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## CHINESE THEOLOGICAL REVIEW 28

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## From the Editor

*Zhongguo hua* 中国化, that is, sinicization, as applied to religious beliefs and Christianity, Protestant and Catholic in particular, has become in recent years the major topic of discussion among officials, scholars and theological thinkers and educators. In keeping with this theme, this 28th issue of the *Chinese Theological Review* (CTR) opens with an essay by the Rev. Dr. Gao Feng 高峰, president of the China Christian Council and president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, on building up the Chinese Protestant church through sinicization.

Rev. Gao begins with a brief discussion of the historical background, from the earliest entry of Christianity into China to the efforts of Matteo Ricci and the many missionaries who followed. He notes the often-cited fact that early translations of Christian terms and ideas made use of Buddhist and Daoist concepts and language already familiar to Chinese people. It is generally affirmed in discussions of the process of *zhongguo hua* that Buddhism, as an imported religion that has become thoroughly Chinese, is an example of successful sinicization. In the history of Chinese Protestantism, theologians, pastors and leaders have long made the realization of a truly Chinese Christianity their goal.

For Rev. Gao, sinicization is based on and develops through both the Three-Self principle and Theological Reconstruction, with important emphasis on the sinicization of theological thinking. Chinese theology, he feels, must break with the idea of “the centrality of the Western Christian tradition.” He concludes his essay with these words: “To sum up, the sinicization of Christianity accords

with biblical teaching. It is a deepening and development of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, a basic requirement for the existence and development of Christianity in China, and is the goal and vision of the development of Christianity in China. The sinicization of Christianity is a comprehensive, long-term project. It cannot be settled once and for all or accomplished in a single move. It requires that we put forth our unremitting efforts.”

Following Rev. Gao’s piece are five essays by women authors on feminist theology in the Chinese Protestant church. This section begins with “Feminist Theology and the Chinese Church,” by the Rev. Dr. Cao Shengjie. Rev. Cao is a church woman and leader who has been active in the church since her seminary training in the 1950s. She is a past president of the China Christian Council. Here she gives an overview of how Chinese Christian feminism grew through exposure to international feminist thought via ecumenical contacts and participation in the worldwide church. She also notes the growth of women’s participation in the church and in the number of ordained women.

Her essay is followed by “A Brief Look at Women’s Ministry in the Chinese Church,” by Rev. Gao Ying, president of Yanjing Theological Seminary in Beijing. She begins her look at women’s ministry with the Opium War and posits three stages of development: Establishment and Expansion; Transformation and Refining (1949-1979); and Rejuvenation and Rebuilding (1979-), discussing issues of women’s ordination, participation in decision-making in the church and in leadership positions, as well as gender issues and the encounter with traditional culture.

The remaining three essays, “A Biblical Perspective on Women’s Role in the Church,” by Rev. Sun Meici, Rev. Wang Peng’s “Understanding Paul’s Prohibitions Against Women in First Corinthians and “Women, Faith, Marriage—The Challenges of Marriage for Women: A Feminist Perspective,” by Meng Yanling, take in the main a more textual approach,

emphasizing careful attention to the original meanings of the text and urging a feminist exegesis that would go deeper in uncovering the male-centered cultural norms operating in the text. Both Wang and Meng draw on Chinese classical texts, using the traditional patriarchal mindset of their own culture to show how these views have had an impact on Chinese Christian women that continues today, even among women clergy.

These five essays are taken from *Theological Writing from Nanjing Seminary*, Vol. 2 (1993-2017). Volume 2 was issued in May 2017, along with a reprint in the new format of Volume 1 (1952-1992), originally published to mark the 40th anniversary of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS). This new two-volume set marks the 65th anniversary of the seminary and the completion of the NJUTS cathedral. This 700-page second volume has a preface by Rev. Dr. Gao Feng and an afterward by Rev. Chen Yilu. In his afterward, Rev. Chen includes a note on the cover design, which “draws on a ground of cloud-pattern brocade, characteristic of Nanjing culture, expressing identification with Chinese culture and local culture. The two photos, of our old campus and the new, with calligraphy by Xu Rulei, express our continuous academic heritage. The dedication of the seminary cathedral is celebrated by its prominent placement here, another great event in the history of our seminary. ...”

In the following excerpts from the foreword and afterward, Revs Gao and Chen reflect on the editorial process and aim of the volumes, Volume 2 in particular.

### *Foreword*

“Volume I was published as NJUTS celebrated its 40th year. That volume comprised 33 essays by senior theologians. These essays embodied the theological inquiries and ponderings of those times, including how Chinese

Christians regarded the Bible, the relationship between Christians and non-Christians, church and state, the material and the spiritual, the spiritual and the secular, Heaven and reason, and Christianity in relation to its cultural context. It also touched on initial exploration and understandings of God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, the Church, and God's creation. All these form part of the Chinese church's valuable thinking process around theology, set down in these pages to be treasured.

...

"In the twenty-plus years since 1992, the church has continued to develop. Changes in the society and times surrounding the church have continued apace; theological thinking in the church has become more dynamic as well. Since 1998 when the church formally called for the strengthening of Theological Reconstruction, the majority of clergy and pastoral workers have actively engaged in this important ministry, with gratifying results. This second volume of *Theological Writing from Nanjing Seminary* includes some of the theses and essays by our co-workers from this historical period, reflecting and embodying their results over two decades of theological reflection and theoretical study in the Chinese church. Due to considerations of length, this Volume 2 comprises essays written by leaders in the national CCC&TSPM and the faculty of NJUTS, including some 63 essays by 39 authors. Essay topics include Theological Reconstruction, Three-Self and the sinicization of Christianity, Chinese theology and theological monographs, Chinese Protestant history, Christian social responsibility and social service, feminist theology, biblical studies and biblical theology.

...

"Three-Self and the sinicization of Christianity account for the greater part of Volume 2. Colleagues and friends in

and outside China have asked why the Chinese Protestant church at times emphasizes Three-Self, at other times speaks of strengthening Theological Reconstruction, and now wants to promote the sinicization of Christianity? Three-Self, Theological Reconstruction and sinicization are not unrelated; they are correlative, they supplement and complement each other. Three-Self is the basic principle for the building up and development of the Protestant church in China. Through Three-Self, the Chinese church has truly become a church independently administered by Chinese Christians, realizing the selfhood of the Chinese church in its institution and sovereignty; in these two aspects, Theological Reconstruction is the foundation for the selfhood of the Chinese church, further building and achieving selfhood in theological thinking. Theological Reconstruction is the development and deepening of the Three-Self Movement. The sinicization of Christianity is not a new topic, but a historical one. The Three-Self Movement of the 1950s and the Theological Reconstruction of the 1990s were efforts at realizing a Chinese Christianity in China; they were substantial steps taken on this path. Theological Reconstruction in Chinese Protestantism must maintain the direction of sinicization. The theological system arrived at through Theological Reconstruction must have Chinese characteristics and content. The sinicization of Christianity is the prospect and goal of running the Protestant church in China well according to the Three-Self principle, and also the direction for the development of our church, as well as a long-term comprehensive program.

“These essays consider the major significance of Three-Self and the sinicization of Christianity for building up the Chinese Protestant church from various perspectives. They touch on topics of fusion with Chinese culture through hymns and sacred music, the Chinese church and modernization, a view of the Bible founded on Chinese

characteristics, the historical origins of the “catechism” and its practical significance in the process of sinicization, as well as looking at building up the church in the context of socialist society from the contemporary perspective of Bishop K.H. Ting’s social theology.

...

“Selections also reflect on feminist theology. Some traditional Chinese views held to the mindset of male superiority. This sort of view still exists, and in some backward and poor areas, abandonment of female infants and the denial of education to girl children does happen at times. Feminist theological positions should be objective and well-rounded, with a correct understanding and hermeneutic of the biblical teachings with regard to women. God has bestowed on women and on men the same dignity and status. There should not be antagonism, competition and strained relations between men and women, but rather complementarity, cooperation and mutual support. The Chinese Protestant church has always had a majority of women believers. We should value and realize the potential of women’s role in the church and develop feminist theology that is in accord with biblical teachings and feminist exegesis that is in accord with modern ethical views.” [Gao Feng]

### *Afterword*

“The majority of the essays included in this Volume 2 were published in the *Nanjing Theological Review* in the years 1993-2017; a few were published in other periodicals or are new works. Many other fine essays have been published in the *Nanjing Theological Review*, but due to time constraints, the present volume includes only work by colleagues in the national CCC&TSPM offices and faculty at NJUTS. We feel that the editorial process reflected in this volume should become a kind of “new normal” for timeliness in collecting fine essays from the *Nanjing Theological Review* into an

edited volume as a reference for understanding and study of Chinese theological thinking.

“The period covered by Volume 2 is rather long—1993-2017—but the essays are comparatively concentrated in the period following 1998 and Theological Reconstruction. In this regard, Bishop K.H. Ting, as both the proponent and promoter of Theological Reconstruction, is represented by four of his essays, allowing us to review his guidance, and allowing his thinking to serve as the major foundation for carrying forward the sinicization of Protestant Christianity.

