible both from without and from within the human person, one is capable of using one's divinely given "Christ nature" to bring oneself into accord with the God both inside and outside oneself, by inner and outer self-cultivation respectively.<sup>54</sup>

## 5. XU SONGSHI'S INDIGENIZED CHRISTIANITY

The Christian religion Xu Songshi endeavoured to show to contemporary Buddhists in China was not the traditional, Western brand, which (in his view) mainly pursued outer transcendence; for he considered the Western churches to have been tainted by mercenariness and materialism as well as interreligious and interdenominational strife, which glaringly went against Christ's spirit.<sup>55</sup> Xu's buddhistic reinterpretation of Christianity is confined to its "core," namely, the doctrines of God, Christ and the Holy Spirit, from which the "secondary" doctrines of revelation, scripture, redemption and church are derived.<sup>56</sup> He believed God to constitute the core of Christianity and to function as the basis on which Christianity and Buddhism could be meaningfully connected.

In Xu's contention, it is only through practice and interfaith dialogue that prejudicial views on each other can be dispelled and that the two religions can supplement and enrich each other, in order that they may

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<sup>54</sup> Xu Songshi, *Jidujiao de fowei*, 24. Xu placed equal emphasis on the practice of inner self-cultivation (self-awakening) and outer self-cultivation (either awakening others or being awakened) as applied to Christian spirituality (*Shengdao qixin lun*, 70). The Christian practice of inner self-cultivation includes praying, reading scripture and making supplication to God, Jesus and the Holy Spirit as well as for one's own salvation. The Christian practice of outer self-cultivation is aimed at controlling oneself and quelling one's desires; attaining enlightenment about one's true, innate nature; progressing towards perfection with vigour and patience; observing religious rules and attaining inner stillness; and undergoing a complete spiritual transformation (*ibid.*, 71).

<sup>55</sup> Xu Songshi, "Taipingyang shang de Jidu" 太平洋上的基督 [Christ upon the Pacific Ocean], *Zhenguang zazhi* 23, no. 2 (February 1933): 3-4, 7.

<sup>56</sup> Xu Songshi, *Jidujiao de fowei*, 35-41.

imbue the lives of the Chinese people, become a potent force that fosters social development, and provide values requisite for that purpose.<sup>57</sup> He used the notion of transcendence, which had been well developed in the Buddhist doctrine of the *bhūtatathatā* vis-à-vis mankind, to explain how human beings—to express it in a phrase derived from John 4:23–24—may be able to respond to God “veraciously and spiritually” (*yicheng yiling* 以誠以靈), that is, to develop their relationship with God through both inner experience and transcendence.<sup>58</sup> On the other hand, Christianity might help to remedy a deficiency of Buddhism, namely, its overemphasis on spiritual salvation at the expense of providing the world with material benefaction; for Christian moral teaching allows and encourages believers to take on this-worldly commitments, albeit in an otherworldly spirit.<sup>59</sup>

### 5.1 *A Religion Centred on God*

The God Xu Songshi brought forward belongs in Christianity yet does not exclusively belong to it. But in his contention it is Christianity that has more clearly described, chronicled and explicated this God, who transcends all deities revealed and revered in other religions. And there is neither a single religion nor a single religious organization that is perfect or blemishless (Xu quite probably had the Christian religion and churches in mind as well);<sup>60</sup> it is the perfect God alone that can save human souls.

Xu emphasized that the Church is to be differentiated from God and Christ,<sup>61</sup> so as to make it clear to both Christians and non-Christians that the success or failure of a religion depends neither on its doctrine and ecclesial institution, nor on how many members it has. Since the Church is essentially different from and inferior to God and Christ, no human being could ever penetrate the truths about God by means of rational thought, rituals or doctrinal formulations unless he wills it and

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<sup>57</sup> Xu Songshi, *Jidujiao de fowei*, 4–5; idem, introduction (*xulun* 緒論) to *Shengdao qixin lun*, 2, 6–7.

<sup>58</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 32; idem, *Jidujiao de fowei*, 43–44. It is to be noted that the phrase “in spirit and truth” in John 4:23–24 has been rendered in the Chinese Union Version as “*yi xinling he chengshi*” 以心靈和誠實.

<sup>59</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 85, 91–92.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*

reveals himself to them. Since God transcends all religions,<sup>62</sup> all human understanding of God is ineluctably limited; even if he has made his revelation clear to human beings, they might not have the intellectual and perceptive powers to thoroughly comprehend it.<sup>63</sup>

What Christianity, in whose “traditional” version the source of divine revelation tends to lie outside the human person, may have to do with the centuries-old idealist tradition of Buddhism and Confucianism, in which religious truths are to be discovered primarily in one’s own heart-mind? Do the latter two religious traditions possess any truths at all that are revealed by God himself? Xu did not attempt to address these questions by applying the doctrine of divine revelation developed in Western Christian theology; rather, he reshaped the notion of divine revelation with a Buddhist frame of reference. He thus departed from Western transcendent theism in his indigenized yet (in his view) biblical doctrine of God.

Xu Songshi used the doctrine of the *trikāya* (namely, the *dharmakāya* [*fashen* 法身], the *sambhogakāya* [*baoshen* 報身] and the *nirmāṇakāya* [*huashen* 化身]) to interpret the Christian idea of God as Trinity: the divine Word’s *dharmakāya* corresponds to the Father, its *sambhogakāya* to the Son and its *nirmāṇakāya* to the Spirit-Paraclete. The trinitarian God is the *bhūtatathatā* over the cosmos, whose *dharmalakṣaṇa* (*faxiang* 法相) consists of the eternal reality of the cosmos and the myriad constantly transforming cosmic phenomena. As to dharma nature, God is a great vital force that is perfectly good, omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, without beginning and end, without interiority and exteriority, self-originative, self-directing and originarily wise.”<sup>64</sup> Śākyamuni rejected the Indian “heterodoxal” belief of a domineering, anthropomorphic creator and brought forward the notion of the *bhūtatathatā*, an eternal cosmic reality that is neither existent nor non-existent yet both existent and non-existent, neither generated nor annihilable, always abiding and immovable. Xu contended that Śākyamuni’s doctrine of the universe as the ultimate, eternal and originant reality bears close affinity to God: the latter is both inseparable from the universe and immanent therein, as is the *bhūtatathatā*.<sup>65</sup> Also, both God

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<sup>62</sup> Ibid., 8–9.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 23.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid., 34.

<sup>65</sup> Xu Songshi, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 11–12; idem, *Jidujiao de fowei*, 12.

and the *bhūtatathatā* encourage human beings to return to and establish rapport with them.<sup>66</sup>

The Buddhists Xu addressed might have queried: “Why should we believe in the Christian God when we already believe in the *bhūtatathatā* or Suchness?”<sup>67</sup> Probably to answer this query, he made clear the basic differences between them in order to show that the Buddhist *bhūtatathatā* is not as great as God and that the doctrine of the *bhūtatathatā* can be subsumed under Christian theism. The greatness of God and the *bhūtatathatā* is to Xu to be measured by their effectiveness in inducing optimism and energizing human beings amid illusionary and transient cosmic phenomena. Although both religions view the myriad cosmic phenomena as illusionary and transient, there is still a basic difference between them. The Buddhist *bhūtatathatā* is eternally tranquil amid illusionary appearances it generated; hence, in relation to the *bhūtatathatā* as the ultimate reality, all things in the cosmos are void and meaningless. The Buddhist doctrine of the *bhūtatathatā* may thus inspire a pessimistic outlook on life. By contrast, Christianity does not encourage human beings to reject or despise phenomena that are generated by the eternal reality; however void and illusionary cosmic phenomena are, their very existence under the eternal reality is real, and they constitute part of that reality. Even though God is eternally tranquil in relation to the cosmos, he is very much active in energizing human beings both to live optimistically and to set themselves the goals of improving their life situation and cultivating goodness.<sup>68</sup> In Xu’s judgment, the Christian doctrine of God is in that sense superior to the Buddhist doctrine of the *bhūtatathatā*.

Over against the concept of outer transcendence, Xu Songshi construed Christian theism and the doctrine of the *bhūtatathatā* with the idealist concept of inner transcendence, encapsulated in the Buddhist saying: “outside the heart-mind there is no dharma.” The idea of a God of inner transcendence, in fact, had been richly expounded in the West, especially in the Eastern Orthodox tradition. Had Xu been aware of the Western idea of an immanent God, he would have found it apposite to his indigenously interpreted theism based on what he regarded as the marked resemblance between the Buddhist and the biblical views of transcendence.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Xu Songshi, *Jidujiao de fowei*, 15.

<sup>67</sup> Xu Songshi, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 14.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 17, 88–89.

<sup>69</sup> The fundamental shortcoming of Western Christianity consists in its “preponderating

Xu's "relocation" of divine transcendence made it possible for him to bridge the gap between the "Western" concept of God and the Eastern (Buddhist) notions of mind-nature and the *bhūtatathatā*. According to his understanding of Śākyamuni's teaching, the notion of the *bhūtatathatā* as the infinite cosmic reality was formed in order to render the idea of a divine creator redundant on the one hand, and to make the universe into a closed system on the other. Would Xu's buddhistic re-interpretation of the Christian God likewise verge on pantheism, as he seemed to understand God as the cosmos (and vice versa) to the point of perceiving them as *identical*?<sup>70</sup> However, his view on the relation between God and the cosmos should better be described as panentheistic:<sup>71</sup> thus tying God within the cosmos, Xu did not deny his transcendence over it; rather, he perceived God as transcendent in the sense that he boundlessly suffuses both the inside and the outside of the cosmos as well as all cosmic phenomena. With a God that bears obvious affinities with the Buddhist *bhūtatathatā*, Xu created a doctrinal basis on which Buddhists and Christians might engage in dialogue. Yet he wanted to make it clear to Buddhists that since the two religions hold markedly differing views on the cosmic reality, their views on the relation between mankind and the cosmic reality must differ widely; for one thing, whereas Buddhists develop their relationships to the *bhūtatathatā* through self-cultivation and the attainment of enlightenment, Christians develop theirs to God not least through his providential love for them.