“The standard for including contributions in this anthology was the presence of both academic considerations and a correct grasp of the direction of the sinicization of Christianity. The foundations of the sinicization of Christianity are the Three-Self Patriotic principle and Theological Reconstruction; these three form a continuum, embodying the theological direction of Chinese Protestantism. The sinicization of Christianity is not simply the formula Christianity + sinicization; its greater emphasis is on using the experience and viewpoint of Chinese Christians to rebuild the theology of Protestant Christianity. China’s experience is not simply cultural, it is also the experience of China’s social reality following the Reform and Opening period, and even more, it is the experience and viewpoint of the trend of the times in the Chinese Dream of rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The purview of the sinicization of Christianity includes not only the past, but the present and even more, the future. Seeing history and the present from the perspective of the future allows us to see even further!”  
[Chen Yilu]

A listing of the contents of 2016 issues of the *Nanjing Theological Review* concludes this issue.

As always, I am grateful to the authors of these essays for sharing their work. Any errors in presentation are

entirely my own. In this issue, we have again included Chinese characters for personal names, titles, some individual terms and citations. Author names are given in Chinese characters and format—surname + personal name. However, personal preference will be followed when known. For those who also use an English name, this is given with the bibliographic information that follows the article.

Please note the following abbreviations used throughout the journal: China Christian Council & Three-Self Patriotic Movement of Protestant Churches in China (CCC&TSPM); regional, provincial and local levels are referred to as Shanghai CC or Sichuan TSPM (or Three-Self Organization); National Chinese Christian Conference (NCCC) Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NJUTS); State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA) or its predecessor the Religious Affairs Bureau (RAB); Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) Communist Party of China (CPC).

The Chinese Theological Review is a publication of the Foundation for Theological Education in South East Asia. I am grateful to the Foundation and to Dr. H.S. Wilson, executive director, for their ongoing encouragement and support. I would also like to acknowledge the counsel and knowledge of Rev. Dr. Philip Wickeri at various points in the preparation of this issue.

The Chinese Theological Review welcomes readers' feedback. Please feel free to contact the editor: [cteditor@gmail.com](mailto:cteditor@gmail.com). We are especially interested to know whether you have found the journal useful in your work or study. Web copies of the Chinese Theological Review are available at <http://www.amityfoundation.org/eng/publications>; new issues are made available shortly after publication.

Janice Wickeri  
Hong Kong

## Build up the Chinese Protestant Church through Sinicization

坚持中国化方向建设中国教会

GAO FENG 高峰

The sinicization (*Zhongguo hua* 中国化) of Christianity is not a recent issue, but a historical one, one that in fact Christianity has faced from its entry into China. For example, many Daoist and Buddhist terms and expressions were employed in translating the scriptures for what is called *Jingjiao* 景教,\* the earliest form of Christianity to enter China during the Tang dynasty. “Related Buddhist doctrine was used in explaining *Jingjiao* creeds.” *Jiangjiao* documents also reveal that in the translation of its scriptures, a great many Daoist terms were used.<sup>1</sup> The inscription on the Nestorian Monument is no more than 2000 characters in length, but it touches upon classics of the Chinese tradition, the *Yi jing* 易经, the *Classic of Poetry* 诗经, and the *Spring and Autumn Annals* 春秋 in some eighty places, “along with 150 instances referring to other Confucian classics, over 100 references to the dynastic histories and over 300 references to philosophical works.”<sup>2</sup> When a religion spreads to a (new)

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\* Often identified with Nestorianism, though not all scholars agree.

1. Zhuo Xinping 卓新平, 基督教与中国文化处境[Christianity and the Chinese cultural context](Beijing: Religious Culture Publishing House, 2013), 21-22.
2. Wang Weifan 汪维藩, 廿载苍茫—王维藩文集(1979-1998) [Writings of Wang Weifan, 1979-1998](Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 2011), 100.

locale, the translation and compilation of its scriptures is foundational work for indigenization. Roman Catholic missionaries who came to China during the Ming and Qing dynasties also made great efforts toward sinicization. Attempts by Matteo Ricci and other Jesuits to contrast with, integrate, supplement and rectify Confucianism are excellent examples.<sup>3</sup> Unfortunately, owing to the Chinese Rites Controversy, the Roman Catholic missionary enterprise was brought to an end in China by the Kangxi emperor's 1720 imperial edict banning religion.<sup>4</sup>

Due to the particular social-historical background of modern Chinese history and for various other reasons, an unequivocal direction toward sinicization was of great significance for the survival and development of Christianity in China. "The sinicization of Christianity was key to its harmonious coexistence with Chinese society, the Chinese nation and traditional Chinese culture. It was not only necessary then, but moreover, as far as the current delicate relationship between Christian faith and Chinese society is concerned, the task has emerged as even more pressing."<sup>5</sup>

Professor Zhang Zhigang 张志刚 of Beijing University points out that if we say that the Chinese Rites Controversy and its fruits was the first historical instance when the differences and conflicts between Western Christianity and the Chinese nation, society and culture were exposed, then after the Opium War, when Christianity, following

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3 Zhuo, *Christianity and the Chinese Cultural Context*, 22-23.

4 Tang Dachao 唐大潮, "佛教, 基督教在中国的传播和发展之比较" [A comparison of the spread and development of Buddhism and Christianity in China], in Zhang Zhigang and Tang Xiaofeng (eds) 张志刚, 唐晓峰, 基督教中国化研究 [Studies in the sinicization of Christianity], vol. 1 (Beijing: Religious Culture Publishing House, 2013), 287.

5 Tang Xiaofeng, "My Understanding of the Sinicization of Christianity," in *Studies in the Sinicization of Christianity*, vol. 1, 303.

the warships and artillery of the Western powers, poured into China under the protection of a series of unequal treaties, the contradictions and conflicts between Western Christianity and the Chinese nation, society and culture clearly intensified and deepened. The resulting invasion of China by Western Christianity and military aggression, the missionary cases disputes, and the anti-Christian movement, etc., all shaped the modern Chinese national memory and are not easily forgotten. “This difficult historical problem is the precise and fundamental reason why Christianity must carry out sinicization.”<sup>6</sup> “It is in this sense that Christianity in China has its obligation and mission of sinicization.”<sup>7</sup> The connotations of Chinese culture are multivariate and plentiful; sinicization of this sort in no way requires that Christianity change its basic faith. In the vastness of the Chinese cultural tradition, the sinicization of Christianity does not at all require total rejection of its splendid Western cultural elements; what is required is a kind of active openness and mutual absorption that transcends East and West, a kind of self-initiated renewal and revival across time.<sup>8</sup>

Professor Zhuo Xinping 卓新平 of CASS in Beijing holds that every foreign religion in China, including Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity is in need of sinicization. It is only

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6 Zhang Zhigang 张志刚, “基督教中国化汪维藩研究的三种视野” [“Three perspectives on the sinicization of Christianity in studies of Wang Weifan”], in 基督教中国化研讨会论文集—纪念中国基督教三自爱国运动委员会成立60周年（1954-2014） [Papers from the Forum on the Sinicization of Christianity at the 60th Anniversary of the Founding of the TSPM (1954-2014)] (Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 2015), 53.

7 Zhuo Xinping, 中国化：基督教在华更新与复兴的必由之路 [Sinicization: The only way for the renewal and revival of Christianity in China], in *Papers from the Forum on the Sinicization of Christianity*, 36.

8 *Ibid.*, 37.

by undergoing this process that they get in touch with the people, acclimatize, enter into society, know the culture and understand people's hearts and minds. Buddhism has been rather successful at these things. Historically it experienced a two-fold sinicization, political and cultural, and thus by degrees it became a Chinese religion in a true sense. Today it is China's foremost major religion, with the largest number of adherents. For Christianity the sinicization process is equally essential, "and also in the present circumstances it is especially urgent that it achieve and embody sinicization as soon as possible." "Chinese Christianity is already closely joined to China's fate, 'sinicization' is then the only path for the renewal and rejuvenation of Christianity."<sup>9</sup>

As Bishop K.H. Ting 丁光训, explained to the ecumenical church, for the past several decades, what the Chinese church has been striving for in China was to enable Christianity to be sinicized, such that Christianity would have a Chinese character and gain the love of Chinese Christians and the broader Chinese people, for only in this way can the Chinese church make its contribution to the ecumenical church, and this relates to the issue of whether Christianity will be able to genuinely survive and develop in China. "We are not relaxing our efforts to make the church in China Chinese. This is a question of 'to be or not to be' for the Church of Jesus Christ in China today."<sup>10</sup>

In May 2015, President Xi Jinping 习近平, speaking at the CPC Central Committee's Work Conference on the United Front, pointed out that "to actively guide the mutual

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9 Ibid., 37, 40.