Since God is the cosmic source of life, our ability to perform our duties qua human beings depends crucially upon him—it is he who animates and energizes human lives.<sup>72</sup> Human beings, in turn, emulate the eternal, perfect, always loving and righteous God as they seek to foster solidarity among themselves, become virtuous, serve others selflessly and handle changeable worldly affairs in an other-worldly spirit.<sup>73</sup> Xu writes: "God and Christ love me personally and their Spirit abides in me personally. Nothing at all in Buddhist scripture could enlighten us

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tendency towards outer discipline; it looks for solution only from without but not from within, seeing that there is not the smallest bit of heaven-endowed nature within a human person" (*Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 61).

<sup>70</sup> Sinclair B. Ferguson and David F. Wright, eds., *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1988), 448–89.

<sup>71</sup> *Ibid.*, 486.

<sup>72</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 125; *idem*, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 51, 53–54.

<sup>73</sup> Xu Songshi, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 42–47.

about cultivating this intimate personal relationship.”<sup>74</sup> No doubt to Xu, the Christian doctrine of a God who is constantly in action in the world, and who co-works with human beings accommodatingly, can serve to foster social and cultural development and induce a positive attitude about life more effectively than Buddhism.<sup>75</sup>

## 5.2 *Christ and Salvation*

Our discussion on Xu Songshi’s thought has thus far focussed on the relation between human beings and God. But what is Christ’s place in that relation? If it is the case that all human beings, regardless of their faiths, can attain salvation only by following God’s way “veraciously and spiritually”<sup>76</sup> as well as emulating his perfection, then the doctrine of Christ would appear superfluous. Xu was therefore obliged to clarify Christ’s unique role vis-à-vis God and mankind. He used Buddhist notions, in particular *upāya-kausalya* or skilful means (*fangbian* 方便) and *pariṣaṇḍa* or ladder (*jieti* 階梯), to construe the doctrines of Christ and salvation.

In Xu’s buddhistic reinterpretation, Christ’s *dharmakāya* is the self-nature of the trinitarian God or the cosmos-*bhūtatahatā*, his *nirmāṇakāya* is the Holy Spirit, and his fleshly body is his *saṃbhogakāya*; as the incarnation of the life-giving cosmic Dao/Logos, he alone has the most complete knowledge of God and is the greatest mediator of divine revelation.<sup>77</sup> His first coming was to show to human beings that there exists a God who is the creator, the father of all mankind, and the true wisdom permeating the cosmos.<sup>78</sup> Christ himself embodies all truths of the world and of the entire universe, for he is truth itself.<sup>79</sup> During his earthly life Jesus, “never short of heavenly wisdom, was deeply aware of his sacred ministry”<sup>80</sup> of leading human beings to God and enabling them to go to paradise and attain eternal life—through his deeds and the moral influence of his personality.<sup>81</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 47, 52.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 71; idem, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 42.

<sup>76</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 39.

<sup>77</sup> Xu Songshi, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 45; idem, *Jidujiao yan li de Zhonghua minzu*, 17, 24.

<sup>78</sup> Xu Songshi, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 49.

<sup>79</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 9.

<sup>80</sup> Xu Songshi, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 19.

<sup>81</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 43; idem, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 21.

The Buddhist notion of skilful means, according to Xu, does not apply to truth itself as though it could be compromised; rather, the notion concerns how Buddhists may efficiently approach and communicate truth. The fact that religious practitioners have different levels of capacity for receiving enlightenment necessitates the use of different skilful means to enable them to discover and communicate truth.<sup>82</sup> The pedagogical notion of *pariṣaṇḍa* is also necessary, since it helps individual practitioners to progress steadily through stages of religious practice so as to discern, experience and prove the Buddhist truth themselves.<sup>83</sup> There are, for instance, preliminary, gradual/transitional and complete methods of teaching.

It is of particular interest to us that Xu interpreted Christ's earthly mission as well as Christian salvation in the light of the notions of skilful means and *pariṣaṇḍa*. To people of varied levels of spiritual capacity Christ preached different "versions" of the gospel, which, according to Xu, exemplified Christ's use of skilful means. To some people Christ taught that they might attain eternal life by keeping certain commandments; to some he taught that to become his followers, it was necessary for them to bear their own crosses; to some he taught that they had to sell all they had before they could enter the kingdom of God. Also, Xu had Christ's teaching on the heavenly kingdom symbolize the gradual progression (*pariṣaṇḍa*) of religious attainment: whereas Christ spoke of a heavenly realm to which he would go to prepare rooms for human beings, he taught that the kingdom of heaven is accessible within one's heart and yet made known that the kingdom of heaven denotes a trans-migratory realm in which human beings are constantly in accord with God. Nonetheless, for believers progressing towards a close relationship with God, all skilful means and *pariṣaṇḍa* methods are nothing more than points of departure in a spiritual journey; whatever method is used, they must adhere to the principle of "yi cheng yi ling"—where *cheng* means sincerity and trustfulness and *ling* means spiritual awakening and truth. One possible implication of the principle is that if a person is veracious before God, faithful to him and disposed towards pursuing truth and enlightenment, there is no reason to say, merely on account of his or her religious faith, that he or she will not find salvation.<sup>84</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 78–79.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid.*, 26.

<sup>84</sup> Xu Songshi, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 55–58.

Xu elaborated on his reinterpreted doctrine of salvation by focussing on its *upāya-kausalya* and *pariṣaṅḍa* aspects. Concerning the former he says, “It is the heavenly-endowed nature [*tianling* 天靈] (conscience or veracious heart-mind) that enables mankind to attain salvation all on their own. Yet it can be said that human beings are saved by the heavenly-endowed nature given by God himself”; for salvation, if rightly understood, “belongs neither outside nor inside the human person, but to God’s Spirit.”<sup>85</sup> By thus emphasizing the coincidence of the soteriological operation of the indwelling, all-pervasive God and the Spirit-driven human self, Xu attempted to resolve the contradiction between the popular Christian view that salvation could only be found from outside (that is, from the transcendent God)<sup>86</sup> and the Buddhist view that salvation could only be found from inside (that is, through self-cultivation).

Concerning the *pariṣaṅḍa* aspect of Christian soteriology, salvation is a process of ascending a bipartite ladder or making a two-stage journey. Upon conversion to Christ, one enters the first, Hīnayāna stage of salvation. During this stage one can reach as far as the level of the “Christian Pure Land School.”<sup>87</sup> But to go beyond it and reach the level of *saddharma*, one must proceed to the next, Mahāyāna stage,<sup>88</sup> so as to receive enlightenment from the Holy Spirit and become a witness for Christ.<sup>89</sup> And believers must with vigour clamber up sub-ladders such as vowing to perform good deeds, ferrying the living across the sea of reincarnation and bringing themselves into accord with the ultimate reality, as well as the ladder of cultivating and practising goodness or their innate good nature, which originates from the perfectly good God and Christ. Since Christ is the perfect exemplar of human life in complete accord with divine will, he alone can enable human beings to become perfect as the Heavenly Father is perfect.<sup>90</sup>

Xu pointed out that many Buddhists found fault with the Christian belief that salvation is conditional upon believing, which seems to imply that even if a person does evil all his or her life intentionally but declares his or her faith in Jesus just before dying, he or she may still receive salvation; thus, the Christian belief of salvation through faith

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<sup>85</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 12–13.

<sup>86</sup> Xu Songshi, *Jidujiao de fowei*, 22–24.

<sup>87</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 36–37.

<sup>89</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 26–27.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 14–15.

does not seem as good as the belief that the effects of one's deeds in one incarnation last for the next two reincarnations.<sup>91</sup> To respond to that criticism, Xu explained, in the light of the Buddhist notion of *pariṣaṇḍa*, what "salvation by faith" really means. The faith by which human beings are saved refers to one backed by deeds<sup>92</sup>—deeds that are performed "in God and Christ"; hence, human beings are saved neither by faith alone nor by deeds performed apart from God and Christ. Instead of merely having or professing faith, practitioners perform meritorious deeds in the second stage of religious faith, so as to ascend the ladder to the state of complete accord with God. In this respect Christ becomes their unsurpassable model: during his earthly ministry he spent far more time putting his thought into practice than preaching, thus paradigmatically manifesting God's compassion for mankind through altruistic, self-giving deeds.<sup>93</sup> Also, Xu made it clear that salvation by faith refers to God's remission of sins committed *before* receiving spiritual enlightenment—and that God will not forgive a person for his or her sins committed *after* he or she has already been spiritually enlightened (deathbed conversion is therefore no guarantee of salvation!). Divine forgiveness applies to punishments to be inflicted on one's soul but not to those to be inflicted on one's fleshly body; retribution for one's sins still operates under the law of cause and effect.<sup>94</sup> In that sense, the doctrine of salvation by faith is fully compatible with a *pariṣaṇḍa* view of Christian salvation as attained by means of self-cultivation, and is congruous with the Buddhist belief that salvation is contingent upon one's deeds (whether good or bad) under the law of cause and effect. Thus, Xu's buddhistic reinterpretation of Christian salvation may be viewed as an indigenous version of the doctrine of sanctification.

Xu placed the main focus of his buddhistic reinterpretation of Christian salvation on what he believed to be the most important tenet Jesus Christ taught during his earthly ministry: human beings shall believe in and worship God "veraciously and spiritually," that is, to do so conscientiously under the illumination by the Spirit, to the extent that their innate capacity for receiving truth allows. Through the "*upāya* dharma gate," all human beings, regardless of their spiritual capacity and intelligence, are able to reach as far as the Hīnayāna level of salvation.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 17.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>93</sup> Xu Songshi, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 44–45.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid., 15–21.

<sup>95</sup> Ibid., 33.

But after they are reborn in Christ, they must devote considerable effort to enter and pass through the second, Mahāyāna stage of salvation, in order that they may attain an eternal, bountiful life (which is a state of uncontaminated *nirvāna* and constant rapport with God) and be empowered to bring the pure land or the kingdom of heaven to earth.<sup>96</sup>

Xu's understanding of Christ (albeit recast in Buddhist terminology) has an obvious affinity with that of some patristic writers. According to the latter, Christ is hardly comparable to the Hellenic sages because his unique divine sonship enabled him to reveal the invisible God to mankind.<sup>97</sup> Likewise, Christ far surpassed Śākyamuni, who "was merely a *sambhogakāya* of superior wisdom but not a *dharmakāya*."<sup>98</sup> Xu did not, however, derive his understanding of Christ's soteriological role from an exposition of the doctrine of the two natures; he viewed Christ first and foremost as the *emulatable* model of "veracious and spiritual" submission to God and obedience to the divine will—a model that served as a basis on which Xu indigenously reinterpreted Christian soteriology in the light of the Buddhist notions of retribution (the law of cause and effect), skilful means and *pariṣaṇḍa*.

### 5.3 *A Religion Centred on the Holy Spirit's Work*

Xu Songshi did not engage in dialogue with traditional pneumatology. Rather, he made use of Buddhist ideas to interpret the person, nature and functions of the Holy Spirit. In his pneumatology, the third person of the Trinity serves to mediate between God and mankind, to impart truth and to rouse one's conscience.<sup>99</sup> He is God, truth and wisdom permeating the entire cosmos.<sup>100</sup> Xu describes him as follows by using Buddhist terms:

The Holy Spirit is the Christian *bhūtatathatā's nirmāṇakāya*. His real appearance (*shixiang* 實相) is the manifold transformative manifestations (*yinghuaxiang* 應化相) of God and Christ in the universe. His real nature (*shixing* 實性) is wisdom (*zhihui* 智慧) and truth (*zhenli* 真理). His functions is to irradiate, guide and protect us; to reconcile us

<sup>96</sup> Ibid., 28–30, 48–50, 54.

<sup>97</sup> E.g., Tertullian, *Apology*, 21; Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, 1.3.16.6; Origen, *On First Principles*, 2.2.

<sup>98</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 78.

<sup>99</sup> Xu Songshi, *Jidujiao yan li de Zhonghua minzu*, 41–42.

<sup>100</sup> Xu Songshi, *Jidujiao de fowei*, 7; idem, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 70.

to God; to enable us to put what we know into practice and to discard bad karma (*eye* 惡業) so that it may not agglomerate; and to empower us to overcome sins, in order that good fruits (*shanguo* 善果) may be reaped for the glory of God the Father.<sup>101</sup>

Xu pointed out that the Spirit of Jesus Christ and God is the greatest vehicle of revelation.<sup>102</sup> Ever since he created the world, God has implanted his own spirit and nature in human beings. On the other hand Jesus, after his crucifixion, descended as a spirit and dwelt among human beings, so as to continue to save all mankind. Hence, God's Spirit is immanent both in the cosmos and in human beings. He has given every human being a mind capable of making discriminations between right and wrong, so that he or she may be able to understand and do what is right rationally and self-consciously.<sup>103</sup> With the irradiation of the bountiful Spirit of God, a conscientious person will be able to believe, to put his or her beliefs into practice (albeit to the extent that his or her capacity for receiving truth allows) and to become a faithful witness for Christ; he or she may thus find salvation regardless of his or her ecclesial affiliation and doctrinal knowledge.<sup>104</sup>

It is noteworthy that Xu Songshi used the Buddhist notions of sudden enlightenment (*dunwu* 頓悟) and gradual enlightenment (*jianwu* 漸悟) to describe the revelatory work of the Holy Spirit:

The descent of the Holy Spirit is the descent of heavenly wisdom (*tianzhi* 天智). At times heavenly wisdom is suddenly attained: one in turn becomes so elated that one gives praise to God, sings and dances as if one were in the new heaven and the new earth. At times we receive heavenly wisdom gradually and enter, without realizing it, the state of being in accord with truth. Although what is experienced in our time may not be as intense as what the apostles experienced back then on the day of Pentecost, the plenariness of the revelation by the Spirit (*lingqi de juzu* 靈啟的具足) is indubitable.<sup>105</sup>

As Xu points out, the Spirit still operates as it did in the apostolic age. Spiritual enlightenment (whether sudden or gradual) is not an intellectual activity, for it is initiated by the Spirit himself; the enlightened be-

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<sup>101</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 41.

<sup>102</sup> Xu Songshi, *Jidujiao yan li de Zhonghua minzu*, 17.

<sup>103</sup> Xu Songshi, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 65–66, 68, 71.

<sup>104</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 33, 37.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

liever feels ecstatic mirth and satisfaction as he or she is brought into accord with truth, the Spirit himself.

Xu placed equal emphasis on rational thought and the Spirit's illumination insofar as their role in enabling human beings to attain religious truth is concerned; indeed he states, "to reject reason is to reject the revelation by the Spirit."<sup>106</sup> Both reason and the Spirit's revelatory work are essential tools by which believers may free themselves from slavish adherence to the literal sense of the biblical text. Xu believed that Western Christians' excessive dependence on the exegetical approach to scripture had resulted in contending interpretations, which had in turn led to sectarianism and inter-Christian strife.<sup>107</sup> Yet he set a limit on how far Christians might use reason to find religious truth in scripture. Of the four means of cognition in Buddhism, the *āgama-pramāṇa* is used for truths or mysteries that can never be fathomed by reason alone;<sup>108</sup> if believers come across a biblical passage for which the appropriate means of cognition or hermeneutic mode is the *āgama-pramāṇa*, they should simply believe what it teaches. Xu, however, states,

The biblical text is nothing more than a tool. The purpose of reading and studying the Bible is none other than to open one's mind to actualize one's spiritual nature, so that one may become more receptive to the Holy Spirit. Having received the Spirit's inspiration, however, we should henceforth follow him, no longer obstinately adhering to the words of scripture. Who would carry the boat around on the back after he or she has arrived ashore? . . . Beyond the Old and New Testaments there is a Wordless Bible that consists in the profundity inherent in the myriad cosmic phenomena, as well as the Spirit's inspiration in our hearts.<sup>109</sup>

The Wordless Bible, written with the Holy Spirit on the tablets of the faithful hearts, is to Xu immeasurably superior to the one written with ink.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, Christ himself did not cling to the literal meaning of the Old Testament (hence he healed on the Sabbath) and told his followers

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 65. Xu states, "If a person says he or she believes in the Lord Jesus but rejects scientific truth as well as truth that is found in Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism or Islam, he or she believes blindly rather than wisely" (ibid., 39–40).

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 61.

<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 63, 67.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid., 60–61.

<sup>110</sup> Ibid., 61.

before his ascension that the Spirit would guide them into all the truth and declare to them the things that were to come.<sup>111</sup> Written by human authors, classical and scriptural writings inevitably have imperfections and limitations in respect of what they teach.<sup>112</sup> Even biblical passages from which (rationally) unfathomable doctrines are conveyed should be read through the illumination of the Spirit, not least because the Bible does not in itself address every situation to be faced by its actual readers.<sup>113</sup> Also, as most of Christ's words and deeds have not been recorded in the four Gospels,<sup>114</sup> we have to read the "incomplete" canonical records under the guidance of the Spirit, which is the most reliable; for it was he who authored the entire Bible by inspiring its human authors.<sup>115</sup> Christian identity, moreover, is to Xu to be defined by life-transforming experience of the Holy Spirit rather than textual acquaintance with the biblical text:

We should broaden our definition of a Christian. Not only those who insist on rigid adherence to the exegetical approach to scripture are Christians. A Christian is a person who worships God, trusts in Christ, loves Scripture and follows the Spirit. . . . A person who seeks truth confidently and fearlessly before God, who does not do wrong knowingly and who is never troubled by his or her Spirit-inspired conscience, is a true Christian.<sup>116</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Ibid., 61–63.

<sup>112</sup> Xu Songshi, *Shengdao qixin lun*, 84. Elsewhere Xu made the same point more cautiously: "The present author would not go so far as to say that the biblical text is flawed. That said, we must not obstinately cling to the exegetical approach to scripture to the point of neglecting the use of our rational thought" (*Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 66).

<sup>113</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 64.

<sup>114</sup> John 21:25; Xu Songshi, preface to *Shengdao qixin lun*, 2.

<sup>115</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 64.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 67–68. No doubt a pastorally minded writer, Xu Songshi has nonetheless hastened to stress that Christians, having recognized scripture's relative importance vis-à-vis the Spirit's revelatory illumination, must never denigrate the former. He gives us five reasons (ibid., 69–70): (i) Scripture (especially the Gospels) is a major source of theological truths that were revealed by God and that are rationally unfathomable, including the doctrine of the Trinity. (ii) Although Xu has compared scripture to a mirror in the sense that the mirror image is not comparable in importance to what is imaged, he nonetheless thought that scripture is an essential tool for self-cultivation. (iii) Scripture can enable believers to be illuminated—and to be better illuminated—by the Holy Spirit. (iv) Since the biblical authors had profound religious experiences, scripture is more than a verbal text: insofar as its meaning is concerned, the biblical text is filled with God's Spirit; "scripture truly is our lamp, our spiritual bread and the sword with which we may ward off the devil." (v) Since

Xu described the Spirit variously as heavenly-endowed nature [*tian-ling*] or wisdom, conscience as well as (innate) Buddha nature—who is both transcendent and immanent vis-à-vis the cosmos and human history. His buddhistic reconceptualization of the person and work of the Spirit seems to show that he intended to link them to human existence across religions, cultures and nations, and to point to the Spirit’s universal commiseration and benefaction towards mankind; the Spirit, in other words, must have left his revelatory traces in different cultures, nations and religious faiths.<sup>117</sup>

As regards the Holy Spirit’s revelatory work in the Chinese nation, Xu viewed the ancient sages’ pious reverence towards the divine Sovereign-on-High (*shangdi*)<sup>118</sup> as reflecting the providential operations of God among them through his own Spirit. Despite their inability to fully know this God, whom they revered as the Sovereign-on-High, they still, generation after generation, piously sought and adored him in various ways. Xu cited a few examples: the dynastic founder of the Shang besought him to break the drought, by inflicting on himself the punishments of cutting his hair and nails short; both Qi 棄 (Houji 后稷) and Xie 契, ancestors of Zhou and Shang rulers respectively, had been inspired by his Spirit before they were born; Confucius included in *Shijing* 詩經 (Book of poems) songs that express praise towards the Sovereign-on-High.<sup>119</sup> The *shangdi* mentioned in *Shijing* and *Liji* 禮記 (Record of rites), Xu supposed, refers to the supreme deity; a line in the latter book, “By means of the ceremonies performed in the suburb, all the spirits receive their offices” (*bai shen shou zhi* 百神受職), could be understood as implying that the *shangdi* revered by the ancient Chinese,

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most human beings are of “dull capacity” for attaining enlightenment, they should better continue to “carry the boat around on the back” in order that they may be able to cross a river whenever they come across one. Xu writes, “While people of superior wisdom must not insist on rigid adherence to the exegetical approach, ordinary people must spare no effort to study scripture by adhering to that approach.”