10 K.H. Ting 丁光训, 在世基联和日内瓦教会普世中心谈三自运动 [Speaking about the Three-Self Movement at the WCC and Ecumenical Centre in Geneva], in 丁光训文集 [The Collected Writings of Bishop K.H. Ting] (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 1998, 13-14). English version: "The Universality of the Church," in *Love Never Ends: Papers by K.H. Ting*, ed. Janice Wickeri (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000), 118.

adaptation of religion and socialist society, it is essential to adhere to the direction of sinicization.” “We must foreground core socialist values, infusing every religion in China with Chinese culture, supporting religious circles in elucidating their religious thought, canons and creeds in keeping with the demands of progress in our time.” The sinicization of Christianity is essential to the path of mutual adaptation of Christians and socialist society. It is also an important goal of running the Chinese church well according to Three-Self principles. “Maintaining the path of sinicization is the foundation of a settled Chinese Christianity.” “Standing at a new historical threshold, we must grasp this historical opportunity to advance the process of sinicization of Christianity at a deeper level.”<sup>11</sup>

The sinicization of Christianity is necessary to the existence and development of Christianity in the actuality of China; it is also a demand the state makes to religious circles. Persevering in the direction of sinicization is indeed “the essential path for the renewal and rejuvenation of Christianity in China.” It is “the foundation of Christianity’s place in the context of China.” Then, how shall we persist in the sinicization of China in the new historical period; how shall we build up the Chinese church well?

In order to follow the path of sinicization in the new situation and do a good job of building the Chinese church, we must continue to uphold the Three-Self principle. In the 1950s, Wu Yaozong 吴耀宗, along with other church leaders of that generation, launched the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) of self-governance, self-support and self-propagation that was of crucial significance for the

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11 Jiang Jianyong 蒋坚永, 在中国基督教第九次代表会议开幕式上的讲话 [Speech at the opening ceremony of the Ninth National Chinese Christian Conference], in 中国基督教第九次代表会议专辑 [Documents of the Ninth National Chinese Christian Conference] (Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 2014), 21.

development of Chinese Christianity. Of course, from the latter 19th century to the early 20th century, many Chinese Christians were active in efforts exploring Chinese church independence and indigenous churches, but these could not truly change the status quo or destiny of the Chinese church of the time. The TSPM, however, fundamentally changed the fate and future of the Chinese church. “Like a switchman, it took the train of Chinese Christianity and, just as it was about to run off the rails, switched it onto a safe track. From then on, Chinese Christianity gained a new life and had a future.”<sup>12</sup> The TSPM enabled the Chinese church to truly become an independent church run by Chinese Christians, realizing the selfhood of the Chinese church in organization and sovereignty; enabling it to gradually change its old image as a “foreign religion”; enabling Chinese Christians to be patriotic Christians; enabling the Chinese church to become a church moving surely to unity in the post-denominational era; enabling it to become a church increasingly adapted to today’s society and times; and enabling it to become a church that is constantly developing and giving a beautiful witness in the ecumenical church.

Over the past decades, under the leadership of the elder generation of pastors and leaders, the TSPM has actively guided the Chinese church in severing its links with imperialism; has guided the majority of believers, clergy and pastoral workers in continuing to raise their understanding of patriotism, actively join in national construction, serve the interests of Reform and Opening; assist Party and government in implementing the policy of religious freedom; lead the Chinese church in upholding united worship and following the path of unity; deepening the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in the new situation

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12 Wang Zuo’an 王作安, 我们愿意看到的基督教” [The Chinese Christianity we would like to see], in *Studies in the Sinicization of Christianity*, vol. 1, 2.

and advancing Theological Reconstruction; appealing to churches nationwide to engage in public charitable enterprises and launching social welfare ministries; promoting continuing development of friendly exchanges and cooperation between the Chinese church and the ecumenical church; and leading the Chinese church to continue mutual adaptation with socialist society. Under the leadership of the elder generation of pastors and leaders, the TSPM has made important contributions to the development of the Chinese church. Without the Three-Self principle, without the TSPM, without the active efforts of the elder generation of pastors and leaders, we would not see the development of the Chinese church that we do today. We should greatly treasure the achievements of this elder generation of pastors and leaders in the Chinese church and the hard-won development of our church. At present, faced with the increasingly grim national and international situation, especially in the complex situation of infiltration from outside, we must uphold the Three-Self principle even more and follow the path of loving the nation and loving the church. Our younger and middle-aged clergy and pastoral workers must continue to strengthen their learning, their own Three-Self education and patriotic education, and fully understand the historical and immediate significance of the Chinese Christian Three-Self Patriotic Movement. As we go further in Reform and Opening, the more we must unwaveringly uphold the Three-Self principles.

The sinicization of Christianity is the major goal of running the church well according to Three-Self principles. Three-Self is the foundation and prerequisite for Christianity in following the path of sinicization. The Three-Self Patriotic Movement is a crucial step taken by Chinese Christianity in following that path. Now, in the new situation, in order to uphold the direction of sinicization and build the Chinese Church, the several aspects listed below need our attention and consideration.

## 1 The sinicization of Christianity and Theological Reconstruction

Most important to the sinicization of Christianity is the sinicization of theological thinking. Theological Reconstruction is the deepening and development of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. The selfhood of Chinese Christianity in terms of organization and sovereignty is an external, only selfhood in theological thinking is internal, an intrinsic quality. Construction of a system of theological thought suitable to the real situation of the Chinese church and conducive to the healthy development of the church is crucial. In the historical tradition of Christianity, the visible church on earth is always a local church and its theology or theological thinking is always contextual.

To construct a system of Chinese Protestant theology, we must first break through the idea of “the centrality of the Western Christian tradition.” Traditional Western theology is theology established by Western Christianity for its context; it is not the sole correct standard of the ecumenical church. “If the concept of the centrality of the Western Christian tradition is not rooted out, along with its tendency toward exclusivity, Christianity will have no way to root itself in the soil of Chinese culture, no way to assimilate into Chinese mainstream society, no way to genuinely indigenize, localize, contextualize or sinicize itself.”<sup>13</sup>

Theology is the church in the act of thinking. It is the church face to face with society, the people and reality within its own context, a self-examination and review undertaken with faith as the starting point. “It is the church

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13 Zhang Zhigang 张志刚 and Zhuo Xinping 卓新平, 基督教中国化研究的三种视野 [Three views of sinicization in Christianity research], in Zhang Zhigang and Zhuo Xinping (eds), 基督教中国化研究丛书 [Research in the sinicization of Christianity series], vol. 1, Introduction (Beijing: Religious Culture Publishing House, 2013), 4-5.

or the Christian individual, girded with loving care for the church itself and one's own nation, with loving concern for the people and for the sheep, a kind of deep contemplation in the presence of God."<sup>14</sup> The church's theological reflection must face the concrete issues of church and society, the society and its people, the real context.

Churches located in different places embody different local characteristics. In the same way, among different peoples and cultures the theology constructed by the church will possess different connotations and characteristics because of those differences in ethnicity, culture and modes of thinking. Xie Fuya 谢扶雅 believed that the Hebrews were a people of "faith," yet the West, as represented by Greece, emphasized "knowledge." They intended to "prove faith through knowledge,"<sup>15</sup> and from this a doctrinal theology of pure reason and philosophical speculation took shape. This theology tended toward conceptualization, systematization and metaphysical constructions.<sup>16</sup> But, "the Chinese people emphasize practice, conduct or practical action," "reflected in theology, this characteristic of Chinese culture became a practical theology, or active theology or a theology of earnest practice."<sup>17</sup> The characteristics of traditional Chinese culture—"pragmatism" and "emphasizing action"—are

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14 Wang Weifan 汪维藩中国教会神学建设之思考 [Reflections on Theological Reconstruction in the Chinese Church], in 廿载苍茫—汪维藩文集 (1979-1998) [Collected Writings of Wang Weifan, 1979-1998] (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 2011), 497.

15 Xie Fuya 谢扶雅, 中国文化与基督教在华的展望 [Chinese culture and the prospects for Christianity in China], in 谢扶雅晚年基督教思想论集 [Later writings of Xiefuya on Christian thought] (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council, 1986), 108.