<sup>117</sup> On the supposition that religious truths are by no means exclusive to Christianity (see esp. *Jidu yan li de Zhonghua minzu*, 24–25), and with the insights gained from his reading of biblical passages such as Acts 15, Xu Songshi believed that Chinese, after they have converted to Christianity, might still retain their Buddhist or Daoist beliefs, insofar as they now (i) believe in the triune God, confessing that God is the Father, that Jesus is the Saviour and that the Holy Spirit is the Paraclete; (ii) abstain from the pollutions of idols; and (iii) seek and maintain the purity of their souls and deeds. And any non-Christian beliefs that might prevent Christians from doing any of these must be jettisoned (*ibid.*, 35).

<sup>118</sup> *Shangdi* 上帝 is one of the two prevalent renderings of “God” in Chinese Protestant churches; the other is *Shen* 神.

<sup>119</sup> Xu Songshi, *Jidu yan li de Zhonghua minzu*, 206–10.

not unlike the God confessed by the ancient Hebrews, was believed to be the lord of deities (*shen*).<sup>120</sup> On the supposition that the Hebrew patriarchs received revelatory inspiration directly from this God and that his providence must have extended to the Chinese people as well from the earliest times, Xu believed that the sages of ancient China could likewise have been divinely (yet less than plenary) inspired.

Xu believed that Confucianism, Buddhism, Daoism and Christianity could be joined together in China on the basis of their common “spiritual” foundation as well as their common emphasis on the fundamental, universal principle or logos (*li*). There is according to Xu a cosmic spirit (albeit variously named or described) serving as a metaphysical basis in each of the three indigenous religious traditions: it is called the Ultimate One (*taiyi* 太一) or the Pristine Vitality/Breath (*yuanyi* 元氣) by Confucians; the Dao or the Great Vitality/Breath (*daqi* 大氣) by Daoists; the *bhūtatathatā* or the Dharma of the Eternal Reality by Buddhists. Despite their conceptual differences, all these names or symbols in fact point to the same spirit that is known in Christianity as the Holy Spirit, the revealer of truth.<sup>121</sup> All three religions, moreover, pursue a fundamental logos or *li* (albeit in their particular ways) so that the thought and practice of their practitioners may be brought into full accord with it.<sup>122</sup> Even though they all fell short of adequately understanding the cosmic spirit and the fundamental logos, their founders, Xu emphasizes, “were all great sages who intended to pursue God (*shangdi*), actualize the good as well as benefit all people. Christians must readily acknowledge that.” He viewed the double emphasis of the three religions (and of Christianity) on a transcendent spirit and a universal logos as an “unpolluted spring” and a good foundation on which dialogue and integration between the four religions might begin.<sup>123</sup> The guiding principle of interreligious integration, states Xu, is “pursuing veraciously and spiritually the great cosmic *dao* and the great cosmic *li*,” and the ultimate goal of it is “bringing oneself into accord with the eternal God’s *dao* of life.”<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid., 213. The line from *Liji* is James Legge’s translation (*The Sacred Books of China: The Texts of Confucianism* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1879–85], 3:386).

<sup>121</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 127–30.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid., 131–32.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid., 132–33.

<sup>124</sup> Ibid., 133.

## 6. CONCLUSION

This paper has clarified why Xu Songshi considered Christianity to be vitally indispensable, and more indispensable than Chinese indigenous religions, for his contemporaries in pursuit of a culturally and spiritually vitalizing philosophy of life. The chief reason was the Christian doctrine of God, lacking in the Chinese religions he examined.

The God referred to in Xu's reinterpreted Christianity transcends all cultures and religions; it maintains the absoluteness not of the religion practised by Christians, but of God himself (Xu also sharply distinguished between God and the symbols of divine reality found in various world religions). Christ did not come to abolish cultures and religions as many (including some of Xu's contemporaries) thought, but to "complete" them (among them was Western Christianity) through the divine Spirit immanent in them all. As to the popular typology of exclusivism–inclusivism–pluralism,<sup>125</sup> where does Xu's interfaith orientation fall, insofar as his reinterpreted Christianity in the first half of the twentieth century is concerned?

Xu subsumed Buddhism and Christianity under a trinitarian theology according to which human beings are to seek after both God, who transcends different religious explications of reality, and Christ, who represents God and the Holy Spirit and who incorporates all truths.<sup>126</sup> Despite their sectarian or credal diversity, adherents of different religions may still have access to the same divine reality and obtain grace therefrom. "To put it quite plainly," writes Xu, "there is no believer whatever of any religion who can be [legitimately] certain that he or

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<sup>125</sup> Paul F. Knitter has given brief definitions of each of the three interreligious orientations for Christians: "*exclusivists* are those who hold that there is only one true, saving religion—the religion founded on Christ; *inclusivists*, on the contrary, affirm many true religions but insist that Christ and his community make up the final, fulfilling norm for those religions (either constitutively, by being the causative source of God's saving truth, or representatively, by being the clearest and fullest embodiment of God's truth and grace). Finally, *pluralists* announce at least the possibility (some would hold the probability, if not the actuality) of many true religions, each carrying on a different though valid role in the divine plan of salvation" ("Five Theses on the Uniqueness of Jesus," in *The Uniqueness of Jesus: A Dialogue with Paul F. Knitter*, ed. Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes [Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1997], 3n2).

<sup>126</sup> Xu Songshi, *Zhonghua minzu yan li de Jidu*, 39, 79.

she can only be saved according to his or her own beliefs.”<sup>127</sup>

Xu’s indigenous theology may be viewed as inclusivist as it considers Christian revelation and soteriology to be clearer and more complete than any others, yet without denying the validity of other religions. Falling under the “corrupting” influence of Western Christianity, not least owing to its exegetical, biblicist approach to sacred scripture, Chinese Christians of Xu’s day were by and large not remotely interested in, if not antagonistic towards, engaging in the dialogue and integration between Christianity and indigenous religions. Thus, he attempted to separate God and Christ from the religion of contemporary churches (Western and Chinese alike); in his contention it is true understanding of the former rather than the latter’s aberrant doctrines about God that can serve to “complete” Buddhism and other world religions.

Xu’s interfaith orientation could be further described as theocentrically inclusivist in that it “does not allow for any privileged access to salvation only through Jesus but strongly affirms the universal availability of salvation through God’s unlimited love and grace”,<sup>128</sup> Christ represents but does not constitute divine love, which constitutes the possibility of salvation.<sup>129</sup> Although Xu’s reinterpretation of Christianity evidently does not “turn Jesus into an idol and claim that the Father is exclusively known through him,”<sup>130</sup> it does not compromise the vital role of Christ as the paradigmatic and emulatable saviour of humanity.

Xu’s trinitarian approach to reinterpreting Christianity allows for the possibility of understanding the one true God more deeply and comprehensively from what he has already disclosed in non-Christian religions by his own, life-giving Spirit, who is equally operative in the religious life of their adherents.

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<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>128</sup> Heung-gyu Kim contends that Schubert Ogden’s theology of religions can be described as “theocentric inclusivism” (*Prolegomena to a Christian Theology of Religions* [Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 2000], 177). See esp. Schubert Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion or Are There Many?* (Dallas, Tex.: Southern Methodist University Press, 1992).

<sup>129</sup> Ogden, *Is There Only One True Religion*, 98, 104; cf. Kim, *Prolegomena*, 176–77; S. Mark Heim, *Salvations: Truth and Difference in Religion* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1995), 224. In other words, according to Ogden’s theology of religions, Buddhism and any other non-Christian religion “can be formally as well as substantially true insofar as it properly represents God’s unbounded love which alone is constitutive of salvation” (Kim, *Prolegomena*, 176).

<sup>130</sup> Cf. Gavin D’Costa, “Christ, the Trinity, and Religious Plurality,” in *Christian Uniqueness Reconsidered: The Myth of a Pluralistic Theology of Religions*, ed. Gavin D’Costa (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1990), 16–29.



# Reflections on the History of Buddhist–Christian Encounter in Modern China

LAI PAN-CHIU

## *Abstract*

The Buddhist–Christian dialogue in China is seemingly underdeveloped in comparison with those in some other parts of the world. However, there were also significant cases of Buddhist–Christian dialogue taking place in China during the first half of the twentieth century. The historical material of this dialogue is worthy of thorough research. Based on a historical analysis and theoretical reflection on these cases of Buddhist–Christian dialogue, this paper suggests that a dynamic and creative dialogue between the two religions may take place in the twenty-first century, if they can overcome some of the prejudices, self-centred attitudes, as well as misconceived or even distorted understanding of each other. This kind of dialogue will not only further promote the creative development of the two religions and enhance the cultural exchanges between East and West, but will also render great contributions to Buddhist–Christian studies worldwide.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Studies on Christian–Buddhist dialogue have become one of the important areas of religious studies, and large numbers of works in English are published as the result of such studies. In Japan, Europe, and North America, several societies and organizations have been established to study and promote the dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism. As far as the current publications are concerned, Buddhist–Christian studies at the international level seem to be dominated by the discussion among the American and Japanese scholars. The most active figures, including D. T. Suzuki 鈴木大拙 (1870–1966), Hisamatsu Shin’ichi 久松眞一 (1889–1980), Masao Abe 阿部正雄 (1915–), Seiichi Yagi 八木誠一 (1932–), etc.,<sup>1</sup> are from Japan and the discussion so far has been focused on Japanese Buddhism, especially Zen Buddhism. In comparison, the contributions of Chinese scholars, as yet, have been far from substantial.<sup>2</sup> Apart from the language barrier, this situation may also reflect, to a certain extent, the underdevelopment of Christian–Buddhist dialogue in Chinese society.<sup>3</sup>

It is evident that the encounter between Christianity and Buddhism started rather early in the Tang dynasty (618–907).<sup>4</sup> Nevertheless, in the years that followed, such encounters neither fully blossomed nor gave rise to fructification, largely owing to historical reasons.<sup>5</sup> In Ja-

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<sup>1</sup> Among them, Seiichi Yagi is perhaps the least studied in the English-speaking world. For an introduction to his thought, see Masaya Odagaki, “An Introduction to the Religious Thought of Seiichi Yagi,” *Buddhist–Christian Studies* 9 (1989): 271–81.