16 Zhuo Xinping, *Christianity and the Chinese Cultural Context*, 61.

17 Wang Weifan, 笃行篇 [On earnest practice], in *Collected Writings of Wang Weifan*, 2011, 116.

embodied in faith and theology in “realizing faith through action”—action as the major basis in constructing theology.<sup>18</sup>

The Western theological tradition is based on a Western model; that is, interpreting faith through a rational and philosophical analysis. Its theology is abstract and metaphysical. But from the perspective of the Bible, we find that the faith of Jesus Christ is actually deeply Eastern in character. On one hand, we have the person of Jesus, a historical figure born in the East; on the other hand, what the Bible records of the words and actions and teachings of the Lord Jesus are all very Eastern in spirit and connotation. Jesus Christ in the world preached the gospel of the kingdom of heaven, expounding the way of Life, without ever using high-sounding words or great wisdom or abstract language. Rather, he commonly used examples from life and figures of speech that people easily understood. He was fond of concretizing abstract principles and popularizing the profound way of Life, bringing faith alive. He often taught people to put “faith” into “action,” to put his words into action (Matthew 7:24-27, etc.). Actually, consistency of faith and action is the whole teaching of the New Testament (James 2:14-26, etc.) Additionally, Jesus’ incarnation is revealed to us: the God we cannot see taking flesh in the concretely existing [person of] Jesus Christ made manifest to people; an abstract way of Life made audible to human ears and visible to human eyes through the words and actions of Jesus in the world. The teachings of the New Testament, the words and actions of Jesus, the truth of the revelation of the incarnation in this aspect approaches and corresponds with the spirit of the Chinese cultural tradition. This is the path and means that the Chinese church should take in establishing its faith and constructing its theology. This is a kind of “expressing faith in action,” action as a way

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18 Ibid., 177,188.

to construct a foundation for theology, an incarnational theological way.

## **2 The sinicization of Christianity and the reality of the Chinese context**

“ ‘The word was here made flesh.’ ‘Here’ in China we are a people with thousands of years of cultural tradition, a people who have also experienced all the difficulties and vicissitudes of life. And the body of Christ made flesh here in the tiny church of China, which has identified with its people in suffering and in suffering has built itself up.”<sup>19</sup> God’s truth was “here” in the great land of China, made “flesh,” establishing the Chinese church. Then the Chinese church must “here” in the great land of China embody and witness to God’s truth. The Lord Jesus said that a grain of wheat “must fall into the earth and die,” before it can bear much fruit (John 12:24). In the same way, Christianity here, can only preserve its intrinsic character of life through shedding accretions and absorbing the nutrients of its locality, only then can it grow more abundantly. Christianity here must witness to God’s truth made manifest in Christ, it must face and adapt to the real context here. For Christianity to be sinicized it must accomplish political identification, social assimilation and cultural fusion in the reality of the Chinese context.

### *1 Political identification*

Political identification means identifying with the current Chinese political and social systems, upholding the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, loving our own

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19 Wang Weifan, 道在这里成为肉身[The Word was here made flesh], in *Collected Writings of Wang Weifan*, 59-60. English translation in *Chinese Theological Review*: 8 (1993): 92-99.

country and people, standing with the Chinese people and sharing the same destiny with them. Chinese Christians are at the same time citizens of the People's Republic of China. Faith knows no country, yet adherents have nationality; Christians, like other Chinese, must have an identity as citizens. There are those who think that Christianity transcends the world and that it should not be involved in or participate in politics, but in reality, this is not so. From its inception Christianity has been held to be an alienated Jewish sect and been subject to social suppression and coercion; gaining legal status, it became a state religion. From the Middle Ages and on to the modern era, for over 2000 years it has never dissociated itself from the society or politics of its location and at times has even taken up arms.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, on entering China, Christianity did not break away from Chinese society and politics, especially following the Ming and Qing dynasties. The Chinese Rites Controversy became a dispute between religion and the state, between the Chinese imperial power and the Roman Pope, a conflict with social and political significance. And following the Opium War, Christianity became even more tied to Western political and military power in China, and this intensified Chinese people's impression of Christianity on the political level. The historical "grudge" formed in the course of the encounter between Christianity and Chinese culture, the impasse faced, was to a very large extent 'political.' Thus, efforts to undo this 'grudge' and break through this 'impasse' were mainly political ones."<sup>21</sup>

Buddhism also went through a transformation on the socio-political level during its sinicization process, from its claims that "Buddhism is the supreme truth," or that "Buddhist monks do not respect sovereigns," to "complying

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20 Zhuo Xinping, *Christianity and the Chinese Cultural Context*, 223.

21 *Ibid.*, 13.

with the sovereign,” and “obeying the law of the land.” Buddhism thereby assimilated to Chinese society and culture relatively more successfully. Likewise, the sinicization of Christianity must first of all undergo this transformation. If Christianity wants to survive and moreover develop within the Chinese political and social spheres, the key is to fit into and conform with the political environment.”<sup>22</sup> Therefore, it is extremely important for Christianity to follow the path of sinicization, political adaptation and identification, along with Christians’ determining and identifying with their status as Chinese citizens.

## 2 *Social assimilation*

Jesus did not wish us to break away from this world, but rather wanted us to enter into it.<sup>23</sup> The Apostle Paul also said, “I have become all things to all people” (1 Corinthians 9:22). Only by actively assimilating into society can Christianity gradually make itself an organic component of Chinese society, move forward with the times, be in step with society, take the initiative to put itself into Chinese Reform and Opening, and integrate with the historical process of social development. Only then will it be able to create conditions and an external environment conducive to realizing sinicization.

The process of social assimilation is a process of being understood, identified with and accepted by society. Christianity should act on the teaching “not to be served, but to serve,” the spirit of service that says it is “better to give than to receive.” It should reflect the virtue of “take thought for what is noble in the sight of all”; actively responding to social needs, taking up social responsibility; applying

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22 Ibid., 206, 123.

23 See Jesus’ “High Priestly Prayer” (Farewell Discourse) in John 17:1-26.

our own strengths and our good traditions in medicine and health, in caring for the elderly and children, assisting the poor and disabled, subsidizing education for the poor, playing a part in disaster relief, environmental protection and other areas. It should do good and benefit and serve society and spread love by being salt and light to establish a good image of Christianity.

The Eighteenth Party Congress proposed “to bring about prosperity, democracy, civilization and harmony; to advocate freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law, and to advocate patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship and actively cultivate and practice core socialist values.” These three foci of advocacy embody the thinking behind the system of core socialist values and reflect the rich connotations and practical demands of those values. Carrying on the outstanding Chinese cultural tradition and the fruits of outstanding human civilization, they represent the values and principles of mainstream Chinese thinking and the spirit of contemporary Chinese people. At the National United Front Work Conference held in 2015, Chairman Xi Jinping pointed out that “we must use core socialist values to lead, Chinese culture to penetrate every religion in China, and support religious circles in undertaking interpretation of religious thought, canon and doctrine that is in keeping with the demands of our times.”

The content of these three foci of advocacy of socialist core values actually agree with concepts of Christian faith and with principles of basic Christian values. These two types of values are basically interlinked. “Prosperity, democracy, civilization, harmony,” are the value objectives at the national level; from the Christian faith perspective, they represent God’s blessing on a nation and its people, embodying God’s will and desire for humankind. “Freedom, equality, justice and rule of law” are the values orientation at the social level. According to Christian faith, these are

the embodiment of the attributes and will of God. God gives humans free will; all persons are equal before God; God is Godself righteousness, and demands that human society be just; God chose the Israelites and first of all issued his laws and decrees to the people through Moses, making clear to the people his commandments and laws. “Patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship” are the standards of values at the level of the individual citizen. From a traditional Christian faith perspective, these are the basic demands of God to his people. The prophets of the Old Testament and Jesus himself all lay down for us a model of love for one’s country and people. According to the demands of faith, one should be industrious and hardworking, taking the work one does as one’s “vocation”; keeping one’s word with integrity, kindness and goodness are all part of a Christian’s moral character.

The Chinese Protestant church, taking the principles of Christian faith as its support, should enter into a deeper understanding and practice socialist core values, unceasingly integrating into the value system of mainstream Chinese socialist thinking, leading the majority of Christians to be enthusiastic supporters, conscious upholders and active practitioners of socialist core values, promoters of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

### 3 *Cultural fusion*

Some Christians think that since the way of life preached by Christianity is transcendent, Christianity therefore “transcends culture.” However, the revelation of the incarnation makes known to us that the way of life of the invisible and all-transcendent God can only manifest God’s great love for humankind by becoming flesh and accomplishing the work of redemption. The incarnate Jesus Christ is a real human being. The Dao entered a real nation

and people, a real cultural and social environment. The way of God and the gospel truth can only realize its meaning by entering into a real cultural and social environment, can only thus accomplish God's will. Therefore, although the way of life preached by Christianity is transcendent, the gospel can only bear fruit, can only have meaning by entering into a specific culture.

Christian or religious views such as those of Paul Tillich, or secular understandings, have in common the understanding that religion and culture are connected. "Religion exists, acts, develops, changes within a culture; religion cannot separate itself from culture."<sup>24</sup> Religion is a cultural phenomenon. Christianity itself is a kind of culture, it is "cultural" in nature. Christianity is a kind of human faith system that exists within actual social life. It cannot truly transcend history and reality, it "must 'enter history,' 'enter culture.'" Christianity is a kind of faith system, and so is inevitably a kind of cultural system, "with its 'cloak of culture,' 'cultural fusion,' and 'common cultural make up,' spreading horizontally across its area and developing vertically through history."<sup>25</sup>

At the cultural level, Christianity is a crystallization of the ancient Hebrew and ancient Greek cultures, that became the spiritual content and foundation of Western culture, representing its spirit and cultural tradition. Christianity's entry into China and its development there was a meeting and collision of two great civilizations, two strong cultures. From the Tang dynasty onwards, over the course of more than a thousand years of history, the path on which Christianity and Chinese culture encountered one another has not been smooth. The Christianity-Chinese culture relationship "has been one of twists and turns and complex

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24 Zhuo Xinping, 9.