<sup>2</sup> For instance, in the 22 volumes of *Buddhist–Christian Studies* published by 2002, less than ten articles are written by Chinese. There are three articles by Julia Ching (Qin Jiayi 秦家懿) (including a respondent article), three by Whalen Lai (Li Huilun 黎惠倫), one by Darui Long (Long Darui 龍達瑞) and one by Pan-chiu Lai. Besides, there is an article on the early encounter between Buddhism and Daoism in China authored by Liu Jiahe 劉家和 and translated by Shao Dongfang 邵東方.

<sup>3</sup> For the encounter of Christianity and Buddhism in different cultures, see Whalen Lai and Michael von Brück, *Christianity and Buddhism: A Multi-Cultural History of Their Dialogue*, trans. Phyllis Jestice (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2001).

<sup>4</sup> See Sverre Holth, “The Encounter between Christianity and Chinese Buddhism during the Nestorian Period,” *Ching Feng* 11, no. 3 (1968): 20–29.

<sup>5</sup> For the history of the encounter between Buddhism and Christianity in China, see Whalen Lai, “The Buddhist–Christian Dialogue in China,” in *Religious Issues and Interreligious Dialogue: An Analysis and Sourcebook of Developments since 1945*, ed.

pan, the encounter between the two religions transformed from mutual antagonism to dialogue in the second half of the nineteenth century.<sup>6</sup> During the twentieth century, Japanese scholars from both the Buddhist and Christian sides actively engaged in dialogue. In addition to the scholars from the Kyoto School, many Catholic scholars, particularly those from the Jesuit-founded Sophia University, contributed tremendously to the dialogue. Some of them were equipped with a profound understanding of Zen, for instance, Heinrich Dumoulin (1905–95),<sup>7</sup> William Johnston (1925–)<sup>8</sup> and J. K. Kadowaki 門脇佳吉 (1926–).<sup>9</sup> Also, the Nanzan Institute for Religion and Culture has actively contributed to this dialogue. It should be admitted that, in contrast, the Buddhist–Christian dialogue in China as well as research related to it have lagged far behind.

Whalen Lai, who has made valuable contributions to the studies on the encounter between Buddhism and Christianity in China, raises the question as to why there is no Buddhist–Christian dialogue in China.<sup>10</sup> Of course, this does not mean that there has been no contact or dialogue whatsoever between Christianity and Buddhism in China. Instead, it implies that the encounter between Chinese Buddhism and Christianity is rather full of mutual confrontation and conflict, and little has been achieved in the dialogue. No mutual understanding and intercommunication, as occurred in Japan, have taken place in China. Lai’s observation is certainly true that the Buddhist–Christian dialogue never thrived in China as it did in Japan and North America. However, should it then be concluded that nothing in the Christian–Buddhist dialogue in China deserved to be studied? If so, does this indicate that there is nothing but a dead end for the dialogue between the two religions in China? Or, if a

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Charles Wei-hsun Fu and Gerhard E. Spiegler (New York: Greenwood, 1989), 613–31.

<sup>6</sup> Notto R. Thelle, *Buddhism and Christianity in Japan: From Conflict to Dialogue, 1854–1899* (Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 1987).

<sup>7</sup> Heinrich Dumoulin was an expert in Zen studies. Besides the works that discuss Zen, he also wrote on the encounter between Christianity and Buddhism. For example, Heinrich Dumoulin, *Christianity Meets Buddhism* (La Salle, Ill.: Open Court, 1974).

<sup>8</sup> William Johnston wrote several other books on Buddhist meditation and Christian spiritual practice. For example, *The Mirror Mind: Zen–Christian Dialogue* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1990). See also So Yuen-tai, “William Johnston’s Contemplative Approach to Buddhist–Christian Dialogue,” *Ching Feng* 42, nos. 1–2 (March–June 2000): 83–110.

<sup>9</sup> J. K. Kadowaki, *Zen and the Bible: A Priest’s Experience*, trans. Joan Rieck (London: Routledge, 1980).

<sup>10</sup> Whalen Lai, “Why Is There Not a Buddho–Christian Dialogue in China?,” *Buddhist–Christian Studies* 6 (1986): 81–96.

certain historical foundation was already laid down for the encounter between Chinese Christianity and Buddhism in the past, can it successfully pave the way for dialogue in the future? All these questions are worthy of further discussion.

As a person who, for years, has been interested in Christian–Buddhist studies, I would like to take this opportunity to reexamine my own studies conducted in the past and to share some of my personal reflections on the topic. It is my hope that this may arouse the interests of scholars in the subject.

## 2. THE (RE-)DISCOVERY OF HISTORICAL MATERIALS

A few years ago, Professor He Jianming 何建明, formerly teaching at Central China Normal University (Huazhong shifan daxue 華中師範大學) and now at the People's University of China (Zhongguo renmin daxue 中國人民大學), and I conducted a research project on the Buddhist and Christian publications in China during the first half of the twentieth century. We discovered that although the encounter between Buddhism and Christianity at that time was also marred by intermittent heated disputes, a number of constructive and open-minded dialogues indeed took place since the late Qing dynasty and continued during the Republican era. The contact between Timothy Richard (1845–1919) and Yang Wenhui 楊文會 (1837–1911) enabled them, a Christian missionary and a lay Buddhist, to cooperate on a project to translate the *Treatise on the Awakening of Faith (Mahāyāna Śraddhotpāda Śāstra)* and the *Lotus Sutra (Sadharmapuṇḍarīka Sūtra)* into English in the hope that Mahāyāna Buddhism might be introduced to the West.<sup>11</sup> Richard also attempted to initiate the dialogue with Buddhists.<sup>12</sup> Later on, he introduced Dhammapala (1865–1933),<sup>13</sup> a pioneer for the Buddhist revival movement in India, to Yang Wenhui. To a certain extent, the Buddhist reform advocated by Yang was inspired by his personal

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<sup>11</sup> Timothy Richard, *The New Testament of Higher Buddhism* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910).

<sup>12</sup> Timothy Richard, *Li Timotai zhi shijia shu* 李提摩太致釋家書 [Timothy Richard's letters to Buddhists] (Shanghai: Guangxuehui, 1916).

<sup>13</sup> Yu Lingpo 于凌波, *Yang Renshan jushi pingzhuān* 楊仁山居士評傳 [A critical biography of Yang Renshan] (Taipei: Xinwenfeng, 1995), 223–28.

contact with Christianity.<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, most of the existing studies on Timothy Richard have concentrated on how he, as a Christian missionary, contributed to the socio-political reform and modernization of China, while his efforts as well as contributions to Christian-Buddhist dialogue have been largely neglected.<sup>15</sup> Meanwhile, some eminent Buddhist monks in the Republican era also adopted open and positive attitudes toward Christianity. They believed that Buddhism could learn from Christianity in many ways, especially its missionary method and its involvement in education and charity.<sup>16</sup> Within the Buddhist circle, some Buddhist journals also published Buddhist responses to the challenges coming from Christianity. Many of the respondents were not well-known monks, but ordinary Buddhist intellectuals. Their responses, which revealed the attitudes among ordinary Buddhists, showed that the concern about Christianity was not limited among the Buddhist hierarchy, but extended to the broader Buddhist community.<sup>17</sup>

Within the Christian circle, in addition to the small numbers of missionaries who extended their goodwill toward Chinese Buddhists, many Chinese Christian intellectuals also endeavoured to study the indigenization of Buddhism in China in order to learn the way of indigenizing Christianity with a view to making Christianity more suitable and acceptable to the Chinese.<sup>18</sup> Furthermore, many intellectuals, such as Xu Songshi 徐松石 (1900–1999) and Zhang Chunyi 張純一 (1871–1955), who were knowledgeable in both Buddhism and Christianity, attempted to synthesize Buddhism and Christianity by proposing a “Mahāyāna Christianity.”<sup>19</sup> Although Xu Songshi was a Christian, he

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<sup>14</sup> He Jianming and Lai Pan-chiu, “Jiduzongjiao yu jindai Zhongguo fojiao de gaige yundong” 基督宗教與近代中國佛教的改革運動 [Christianity and the reformation of modern Chinese Buddhism], in *Jindai Zhongguo fojiao yu jiduzongjiao de xiangyu* 近代中國佛教與基督宗教的相遇 [The encounter between Buddhism and Christianity in modern China], ed. Lai Pan-chiu (Hong Kong: Logos & Pneuma Press, Institute of Sino-Christian Studies, 2003), 74–80.

<sup>15</sup> For an exceptional example, see Andrew F. Walls, “The Multiple Conversions of Timothy Richard,” in idem, *The Cross-cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 2002), 236–58. See also Lee Chi-ho, “Timothy Richard’s Response to the Challenges to Christianity in China,” in *The Second International Seminar on the Studies of History of Christianity in North East Asia for Graduate Students and Junior Scholars, 21–23 September 2002* (Kanagawa, Japan, 2002), 87–104.

<sup>16</sup> He and Lai, “Juduzongjiao yu jindai Zhongguo fojiao de gaige yundong,” 80–124.