25 Ibid.

changes.” Now, we have already welcomed a brand-new era, and history has given these two a rare [new] opportunity to become acquainted, make friends and converge. If the “two sides ‘struggle’ neither gains, but humanity gains from ‘peace’ between them.”<sup>26</sup>

Many others before me have pondered, explored and labored over the theme of Christianity and Chinese culture. In my humble opinion, regardless of whether we regard Christianity as a faith system, spreading the truth of its gospel, or as a cultural system that wants to survive and develop in China, it must enter into Chinese culture and assimilate to Chinese culture. The fusion of Christianity and Chinese culture includes two main dimensions: 1) the truth of the gospel of Christ must be interpreted and made known through Chinese culture; and 2) Christianity as a culture with Western characteristics must encounter and merge with Chinese culture.

First, for the Way of Life to appear, take root, bloom and bear fruit in China, for the truth of the gospel to develop among the peoples of China, it must be interpreted and preached using the spoken and written language of China in ways that Chinese people can understand and accept. “When speaking about doctrine, speak Chinese.”<sup>27</sup> Acts 2 records that after Christ’s resurrection and ascension, when the Holy Spirit came down on the first Pentecost, people from every place heard the disciples preaching in their own languages. The survival and development of Christianity in China is like that grain of wheat; it must fall to the ground and die, shedding its external things, preserving its innate character, absorbing all the nutrients of the soil, bearing the fruits of life in greater abundance. The innate character of Christian faith must be conveyed through Chinese culture.

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26 Ibid., 65.

27 Zhuo Xinping, 36.

The development of Christianity in the West went through the same historical process.

Second, Christianity and Chinese culture are two cultures, each with its own characteristics of East and West; their past encounters a series of twists and turns, ups and downs. But we should also see Christianity as an open cultural system and Chinese culture, too, as one where “all rivers run into the sea,” a culture with an extremely strong tolerance. It is entirely possible for these two to co-exist, to have a common form, and be organically integrated on a foundation of linkages and dialogue. The fusion of Buddhism, with its Indian origins, and Chinese culture provides us with a successful precedent. Both Christianity and Chinese culture have, in the course of their respective histories, amassed their own outstanding components. Both sides can draw on each other’s experiences and absorb each other’s essence, so as to mutually enrich their common development. If Christianity and Chinese culture can achieve the friendship and fusion described in these two points, then a genuinely sinicized Christianity will emerge in China.

### **3 The sinicization of Christianity and the structure and management of the church**

In becoming sinicized, the structure and management model of Christianity as a social organization must also be sinicized. “Christianity is a mass social organization, a structure that operates normally in Chinese society. Thus its structure must also be sinicized; its infrastructure must conform with Chinese political and economic ideas, and must be carried out within the scope of the operation of socialist legal institutions.”<sup>28</sup> According to the Bible, church tradition

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28 Tang Xiaofeng, “My Understanding of the Sinicization of Christianity,” 305.

and the experience of the ecumenical church, the model of church structure and management should vary according to context. The New Testament records that in the early church there were differences in preaching, pastoral care and management between the church in Jerusalem and the gentile church, and among the gentile churches in different places, with differences in culture, staff, and the problems they faced. In the historical traditions of the church, there were differences between denominations, between groups with different faith characteristics, such as Roman Catholics and Protestants, and among Protestants such as Anglicans and Presbyterians, Presbyterians and Methodists. Structures and management models were all different. And today, among the ecumenical churches, “due to national differences, each country’s church system and method of church management differ to some extent.”<sup>29</sup> Circumstances differ, so church organization and management naturally differs; church structure and management methods should be suited to local conditions.

Since the 1950s, along with the profound changes that have taken place in our social system, the Chinese church has gradually shaped the present system of organization and management based on the actual situation of Christianity and reflecting our own special characteristics. At present, it seems that this organizational framework and management model corresponds to the reality of the Chinese Protestant church; it is effective and uniquely superior. However, we find ourselves in a rapidly developing era, in which our society is constantly changing and reforms in the economic

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29 Wang Zuo’an, 在中国基督教三自爱国运动委员会成立60周年纪念会上讲话 [Speech at the 60th anniversary commemoration of the founding of the Chinese Christian Three-Self National Committee], in *Papers from the Symposium to Commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Founding of the Chinese Christian Three-Self National Committee* (Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 2015), 12.

and political systems are constantly deepening. The “Outline of the Thirteenth 5-Year Plan” for national economic and social development has been issued, declaring that we must constantly “construct new development systems,” including, unceasingly “deepening reform of the administrative management system,” unceasingly “advancing the new urbanization,” process, etc. The mechanism by which the Chinese Protestant system operates must be suited to the times and circumstances demanded by development; management principles and methods must keep up with the times.

The institutional system and management model of the Chinese Protestant church in the new situation must continue to develop and improve. A major task facing the Chinese church is continued envisioning, development and perfecting of the organizational system and management model. This requires our common reflection and effort. In this process, we must:

1) seriously reflect on and formulate our own ecclesiology as soon as possible. In past decades, we have continued to speak of the need to establish a Chinese Protestant Church, but how to do so, and what sort of Chinese church we should build first of all involves ecclesiology and our view of the Church. A church organizational system and management model are questions of ecclesiology. Western ecclesiology mainly stresses theory and debate. Chinese ecclesiology should begin with church practice, taking church structure and management mode as the entry point to seriously reflect on and establish its own ecclesiology step by step. Establishing an ecclesiology advances the needs of Theological Reconstruction and the fundamental requirements of sinicization. It has important guiding significance for establishing a Chinese Church.

2) We must proceed in conformity with the Bible. All actions of the church must be judged by the Bible; or

in other words, such actions cannot run counter to the principles and spirit of the Bible. In the same way, the construction, growth and improvement of Chinese church structure and its management procedures, must conform to the principles and spirit of the Bible. In its embryonic stage, the New Testament church was rather simple; it could not provide complex and diversified models for later generations of the church to draw on. But the early church nevertheless reveals to us some principles, such as that churches in different regions had their own characteristics and were not subordinate to each other. They stood on their own feet, yet were one body in Christ and would come to each other's assistance. The establishment and management of the church in every place was for the spread of the gospel, pastoring and church development. For all of them, management aimed at their own conditions and problems.

3) To continue and draw on church tradition. On the basis of the "Four Marks of the Church" (one, holy, catholic, apostolic), in whatever era or locale no church could separate itself from the fundamental traditions of the Church.<sup>30</sup> Though the Chinese Protestant church is independent and self-run, it cannot divorce itself from reality—it must carry on the fundamental traditions of the church, such as that the conferral of holy orders is our heritage from the apostles.

4) Reference the experience of the ecumenical church. Churches of different nations, regions, and contexts, do not have the same organizational systems and management arrangements. We cannot indiscriminately copy any one model, but the various churches all have their own successes and experiences, and all these can provide definite points for reference and inspiration for us.

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30 Though Protestant and Roman Catholic interpretations of the Four Marks differ.

5) Our arrangements must be suited to the actual Chinese context. The construction, growth and improvement of church structure and management must take our reality into account and this includes China's political and social systems. Christianity is a community organization, and its operation and management modes must be coordinated with China's constitution, laws and regulations and policies; they cannot be contrary to or in conflict with them. In addition, China is promoting the comprehensive construction of China's legal system, constantly advancing the rule of law. Christianity must also constantly strengthen awareness of the legal system and adapt to China as a country ruled by law, and through the demands of developing governance by law, administration by law, and building a law-based government and society, Christianity should strengthen construction of its own regulations on the basis of related national laws, regulations, and policies, thus building a sound set of regulations for Christian operation and management and enabling Christian work to be more systematized and standardized. Protestant CCs and TSPMs, as well as churches and meeting places, should undertake to educate the majority of believers in knowledge of the laws, enabling them to continue to establish a concept of the law, enhance their awareness of the legal system and be good citizens who study, understand, apply, and adhere to the law.

6) Face the Christian reality of China. The construction, growth, and improvement of the system and management approach of Chinese Protestantism must be based on the real circumstances of Christianity in China, and must remain oriented towards development and problems. Problems in the current state of Chinese Protestantism require our attention and awareness, problems such as being a church in the post-denominational era that continues on the path of unity, such as how we can fully respect different faith characteristics as well as keeping the Chinese church on

the road to unity. The self-construction of some CC&TSPM organizations is rather mediocre; some are rather seriously mechanistic, or feudalistic and lack cohesiveness, influence and rallying power among believers. They have not been very effective. For several decades now and for a variety of reasons, some Christians have drifted away from the CCC&TSPM. how can the CCC&TSPM better unite, serve, and lead these Christians on the basis of the relevant national laws, regulations and policies? How can localized management be put in place where now each church goes its own way and there is a tendency toward disunity? How can the longitudinal relationship between different levels of CCC&TSPM organizations and between grassroots CC&TSPM organizations and churches and meeting venues be strengthened? How can the Chinese Protestant church be maintained as a whole? How can we continue to build sound CCC&TSPM organizations everywhere, strengthen self-construction of the organization and the self-strengthening of our pastoral workers to better embody the religious, political, and social functions of the CCC&TSPM, and improve the effectiveness of the two organizations' function of bridging and bonding; etc.<sup>31</sup>

#### **4 The sinicization of Christianity and training**

In any undertaking or work, people are the number one key factor. Just so, on the path to sinicization of Chinese Christians, personnel are the essential element. Chinese Christian leaders who were exploring independence and indigenization of the Chinese church in the 1920s and 30s

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31 See Huang Haibo 黄海波, 对当前我国基督教两会功能的初步思考 [Preliminary thoughts on the current function of the CCC&TSPM], in *Papers from the Symposium to Commemorate the 60th Anniversary of the Founding of the Chinese Christian Three-Self National Committee*, 362-370.

recognized this issue. Wang Zhixin 王治心 holds that to construct an indigenous church, it must have “indigenous personnel” and “indigenous literature;” “without indigenous personnel there can be no indigenous church;” we must train indigenous church leaders and theorists.<sup>32</sup> In March 2012, experts from the Peking University Research Institute of Religion and Culture and the Center for Christian Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and a number of colleges and universities held a symposium in Beijing on “Studies in the Sinicization of Christianity.” During the discussion of one of three topics addressed, “The Key Question Faced in the Sinicization of Christianity,” attendees were agreed that the key question was the “personnel issue.” “The sinicization of Christianity requires the training by the church of more personnel grounded in a knowledge of traditional (Chinese) culture and with profound theological attainments.”<sup>33</sup>

The sinicization of Buddhism, as Tang Xiaofeng has said, could not have occurred without generations of sutra translators equipped with the necessary expertise for the times. These included An Shigao 安世高 (fl 148-180CE), early Buddhist missionary to China and earliest known translator into Chinese of Indian Buddhist texts, and Xuanzang 玄奘 (fl 602-664), Chinese Buddhist monk, scholar, traveler and translator, and generations of others between them. The efforts to fuse (Buddhism) and Chinese culture would have come to naught without these Buddhist scholars,

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32 See Wang Zhixin, 本色教会与本色著作 [The Indigenous church and indigenous literature], 文社月刊 [Wenshe monthly] 1:6 (1926): 1, quoted in Zhuo Xinping, *Christianity and the Chinese Cultural Context*, 138.

33 See Wang Shuai 王帅, “基督教中国化研究” 专家座谈会综述 [Roundup of the scholarly symposium on studies in the sinicization of Christianity], in *Studies in the Sinicization of Christianity*, vol. 1, 312-315.

grounded in the culture and understanding of their times, interpreting the sutras, and explaining Buddhist concepts in Chinese terms. Thus gradually sinicized Buddhist schools of thought such as Tiantaizong 天台宗, based on the Lotus Sutra, Huayanzong 华严宗, Pure Land (Jingtuzong 净土宗) and Chan or Zen (Chan zong 禅宗) took shape.<sup>34</sup> Islam's path to sinicization was similar to that of Buddhism.

Much foundational work in Christianity has not yet been effectively launched: translation of and introduction to the Christian classics, including theological works, and explanatory material on Christian faith, creeds and doctrines; this work requires people equipped with excellent education and knowledge. Chinese Christianity must cultivate and train up church leaders, biblical scholars, theologians and thinkers, as well as qualified ranks of seminary professors with sinicized thinking. The Chinese church must have top-level design and coordinated planning on the issue of personnel training. It must ponder the direction for training geared to the needs of current actual and future personnel training in the mid to long term, including mid to long term planning for Chinese theological education. Without reflection and effective action in personnel training, it will be extremely difficult for Christianity to follow the path of sinicization.

## **5 The sinicization of Christianity and the universal nature of the Church**

The visible church in the world has two special characteristics: all churches are both particular and universal. The sinicization of Christianity stresses and develops the national nature of the church in China and its

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34 Tang Xiaofeng, "My Understanding of the Sinicization of Christianity," 302.

local characteristics. The local nature of the church was an important principal for the founding of the church in New Testament times. In the apostolic era, the church among the Gentiles and the church in Jerusalem differed. The gentile church(es), unlike the church in Jerusalem, did not follow the Jewish tradition of circumcision; the gentile churches, such as those in Rome, Antioch, Colossia, and Corinth, also differed ethnically, regionally, culturally and in customs. Revelation chapters 2 and 3 record seven representative churches, including Ephesus, Smyrna and Pergamon. From the differences in what the Spirit says to these churches, we see that their circumstances are different; each has its own characteristics (Revelation 2:1-3:2). When the holy city, the new Jerusalem comes, with three gates on the north, three on the east, three on the west and three on the south and God's people enter from all sides, all tribes and nations in all their diversity together enter into the holy city, all entering together into the abundance in Christ (Revelation 21: 2, 10-13, 27).

Emphasis on the church's local nature does not at all negate its universal nature. "Individuality and catholicity, particularity and universality, are not contradictory, or mutually exclusive, but are complementary to each other. The more fully a church in a particular country actualizes its particularity, the richer the diversity of the whole church and the more substantial its universality."<sup>35</sup> China's fifty-six ethnic groups differ in history, culture, language, dress, social customs, population, etc., yet all belong to the big family of the Chinese people. The more prominent an ethnic group's traits are, the richer and more varied is the Chinese nation.

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35 K.H. Ting, 三自再认识 [Another look at Three-Self], in 丁光训文集 [Collected Works of K.H. Ting](Nanjing: Yilin Press, 1998), 319. English version in K.H Ting, *Love Never Ends: Papers by K.H. Ting*, ed. Janice Wickeri (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000), 102.

In the same way, in each era and place, the more evident the ethnicity and locality of each church, then the richer the universal church and the more it embodies abundance in Christ.

In emphasizing its national character and local characteristics, Chinese Christianity in no way does harm to or changes the basic attributes of the Christian Church; it remains part of the one, holy, catholic and apostolic Christian Church, remains a limb of the Body of Christ. The Chinese Protestant church maintains self-governance, self-support, and self-propagation, but does not close itself off; is not self-isolating. The CCC is a full member of the WCC. The Chinese Protestant church is ready to maintain friendly exchanges and cooperation with the ecumenical churches, willing to maintain fellowship and the communion of the saints in Christ with the ecumenical church.

While maintaining friendly exchanges with other churches, the Chinese Protestant church also is determined to resist outside exploitation of Christianity for purposes of infiltration. There are some foreign organizations and individuals, who out of various motivations or goals, do various things that are detrimental to Chinese churches, Chinese society and the nation. Some want to recover the churches in China that were part of their own denomination, thus damaging the unity of the Chinese church; some act out of political objectives and intentions. These may do severe harm to the Chinese church and society and we must firmly oppose them and take effective measures to resist them.

To sum up, the sinicization of Christianity accords with biblical teaching. It is a deepening and development of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, a basic requirement for the existence and development of Christianity in China, and is the goal and vision of the development of Christianity in China. The sinicization of Christianity is a comprehensive, long-term project. It cannot be settled once and for all or

accomplished in a single move. It requires that we put forth our unremitting efforts.

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## **FEMINIST THEOLOGY AND THE CHINESE CHURCH**

### **妇女神学与中国教会**

CAO SHENGJIE 曹圣洁

Feminist theology originated with feminist theologians in the West in the mid-20th century. It has had a unique role in integrating exegesis and theological tradition to raise women's consciousness. Other than the national seminary, Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Chinese seminaries offered few classes in feminist theology. Through foreign exchanges, however, feminist theology has had a definite impact on the Chinese church.

### **Feminist theology advanced the development of women's ministry in the church**

When normal church activities were resumed in China in the 1980s, all aspects of ministry began to flourish. Prior to the fifth National Chinese Christian Conference (1991), the national CCC&TSPM had a constitution, theological education, a hymnal, publications and Bible publication committees, but no women's ministry committee. At the time, people's thinking was that in the work of the church everyone, male or female, participated together, and so there was no need for a separate women's ministry. In fact, even in the past century, the Chinese church had a tradition of women's work. In the present church, women account for upwards of 70 percent of believers. If we do not do a good job among this group of believers, we will find it difficult to run the church well.