<sup>17</sup> He Jianming, “Buddhist-Christian Encounter in Modern China: A Case Study of *Ren Jian Jue Banyuekan*,” *Ching Feng*, n.s., 1, no. 2 (2000): 121–42.

<sup>18</sup> Lai Pan-chiu, “Influence of Chinese Buddhism on the Indigenization of Christianity in Modern China,” *Ching Feng*, n.s., 1, no. 2 (2000): 143–60.

<sup>19</sup> Lai Pan-chiu and So Yuen-tai, “Zhang Chunyi’s Buddhist-Christian Pneumatology,”

often had his articles published under the Buddhist name “Zhaoliu *jushi*” 照流居士 (the term *jushi* usually refers to a lay Buddhist) in an attempt to reconcile the conflict between the teachings of Christianity and Buddhism. He even elaborated on “the Buddha’s flavour in Christianity” and “the Christ’s flavour in Buddhism.”<sup>20</sup> Zhang Chunyi, who had been a Christian but embraced Buddhism later on, composed eight books to discuss how Christianity could be transformed through Chinese culture, including Chinese Buddhism.<sup>21</sup> In addition to these attempts to harmonize Buddhist and Christian doctrines, many Chinese intellectuals managed to deal with the practical issues of coexistence between Buddhism and Christianity in their daily lives, and some of them provided unique solutions. For instance, Xu Dishan 許地山 (1893–1941), a well-known writer, not only cherished the idea of harmony between Buddhism and Christianity in his daily life, but also displayed it in his literary works.<sup>22</sup> Nevertheless, since previous studies of Buddhist–Christian encounter have been focused on how Western missionaries, such as Karl Ludvig Reichelt (1877–1952), exerted influence on Buddhism,<sup>23</sup> and on how eminent Buddhist monks, such

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*Ching Feng*, n.s., 4, no. 1 (2003): 51–77, originally published in Chinese as “Zhang Chunyi de fohua jidulun” 張純一的佛化基督論, in *Shengling: Huaren zongjiao ji wenhua chujing xia de fansi* 聖靈：華人宗教及文化處境下的反思 = *Holy Spirit: Reflections in the Chinese Religious and Cultural Context*, ed. Deng Shaoguang 鄧紹光 [Andres Tang] (Hong Kong: Lutheran Theological Seminary, 2002), 181–203; So Yuen-tai and Ho Hing-cheong, “Baoshou yu kaifang: Shilun Xu Songshi zaoqi de zongjiao duihua” 保守與開放：試論徐松石早期的宗教對話 [Conservative and open: on religious dialogue in Xu Songshi’s early career], *Jiandao xuekan* 建道學刊 = *Jian Dao: A Journal of Bible and Theology*, no. 18 (2002): 47–66.

<sup>20</sup> Xu Songshi 徐松石, *Jidujiao de fowei* 基督教的佛味 [The Buddha’s flavour in Christianity] (Shanghai: Qingnian xiehui shuju, 1935).

<sup>21</sup> Zhang Chunyi 張純一, *Laozi tongshi* 老子通釋 [Concise commentary on *Laozi*] (Chongqing: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1946), 3.

<sup>22</sup> I have recently supervised three graduate students, who undertook the studies on Xu Dishan, Xu Songshi, and Zhang Chunyi respectively. Their research results are incorporated as three chapters in Lai Pan-chiu, ed., *Jindai Zhongguo fojiao yu jiduzhongjiao de xiangyu* (see above, note 14). (The chapters on Xu Dishan and Xu Songshi, translated into English, are published in the present issue of *Ching Feng*.—Ed.).

<sup>23</sup> Winfried Glüer, “The Encounter between Christianity and Chinese Buddhism during the Nineteenth Century and the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” *Ching Feng* 11, no. 3 (1968): 39–57; Timothy Man-kong Wong, “Protestant Missionaries’ Images of Chinese Buddhism: A Preliminary Study of the Buddhist Writings by Joseph Edkins, Ernest John Eitel, and James Legge,” *Xianggang Jinhui Daxue shixue jikan* 香港浸會大學史學集刊 = *Hong Kong Baptist University Journal of Historical Studies* 1 (1999): 183–204; and Eric J. Sharpe, *Karl Ludvig Reichelt: Missionary, Scholar and Pilgrim* (Hong Kong: Tao Fong Shan Ecumenical Centre, 1984).

as Taixu 太虛 (1890–1947),<sup>24</sup> looked upon Christianity, no attempt has so far been made to study the creative attempts made by Chinese intellectuals like Xu Songshi and Zhang Chunyi to harmonize Christianity and Buddhism. Owing to the difficulty of locating related documents, which are scattered here and there, records of their experiments in integrating Christianity and Buddhism have not been properly organized, despite the fact that they thoroughly deserved to be studied carefully.<sup>25</sup>

Our discussion so far has concentrated on the materials related to the Buddhist–Christian encounter in the China of the past. With regard to research methodology, it is found that more attention must be paid to the differentiation between *inter*religious dialogue and *intra*religious dialogue when we embark on the studies of the encounter between the two religions.<sup>26</sup> While “interreligious dialogue” refers to the audible and visible conversations conducted outwardly between two or more persons representing different religious traditions, “intrareligious dialogue” refers to the dialogue between two or more religious traditions occurring inwardly within an individual. The distinction between the two sorts of dialogue is merely a conceptual classification for the facilitation of discussion. Actually, when an interreligious dialogue takes place, an intrareligious dialogue occurs concurrently so that more than

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<sup>24</sup> Don A. Pittman, “The Modern Buddhist Reformer T’ai-hsü on Christianity,” *Buddhist–Christian Studies* 13 (1993): 82–109; Darui Long, “An Interfaith Dialogue between the Chinese Buddhist Leader Taixu and Christians,” *Buddhist–Christian Studies* 20 (2000): 167–89.

<sup>25</sup> For instance, Zhang Chunyi’s idea about the Holy Spirit under the influence of Buddhism is a great contribution to Chinese theology. See Lai and So, “Zhang Chunyi’s Buddhist–Christian Pneumatology,” 51–77 (see above, note 19). Xu Songshi emphasized the concept of skilful means, which can provide a new approach to the question of biblical theology. See Lai Pan-chiu, “Zhongguo fojiao de panjiao dui shengjing shenxue de qifa” 中國佛教的判教對聖經神學的啟發 [The inspiration of Chinese Buddhist doctrinal categorization to biblical theology], in *Wujin de zhuiqiu* 無盡的追求 [Endless search], ed. Chen Zuoren 陳佐人 [Stephen T. Chan] (Hong Kong: Religion Society, Chinese University of Hong Kong, 1988), 36–62. Although this article has no direct connection with Xu Songshi, it points out that the theory of doctrinal categorization in Chinese Buddhism is a way to deal with the diversity among different scriptures and teachings. Similar problems also occur to the Bible, which consists of both the Old Testament and the New Testament. There are theological diversities between the two Testaments as well as within each Testament. For instance, there are tensions between the Pauline letters and the letter of James with regard to their understandings of the relations between faith, work and salvation. It may be beneficial to consult the Buddhist method of doctrinal categorization, which is based on the concept of “skilful means.” Meanwhile, in the Christian tradition, there are some concepts similar to that of skilful means, and even the embryo of theological categorization can be found therein.

<sup>26</sup> Raimon Panikkar, *The Intrareligious Dialogue*, revised edition (New York: Paulist, 1999), 111–17.

two religious traditions can be compared, evaluated, mutually interpreted, or harmonized. The religious attitude of those who are engaged in the interreligious dialogue, which inevitably involves some sort of intrareligious dialogue, may thus be changed and readjusted. The differentiation of the two sorts of dialogue is vital for the understanding of the Christian–Buddhist dialogue in China.

In Western society, the religious identity is basically exclusive and each person tends to have only one particular religious identity. In general, it is very rare to find overlapping religious identities in an individual, even though Judaism, Christianity as well as Islam were derived from Abrahamic faith and were closely interrelated in history, and even though there are a few Jewish or Arab Christians. In contrast, in the Chinese religious tradition a large number of people can simultaneously accept three religions, and their religious identities can be multiple. Because of their social and cultural background, some Chinese Christians may possess certain understanding about Buddhism or might have been themselves Buddhists before converting to Christianity. It is quite easy or natural for them to undertake some sort of dialogue in their own minds between the religion of their past and the religion they now embrace. Some of them may consider whether Buddhism should be completely rejected or whether it is endowed with some truth and worth preserving. The occurrence of such issues in the individual mind will inevitably give rise to intrareligious dialogue. Since this dialogue takes place within an individual, it reflects one's own genuine belief and can be free from the pressure of the official position of a religious tradition. It can thus be more penetrating and creative. Therefore, so far as the studies of Buddhist–Christian dialogue are concerned, it should not be limited to the visible and outward interreligious dialogue: more attention should rather be paid to the intrareligious dialogue of individuals.

In the history of the encounter between Christianity and Buddhism in China, apart from the several incidents of contention and conflict, there were also some notable endeavours to synthesize and harmonize the teachings of the two religions. Furthermore, there were also attempts to harmonize the two religions in daily life and in literature. All these have left us with a great volume of material that is worthy of further study.

### 3. REFLECTION ON THE ATTITUDES TOWARD THE DIALOGUE

In examining the encounter and dialogue between Christianity and Buddhism in China during the first half of the twentieth century, two contributing factors are found to be influential in the positive development of Buddhist-Christian dialogue. One is the external, socio-political environment and the other the internal quest within each of the two religions. With regard to the latter, while Christianity looked for its indigenization in China, Buddhism searched for its modernization. From the Christian side, a large number of Christian intellectuals believed that Christianity needed to double its effort for indigenization in order to be free from occidental ideology; only then would the Christian faith integrate better into Chinese culture, take root in Chinese soil and grow accordingly. The successful experiences of the indigenization of Buddhism in China seemed to provide good examples for Christianity to follow. From the Buddhist side, Buddhism witnessed the advanced methods of Christianity in missionary work, organization, education and social service. All these were recognized by Chinese Buddhists as good examples, deserving to be adopted for the Buddhist reform so that Buddhism would not lag behind in contemporary society. Quite amazingly, most Buddhists were only interested in learning what was called “external forms,” such as the skill and stratagem of religious missions, design of theological curricula, as well as expansion of charitable activities. They neglected or even denounced the Christian “inner learning” or *neixue* 內學 (i.e., doctrine and spiritual discipline), disregarding all of them as too meagre and too superficial to be studied.<sup>27</sup> They were quite similar to some of the contemporary Confucians who considered that Confucianism had been so perfect with regard to the aspect of “inner sagehood” that nothing could be learnt from Christianity excepting that which pertained to the aspect of “outward kingship.” This kind of attempt to learn from the other, highlighting the value of superficial copying and mimic emulation without entering into the depth of the other religion, is no different from the typical approach

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<sup>27</sup> He and Lai, “Jiduzongjiao yu jindai Zhongguo fojiao de gaige yundong” (see above, note 14), 122–24; also Lai, *Jindai Zhongguo fojiao yu jiduzongjiao de xianguy* (see above, note 14), 313–14.

called “Chinese substance with Western function,” a famous slogan articulating the half-baked attitude of many Chinese intellectuals toward Western learning, especially Western science and technology.

With regard to the Christian side, although a number of Christians appreciated the merit of Buddhist philosophy, they never thought that Buddhism in contemporary China could provide any special inspiration to the Christian mission. This was because what they were interested in was merely the successful examples of Buddhist indigenization in the past, not the practices of contemporary Chinese Buddhism. They came to the conclusion that as the accomplishment of Buddhism in the past could be attributed to its indigenization with Chinese culture, contemporary Christianity should also endeavour to become integrated into Chinese culture—especially Confucianism. An implication of this is that the communication with contemporary Buddhism or Buddhists would be relatively non-essential, if not entirely irrelevant. Ironically, since the aim of indigenizing Christianity was to proselytize more Chinese people, this rationale for learning from Buddhism could be understood as a strategy for “overcoming the barbarians through learning the strength of the barbarians,” another famous slogan that articulates an agonizing and antagonistic attitude of some Chinese toward the invasion of Western culture. According to this understanding, no need is felt to take Buddhism in contemporary China seriously as a living partner in actual dialogue.<sup>28</sup>

It can thus be said that this mutual learning between Buddhism and Christianity was the result of a practical, if not pragmatic, consideration. One’s being interested in the other religion was not motivated by one’s interest in another religion as such. Furthermore, the possible areas of dialogue had been delimited even before any dialogue was undertaken. The dialogue between the two was thus by no means open and the foundation for dialogue was far from solid. Inevitably, with the change of external factors or environments, such interest would easily be lost. Since 1949, religious organizations in mainland China had to focus their efforts on how to adapt to the new socio-political system, and interreligious dialogue became superfluous. The situation has been quite different in Hong Kong and Taiwan. On the one hand, Chinese Buddhism, especially in Taiwan, underwent undisturbed development and modernization and its social and cultural influence is second to no other religions. On the other hand, as the influence of traditional Chinese culture on the Chinese people has gradually lost ground, the demand

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<sup>28</sup> Lai, *Jindai Zhongguo fojiao yu jiduzongjiao de xiangyu*, 313–15.

for indigenization on the Christian side has also weakened. There has been less and less interest in Buddhist–Christian dialogue. Besides apologetic contentions, only a few occasions occurred for fair and serene contact between the two religions.<sup>29</sup> The situation improved only rather recently at the turn of the century.<sup>30</sup>

In order to pave the way for the Christian–Buddhist dialogue in the twenty-first century, we have to rethink or remove some of the presuppositions that might impede its development in China. Buddhism needs to reexamine the prejudice that the doctrine of Christianity is naive and defective and that Christian spiritual discipline has nothing to be recommended. Such pre-understanding was largely derived from the impressions given by the Western missionaries as well as Chinese Christians in the past. If such impressions are generalized to pass a judgment on Christianity as a whole, it will not only underestimate the diversity of the Christian tradition, but will also betray ignorance concerning the accomplishment of Christian theology, philosophy, and spirituality in the past two millennia. It may even undermine the organic relation between external practices and internal faith as well as spiritual discipline. Buddhism and Christianity use Nirvāṇa and the Kingdom of God respectively as symbols for the ultimate state, yet they may also have different emphases in social ethics.<sup>31</sup> If Buddhists can take seriously the long-standing and well-established spiritual and mystical tradition of Christianity, they may not hastily comment that Christianity is lacking of “inner learning” and fine doctrine.<sup>32</sup> In fact, the study of spirituality and mysticism has become one of the most important topics for Christian–Buddhist comparison and dialogue in the international aca-

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<sup>29</sup> Peter K. H. Lee and Shih Heng-ching, “A Christian–Buddhist Dialogue on Causality and Good and Evil,” *Ching Feng* 30, nos. 1–2 (1987): 39–57; and eidem, “Karma and Christ,” *Ching Feng* 31, no. 1 (1988): 24–47.

<sup>30</sup> Lai Pan-chiu, “The Role of Hong Kong in the Buddhist–Christian Encounter in China: A Post-Conference Reflection,” *Ching Feng*, n.s., 5, no. 1 (2004): 119–33. The article was presented at the Workshop on Chinese Religion and Traditional Culture, Hong Kong, 17–19 March 2003.

<sup>31</sup> Lai Pan-chiu, *Bianyuan shang de shenxue fansi: Paihuai zai daxue, jiaohui yu shehui zhi jian* 邊緣上的神學反思：徘徊在大學、教會與社會之間 [Theological reflections on the boundaries: between university, church and society] (Hong Kong: Jidujiao wenyi chubanshe, 2001), 160–61.

<sup>32</sup> For a survey of the origin and development of Christian spirituality, see *Christian Spirituality: Origins to the Twelfth Century*, ed. Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff in collaboration with Jean Leclercq (New York: Crossroad, 1985); *Christian Spirituality: High Middle Ages and Reformation*, ed. Jill Raitt in collaboration with Bernard McGinn and John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1987); and *Christian Spirituality: Post-Reformation and Modern*, ed. Louis Dupré and Don E. Saliers in collaboration with John Meyendorff (New York: Crossroad, 1989).

demic circle in past decades.<sup>33</sup> On the basis of the profound resource of Chinese Chan (Ch'an) Buddhism, the right attitude of acknowledging the value of the Christian spiritual and mystical tradition may open a way for further exchange between the two religions in the future.<sup>34</sup>

For Christianity, reflection perhaps should be undertaken immediately to review the mentality of taking interreligious dialogue as a direct (for proselytizing in the name of dialogue) or an indirect (for learning the way of indigenization) instrument for evangelization. As pointed out by John B. Cobb, Jr., who has made a great contribution to Christian–Buddhist dialogue, this kind of mentality only forces the participants of the dialogue to bind themselves to the official standpoint, preventing any open and penetrating dialogue on an equal footing, not to mention mutual creative transformation through the dialogue.<sup>35</sup> In recent years, many Chinese Christian theologians have queried the proposal of theological indigenization. The scheme of indigenization used in the dialogue between Confucianism and Christianity has also gradually been cast aside. This gives way to an examination of how the dialogue between Christianity and Confucianism, as two spiritual traditions, can be carried out and how they can contribute to solving the issues confronting humankind here and now.<sup>36</sup> Recently, the Buddhist–Christian dialogue at the international level has shown a trend toward focusing more on the global issues related to ecology and economy.<sup>37</sup> In contrast, in the Chinese academic circle there is only

<sup>33</sup> For instance, Donald W. Mitchell, *Spirituality and Emptiness: The Dynamics of Spiritual Life in Buddhism and Christianity* (New York: Paulist, 1991); Donald W. Mitchell and James Wiseman, eds., *The Gethsemani Encounter: A Dialogue on the Spiritual Life by Buddhist and Christian Monastics* (New York: Continuum, 1997); and Paul Mommaers and Jan van Bragt, *Mysticism Buddhist and Christian: Encounters with Jan van Ruusbroec* (New York: Crossroad, 1995).

<sup>34</sup> Some works have already been done in this area. For instance, Tan Peiquan 譚沛泉 [Ekman Tam], “Chanzong de jingmoguan he jidutu yu shen de jingli” 禪宗的靜默觀和基督徒與神的經歷 [Silence of Ch'an and the Christian experience of God], in *Chuancheng yu shiming: Aixiangde boshi shishi sishiwu zhounian jinian xueshu wenji* 傳承與使命：艾香德博士逝世四十五週年學術紀念文集 = *Heritage and Mission: Memorial Volume to Rev. K. L. Reichelt (1877–1952)*, ed. Chen Guangpei 陳廣培 [Frank Chan] (Hong Kong: Tao Fong Shan Christian Centre, 1998), 131–46.

<sup>35</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr.'s ideas on religious dialogue can be referred to in Lai Pan-chiu, “Cobb's Theory of Inter-religious Dialogue and the Buddhist–Christian Encounter in China,” *Ching Feng* 40, nos. 3–4 (September–December 1997): 261–90.

<sup>36</sup> For example: Lai Pan-chiu, ed., “Special Issue: Christian and Christian Dialogue on Life and Ethics,” *Ching Feng*, n.s., 2, nos. 1–2 (2001).