The Chinese church's contact with women in overseas churches grew in the course of developing contacts with churches overseas. Ms. Jean Woo 黄献真 (formerly of the China Program of the NCCC) organized a number of visits to Chinese churches by American church women's groups; in 1990, American feminist theologians Professor Letty Russell and Professor Kwok Pui Lan, who was in Hong Kong at the time, led a visit by a group of US and Asian feminist theologians; former Executive Secretary Eunice Kim 金裕淑 of the Asian Church Women's Conference 亚洲基督教妇女议会, visited twice. During these activities, they had informal discussions and shared experiences with women in many Chinese churches, as well as introducing how churches overseas carried out women's ministries, and they brought feminist theological views to the discussion. I remember one Asian Christian woman mentioned Jesus' healing of the woman who had been crippled for 18 years (Luke 13:16) to illustrate Jesus' special concern and care for women, bringing us much inspiration and encouragement.

1988-1998 was the WCC Ecumenical Decade of Churches in Solidarity with Women. Materials they sent to us set forth the theological basis for taking women's issues seriously: Christ's Body should be a fellowship of love. Both men and women are created by God and are limbs of the body in the church, who are bound together by common interests. These views enabled women to make a greater contribution to the church.

Additionally, the women of our church who went overseas for study naturally encountered feminist theology. To my knowledge, following our overseas studies, Rev. Gao Ying 高英, Rev. Peng Cui'an 彭萃安, Rev. Sun Meici 孙美慈 and myself, all came to feel that the Chinese church was not without problems regarding the needs of women and that solutions were needed. For example, the idea that

there was no need to develop women's ministry showed a fundamental disregard of women's characteristics and a failure to see women's role in the church. Feminist theology helped us to focus on gender from a theoretical level to raise consciousness and become aware of the significance of advancing women's ministry.

In 1995, the World Conference on Women met in Beijing. The YWCA, as a member group of the All-China Women's Federation, obtained permission to organize a seminar in the NGO forum. When we received the information that many Christian women would be coming to Beijing for the event, Chinese women could not remain silent. In response to the proposal by a dozen or so young colleagues, the national CCC&TSPM established a Committee on Women's Ministry. This was the first national women's organization in the church in new China, marking the turn of a new page in women's work. Following the establishment of the Committee on Women's Ministry, we took an active part in the NGO forum as well as in a seminar held jointly with the YWCA: "Women—Christianity—Society," enabling many foreign women to hear the voice of Chinese Christian women.

This illustrates how feminist theology played the role of advancing the theoretical underpinnings of Chinese Christian women's organizations in launching their ministry.

## **Feminist theology inspires women in the Chinese church**

Feminist theology touches a wide variety of aspects. Its direct bearing on women in our church lies in three aspects:

1 *Raising women's consciousness and understanding that in God's eyes, men and women are completely equal.*

China has been influenced by thousands of years of feudal thinking and its disregard for women has had a deep impact. After Liberation, male-female equality was stipulated by law, but in fact, in education, employment and many other areas, women still faced many difficulties. In the church, those who looked down on women more often than not cited certain biblical verses to support their views, such that women in the church faced yet another level of restriction.

Whether in society or in the church, people are frequently content with the way things have always been; people were accustomed to this inequality. This was so not only of men, but even of women themselves: because of being on the receiving end of the view that men are superior to women for the long term, they felt themselves inferior. When something came up, they shrank back, thinking that they should put themselves behind men. To strive for equality of the sexes, women must first have a feminist consciousness, realizing that they have value in their own right, and cannot be superseded by men.

Two Bible passages frequently cited in feminist theology are especially significant for women in understanding the value that God has bestowed on them: Genesis 1:27: "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." This shows that in God's process of creation, female and male are the same. Both have God's image: as God created man, so he created woman, with no difference in value between them. The second passage is Galatians 3:28: "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ

Jesus.” This illustrates that in the salvation of Jesus Christ, male and female receive the same grace, without difference. Thus, women have absolutely no reason to hold themselves inferior to anyone else. They should value the status they themselves have in Christ.

2 *On holy orders for women, emphasizing that God employs women in the same way as men as vessels for his service.*

Our church has ordained women as ministers since the 1980s. At present in China there are over 300 women pastors; the absolute number is not small. But this is not to say that in the Chinese church, women pastors and men pastors have been accepted in entirely the same way. There are some places with churches that have not yet ordained a woman pastor, or even if they have ordained one, still put the woman pastor in a subordinate position. It is said that there are some places where a woman pastor is permitted to lead worship only if the male pastor is unavailable. In some places, if a woman pastor is asked to officiate at a wedding, that woman pastor may, giving the reason that the believers are not used to a woman pastor, make every effort to recommend a male pastor for the task.

Feminist theology helps women investigate the Bible. In Old Testament times, when women had no social standing, God yet used Miriam, Deborah, Esther and other women to carry out God’s will. In the New Testament, the women disciples who followed Jesus were loyal to the Lord to the end. It was women to whom the risen Lord first revealed himself, and whom he sent to convey the news of his resurrection. The church was established on the foundation of Jesus’ resurrection and in this sense we can say that women were the first disciples. These teachings help women

in the church today to boldly take up what God has entrusted to them and accept positions in the church.

3 *Showing that women in the church should not only serve in regular capacities, but should shoulder significant responsibilities.*

Whether in Chinese or foreign churches, women form the majority of Christians and enthusiastically participate in many ministries of the church. Yet among church policymakers and leadership, the proportion of women is always small. This phenomenon is on the one hand related to a woman's own quality and ability; on the other hand, in many circumstances it is because women have not received the importance they deserve. The national CCC&TSPM attaches rather more importance to women. The current chairperson, vice-chairperson, president and vice-president of these bodies comprise 19 persons, four of whom are women. But beyond the national level, in other areas around the country, the representation is uneven. Prior to the convening of the Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference, women raised their hopes that 30 percent of delegates would be women, but the final number was only 21.3 percent. Prior to the Sixth NCCC, women put more work into the effort; the final number of women delegates was 26.1 percent, and though this was higher than five years previously, it remained far from the projected goal of 30 percent. Mainly this was because in the grassroots churches as well as at the city and provincial levels, few women had been promoted to positions of authority and it was hard for them to be elected [as delegates]. This also reflects women's status in the grassroots church—they do a great deal of work, but they still do not have much of a voice.

Feminist theology emphasizes that in creating women, God bestowed upon them special grace. The church should recognize women's role, encourage them to realize their potential and serve the church—as did Phoebe, a female deacon praised by Paul (Romans 16:1), and Priscilla, whose name precedes that of Aquila, her husband (Acts 18:26). Phoebe and Priscilla made great contributions to the church. If the church genuinely took note of women's role, not only should it not discriminate against or disparage women, but it should do more to create conditions to aid in their growth. Nurturing women in the church to assume responsibility is not only beneficial in representing women's needs, but would be highly conducive to the church's development.

### **Integrate the reality of our church into the study of feminist theology**

In the process of integrating the situation of our church with the study of feminist theology, I have learned two things from my own experience.

- 1 *We cannot mechanically apply certain content of feminist theology, but must encourage women to face issues squarely and bring out their own gifts, making greater demands on themselves and coordinating with male colleagues in better building up the Chinese church.*

In the West, some extreme feminist theologians who focus their attention on fighting for women's rights, will take any excuse to accuse male colleagues of suppressing women, which is quite intimidating. Feminist theology proposes use of the term "inclusive language," opposing the use of male-gendered terms to describe God, or the use of the male pronoun in generalizing all Christians. This notion makes

positive sense, as in the NRSV Bible where “brethren/brothers” is consistently written “brothers and sisters,” which is even more appropriate to the original meaning. But as to whether “Creator” should replace “Father” as the term of address for God—this would easily lead to a great deal of debate in our churches.

Chinese Protestantism wants to run the church well according to Three-Self principles. One implication of this is to “strengthen unity.” Today the Chinese church is short of qualified personnel. Things that exclude women due to seeing female co-workers as physically weak or only good at housework are totally wrong and must change. But within the church, male and female co-workers must work in coordination, rely on each other’s strengths to make up for their own weaker points, unite in building up the church, and not allow the debate about whether or not men and women are equal to become preeminent, giving rise to the misunderstanding that women are trying to “seize power.” In the current phase, it is still inadvisable for us to allow controversies such as “inclusive language” to impact the unity within the church.

Women should be respected in the church. They cannot depend on others to take care of them, but need to make practical efforts and prove by concrete actions that they are not lesser than anyone. The “Four Selves” for women advocated by the All-China Women’s Federation—self-respect, self-confidence, self-reliance, and self-improvement—are also applicable to church women. Women clergy and women co-workers face real hardships—inadequate education, narrow views—and are in even greater need of relying on the Lord’s might to overcome their weaknesses, taking God’s family as their study, constantly improving themselves and being devoted handmaids of the Lord.

- 2 *Feminist theology is very closely related to exegesis. We must study advanced methods of exegesis, not only to resolve women's issues, but more: we must care about the building up of the whole of Chinese Protestant theology, enabling the mutual adaptation of Christianity and socialism.*

If we look only at what is written in the Bible, then the Bible does contain things that are detrimental to women, such as Paul forbidding women to preach, requiring blind submission from women and so on. In fact, God does not treat people unfairly; scorn for women is not the message of the whole Bible. Feminist theology has always emphasized exegesis. It does not focus solely on passages in which God values women, but has asked that there be deeper study of passages that have been considered to disparage women's role to look at the meaning of the original languages, the grammatical tenor, the historical background, etc. This is very helpful in gaining an accurate understanding of the finer points of the passages. Reading the Bible from a feminist perspective always brings much new light to women.