<sup>37</sup> The first four articles in *Buddhist–Christian Studies* 22 (2002) discuss these issues.

some preliminary research on Christian and Buddhist ethics conducted; there is more work to be done.<sup>38</sup>

So far as Buddhism and Christianity in the contemporary world are concerned, the most urgent issues needing to be dealt with properly are related to globalization, such as environment protection, human rights, world peace, the unsettlement of the human soul as well as the collapse of ethical values. These current challenges may stimulate Christians and Buddhists to think again about the shortcomings of their own religions and to ponder over how they should face these common issues through dialogue and cooperation. This may also be a possible way for Christian–Buddhist dialogue in China to go forward.<sup>39</sup>

#### 4. REFLECTION ON THE PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES

In the Christian–Buddhist comparison and dialogue, one may often come across the stereotypical idea that while Christian theology is based on the notion of “being,” Buddhism expounds the doctrine of “emptiness.” This kind of labelling often gives rise to a view that Christianity and Buddhism cannot communicate, but contradict each other. Matteo Ricci (1552–1610), a Jesuit missionary, dressed like a Buddhist monk for the first nine years after arriving in China at the beginning of the seventeenth century. After discovering that Confucian ideology was in fact cherished by most Chinese gentry, he began to wear Confucian robes.<sup>40</sup> This incident shows that Ricci had initially attempted to indigenize or “sinicize” Christianity through some sort of superficial “Buddhistization,” so that Chinese people could more easily embrace the Christian religion. It is clear that the motivation behind

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<sup>38</sup> You Huizhen 尤惠貞 and Zhai Benrui 翟本瑞, “Jidujiao ‘ai guan’ yu fojiao ‘cibei guan’ de bijiao: zongjiao shehui guanhuai de lunli jichu” 基督教「愛觀」與佛教「慈悲觀」的比較：宗教社會關懷的倫理基礎 [A comparison between Christian love and Buddhist compassion as ethical foundation of religious social concerns], *Pumen xuebao* 普門學報, no. 2 (March 2001): 39–56.

<sup>39</sup> Lai, “Cobb’s Theory of Inter-religious Dialogue and the Buddhist–Christian Encounter in China,” 280–84.

<sup>40</sup> See Gianni Criveller, *Preaching Christ in Late Ming China: The Jesuits’ Presentation of Christ from Matteo Ricci to Giulio Aleni* (Taipei: Ricci Institute for Chinese Studies; Brescia, It.: Fondazione Civiltà Bresciana, 1997); cited from the Chinese translation by Wang Zhicheng, Si Zhu and Wang Jianda: *Wan Ming jidulun* 晚明基督論 (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1999), 68–71.

this kind of dialogue with Buddhism was to propagate Christianity rather than to understand or study Buddhism. What is more unfortunate is that Ricci and many of his followers severely criticized Buddhism as superstition and idolatry and attempted to adopt and implement the strategy of “replacing Buddhism and supplementing Confucianism.” The confrontation or contention between Christianity and Buddhism was thus quite unavoidable because both sides endeavoured to promote their own religion and to denigrate the other’s, and failed to understand each other’s thought system with an open mind.<sup>41</sup> On the basis of the available documents, especially those from the Catholic side, one may find that, owing to their intellectual background, the Catholic theologians took seriously the concept of “being” and failed to understand the Buddhist doctrine of “emptiness” (*kong* 空) or the Taoist concept of “nothingness” (*wu* 無). Assuming that these concepts are directly opposed to Christian theology, they rigorously denounced the Buddhist idea of “emptiness” and the Taoist doctrine of “nothingness,” arguing that these concepts, which arbitrarily deny phenomenon/reality and scientific discovery, would only lead to nihilism.<sup>42</sup> In reverse, the Chinese Buddhist circle, based on the viewpoint of emptiness, also criticized the philosophical realism advocated by the Catholic missionaries.<sup>43</sup> This seems to be an irreconcilable dichotomy or contradiction. As He Guanghu 何光滄 once pointed out, the most fundamental obstacle to the communication between Christian theology and Chinese religious philosophy seems to be that they hold two incompatible views on ultimate reality or origin: while the former stresses the notion of “*shi you shi*” 實有是 (reality–being–affirmation), the latter espouses a philosophy of “*kong wu fei*” 空無非 (emptiness–nothingness–negation). However, He Guanghu argues that the contradiction is not absolute and it is not as serious as imagined, if the two traditions are carefully examined. Just as the notion of “*shi you shi*” also appears in Chinese religious philosophy, the idea of “*kong wu fei*” also can be found in Christian theology.<sup>44</sup> On the basis of the theory of complementarity in

<sup>41</sup> Matteo Ricci, *China in the Sixteenth Century: The Journals of Matthew Ricci: 1583–1610*, trans. Louis Gallagher (New York: Random House, 1953). For the Buddhist response to Catholics, see Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 72–82.

<sup>42</sup> Criveller, *Wan Ming jidulun* (see above, note 40), 72–73.

<sup>43</sup> Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact* (see above, note 41), 214–21.

<sup>44</sup> He Guanghu 何光滄, “‘Shiyoushi’ yu ‘kongwufei’: Zhongguo zongjiao zhexue yu jidujiao zhexue xiangtong de yi da zhang’ ai?” 「實有是」與「空無非」——中國宗教哲學與基督教哲學相通的一大障礙？ [Being vs. nothingness: a challenge to the compatibil-

quantum physics, especially the complementarity between the models of “wave” and “particle” advocated by Niels Bohr (1885–1962), I have attempted to point out that comparable examples of complementarity can be found in Christianity and Buddhism. Notable examples include the *Mādhyamika* School in Buddhism and the “Middle-way of Fourfold Negatives” in the Chalcedon Creed (451). Furthermore, St. Augustine (354–430), who made a great impact on the theology of Catholicism and Protestantism, also expounded the view that all phenomena can be characterized as “both ‘being’ and ‘non-being’” or “neither ‘being’ nor ‘non-being.’” Besides, according to the study of Western theology made by John Macquarrie, there is a long-standing and well-established tradition of dialectical theism, which believes that God can be said to be both being and non-being, one and many, knowable and incomprehensible, transcendent and immanent, passible and impassible, eternal and temporal, etc. Accordingly, both Christianity and Buddhism employ the method of complementarity as well as the expressions of “*shi you shi*” and “*kong wu fei*” (to borrow He Guanghu’s terms) concurrently. It is clear that the two traditions not only do not contradict each other; they possess some similarities. Moreover, we may hence be able to talk about the complementarity between Christianity and Buddhism in a loose sense.<sup>45</sup>

Through a study of the theory of complementarity, I also found that the Chalcedon Creed could be read from the Mahāyāna perspective, so that Christianity might be able to formulate a Christology more in line with traditional Chinese culture. This also has made me aware of John Keenan’s proposal for a Mahāyāna Christology. After examining his award-winning *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahāyāna Theology*,<sup>46</sup> I found that the proposal of Mahāyāna theology advocated by Keenan is based mainly on the *Yogācāra* school, supplemented by some ideas from the *Mādhyamika* school, but it neglects or underestimates the potential of the *Tathāgatagarbha* tradition for a Mahāyāna Christology.<sup>47</sup> Furthermore, Keenan’s discussion of Mahāyāna theology is primarily

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ity of Chinese religious philosophy with Christian philosophy?], *Daofeng: Jidujiao wenhua pinglun* 道風：基督教文化評論 = *Logos and Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology*, no. 12 (2000): 165–85.

<sup>45</sup> Lai Pan-chiu, “Buddhist-Christian Complementarity in the Perspective of Quantum Physics,” *Studies in Inter-religious Dialogue* 12, no. 2 (2002): 148–64.

<sup>46</sup> John Keenan, *The Meaning of Christ: A Mahāyāna Theology* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1989).

<sup>47</sup> Lai Pan-chiu, “A Mahāyāna Reading of Chalcedon Christology: A Chinese Response to John Keenan,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24 (2004): 209–28.

derived from the *Problematik* in Western Christianity, which tends to separate religious doctrine from religious (mystical) experience or to subordinate mystical experience to doctrinal formulation. He tries to make use of Buddhist philosophy, especially the *Mādhyamika* and *Yogācāra*, as a handmaid of theology (*theologiae ancilla*), facilitating the restoration of mystical experience to the centre of Christianity and establishing the connection between mystical experience and Christian doctrine. Yet, I find that Keenan's approach is merely one of the possible ways of doing Mahāyāna theology. It is also possible to establish a Mahāyāna theology on the basis of the theory of *Tathāgatagarbha* to affirm the non-duality of human nature and divine nature. According to this view, human beings may participate in the divine life, or every human being can become Christ. Compared with the *Yogācāra* doctrine, the *Tathāgatagarbha* doctrine may reflect even more clearly the character of traditional Chinese culture.<sup>48</sup> This Buddhist interpretation of Christian doctrine may be helpful for the development of Christian theology in the Chinese world. Nevertheless, what the present author has proposed are merely tentative attempts with a view to demonstrating that between Christianity and Buddhism there can be a mutual interpretation, or a "fusion of horizons."<sup>49</sup> This fusion involves not only the horizons of Christianity and Buddhism, but also some other background of the interpreter, including traditional Chinese culture. With the participation of Chinese culture, this fusion of horizons may carry the characteristics of Chinese culture and make a unique contribution to international Christian–Buddhist studies.

## 5. CONCLUSION

It should be admitted that Buddhist–Christian study in contemporary China is still at its formative stage. However, it is evident that dialogue, communication and even mutual transformation between Chinese

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<sup>48</sup> The proposal has been further elaborated in Lai Pan-chiu, "Zuishen, zuixing yu ru-laizang: yi ge jidulunshi renleixue de tantao" 罪身、罪性與如來藏——一個基督論式人類學的探討 [Sinful flesh, sinful nature and *tathāgatagarbha*: an investigation on christological anthropology], *Zhongguo Shenxue Yanjiuyuan qikan* 中國神學研究院期刊 = *China Graduate School of Theology Journal*, no. 35 (July 2003): 210–29.

<sup>49</sup> Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum, 1998), 306–7, 374–75.

Christianity and Buddhism did take place in the past and that the prospect for further development is vast. The dialogue and exchange between the two religions may prosper in the twenty-first century, if the two sides make efforts to eradicate misunderstanding and prejudice against each other. Since Buddhism has undergone drastic developments in China and become an integral part of Chinese culture, the Christian–Buddhist dialogue in China may be rather different from those in America or Japan, and will thus make some special contributions to Christian–Buddhist dialogue worldwide.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> An earlier draft of this paper was presented at “Christianity and Chinese Culture: A Sino–Nordic Conference on Chinese Contextual Theology,” which was organized by the Nordic Institute for Missionary and Ecumenical Research, Faculty of Theology, University of Helsinki and the Union for Christian Culture of Finland and was held in Lapland, Finland on 13–17 August 2003. The present author would like to thank Professor Miikka Ruokanen, organizer of the conference, for his kind permission to publish the paper here.

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