China is in the midst of Theological Reconstruction. Theology must be based on the Bible, but how to understand the finer points of the Bible is of major importance. Many theological issues of concern to Chinese Protestant Christians are directly related to biblical exegesis: issues such as whether passages like "believers cannot be yoked together with unbelievers" means that Christians and non-Christians must be opposed to each other; whether Christians should separate themselves from all that is worldly; and so on. Christian women cannot be solely concerned with feminist theology, and unconcerned with the overall orientation of Christian theology. If the prevailing theology of Chinese

Christianity is stagnant and conservative, feminist theology simply will not receive attention unless there is healthy development and it will be difficult to improve the position of women in the church. Precisely because women have seen the benefits of exegesis and deepened their knowledge of God's truth, we must more actively engage ourselves in the current Theological Reconstruction in our church, and take leading roles to develop further study in exegesis.

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## A BRIEF LOOK AT WOMEN'S MINISTRY IN THE CHINESE CHURCH

浅谈中国教会妇女事工

GAOYING 高英

Following the entry of Protestant Christianity to China in the mid-nineteenth century, the establishment and development of the Chinese church was both constrained and influenced by cultural, political and economic factors specific to the historical period. Set against the larger backdrop of Chinese Christianity, trends in women's ministry in the church were also subject to all sorts of conditions and factors in and outside the church that were closely related to social history of the times and the church's own development.

In light of the modern and contemporary historical development of Chinese society, and based on the features and characteristics of the church as shaped in different historical periods, using a framework of structural analysis as our entry point to gain perspective on the full picture of women's ministry in the church may aid us in comprehending the historical significance of women's ministry from a contextual angle and the challenges we face.

Such historical antennae outline for us roughly three stages of women's ministry in the church.

### *Stage 1—Establishment and expansion*

With the outbreak of the Opium War between China and England in 1840, imperialist powers invaded, signaling the beginning of Chinese society's gradual reduction from its long-term self-sufficient small-scale peasant feudal

economy into a semi-colonized society. From then on, Chinese society's political and economic standing gradually underwent a qualitative change. After this, Western countries organized mission bodies to send missionaries overseas. These mission boards relied on a series of unequal treaties agreed by the great powers and the corrupt Manchu government of the Qing dynasty with their evangelization "allowance clauses" to fulfill Jesus' Great Commission. Imbued with a strong sense of calling and duty to preach the gospel, the missionaries began to arrive in China in large numbers, preaching the gospel to us Chinese. Thus was Protestant Christianity established in China.

In the initial stages of the mission enterprise, many mission boards sent only male missionaries, mostly pastors. Women missionaries arrived as spouses and assisted in the work. Then due to the growing demands of the work, female relatives of the male missionaries—older and younger sisters—followed. Due to the fact that women were only beginning to be independently appointed, among the early women missionaries, pastors' wives and female relatives were in the majority.<sup>1</sup> Women being sent independently and not as dependents by the mission boards emerged later. Many mission boards relaxed their gender-limited policies for three main reasons:

1) In the work of preaching and establishing churches in mission areas, there was a large quantity of women's ministry to be done, but due to the impact of the Chinese feudal tradition that held "it is improper for men and women to touch hands in passing objects," developing evangelization among women became quite difficult. In this situation, the gender superiority of women missionaries undoubtedly

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1 Tang Qing 汤清, 中国基督教百年史 [A century of Chinese Christianity] (Hong Kong: Taosheng Publishing House, 1987), 551.

afforded them the capacity to “open up” ministry among women, providing convincing objective evidence to their contemporaries.<sup>2</sup>

2) A grand and robust missionary movement arose from the late 19th to early 20th century in Western, and especially in North American, churches. The establishment of the “Student Volunteer Movement” attracted even more young believers determined to offer themselves for appointment overseas. There were quite a large number of unmarried young women and women college students who felt called by God among them.

3) The vigorous development of the missionary movement increased the need for missionaries in the mission areas of the various countries. Sending only male missionaries and their wives could no longer satisfy the need in the missionary areas: many mission boards found it necessary to adjust their sending policies and increase the number of women appointed in order to respond to the urgent need.

Initially, in order to respect the Chinese custom that held that “the sexes should be kept separate,” men and women sat separately during worship; some churches even installed a screen between them.<sup>3</sup> It was inappropriate for male missionaries to teach female students, to treat women patients or engage in women’s ministry. Thus, they were usually helped by their wives, but this was less effective than one would wish, and it was difficult to develop.<sup>4</sup> In order

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2 Ibid., 555.

3 Wang Zhixin 王治心, 中国基督教史纲 [Survey of Chinese Christian history] (Taipei: CCLC), 278.

4 Ibid., 579.

to supplement the ministry gaps among male missionaries and enrich their human resources, many Western mission boards began to send more women missionaries, especially professionals like doctors, nurses, and teachers. To satisfy the needs of the mission areas, individual mission boards established specialized women's mission departments; for example, the Anglican Women's Missionary Society<sup>5</sup>, the American interdenominational Women's Missionary Union and so on.<sup>6</sup> In order to enjoy greater independence, most women missionaries were single women. The ratio was clearly greater than that of single men. Up until the early 20th century, single women missionaries accounted for 27.9 percent of total missionaries, more than the 16.2 percent of single male missionaries.<sup>7</sup>

Following the entrance of Protestantism to China, many mission boards made rather large adjustments in their approaches to mission. In addition to building churches, they focused on the extremely backward educational, medical and hygiene conditions of the time. They energetically opened schools and constructed hospitals whose purpose was to preach the gospel through education and medicine. Since the results were quite good, this became an important means of evangelization, and churches, schools and hospitals were rapidly built. These three combined as one to form the missionary system.

Because the task of women missionaries was primarily to take the gospel to women, their ministry was very focused. They concentrated on starting schools for girls (church schools for girls), women's Bible schools (to train women evangelists and Bible women), opening maternity hospitals and other charities (including orphanages and founding

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5 Tang Qing, 228.

6 Ibid., 506-507.

7 Ibid., 550.

hospitals for abandoned infant girls), opening YWCAs, visiting women Christians, etc. Many denominational churches opened women's departments, women deacon departments, etc. In the early period, women's ministry was largely the provenance of ministers' wives; later it gradually was taken over and supplemented by independent women missionaries and Chinese women evangelists.<sup>8</sup>

Even though for women to be educated was a "departure from traditional norms," to enable these illiterate and semi-literate women to be able to read the Bible, the churches at the time ignored the censure and opposition of the forces of feudalism by setting up girls' schools to train women. In 1844, English church women established the first church-run school for girls in Ningbo.<sup>9</sup> Afterwards, the church-run women's schools that appeared one after another were set up by missionaries and the teaching staff was mainly women missionaries.<sup>10</sup>

It is worth mentioning that at the same time as churches were setting up schools for women, they were also taking part in a highly influential movement by vigorously advocating for and promoting an end to foot binding. Consequently, a prestigious social movement, the Natural Foot Society was begun. The publications missionaries started through the churches presented their views and advocated natural feet for women. This quickly evoked a response from some enlightened and important government officials who published letters making their views known to the public, criticizing and challenging the binding of women's feet, an ugly custom that satisfied an

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8 *Ibid.*, 343.

9 All-China Women's Federation 全国妇联, *中国妇女运动史* [History of the Chinese women's movement] (Beijing: Chunqiu Publishing House, 1989), 34.

10 Tang Qing, 556.

abnormal male aesthetic.<sup>11</sup> In 1874, missionaries proposed uniting with Chinese women, first establishing in Xiamen the “Xiamen Anti-Foot Binding Society.” Following this, “Natural Foot Societies” were established in response around the nation. These organizations were primarily the responsibility of missionary wives and women missionaries. Many church-run girls’ schools made natural feet a condition of entrance for female students.<sup>12</sup> In the “Natural Foot” movement, those who took the lead in emancipating their feet were all Christian women. Church initiation of women’s education and its launching of the natural foot movement was a strong assault on the traditional Chinese feudal culture of male authority, enabling women’s bodies and hearts to be set free, producing a great change and improvement in women’s social status. Missionaries and the churches they represented made exceptional contributions in the fight for male-female equality. They were ahead of their times, the first to sound the call in the early women’s movement in Chinese society, awakening women’s consciousness and becoming the fountainhead of the movement for Chinese women’s liberation.

In the realm of women’s ministry, due to the special nature of the objects of that ministry, the important historical task of the training and education of Chinese women Christians fell duty-bound on the shoulders of many missionary wives and women missionaries, setting them above women Christians in the Chinese churches, going beforehand to assume leadership of women and training of women in leadership roles. Yet these opportunities were frequently unavailable to women missionaries in their work in their own churches at home. Many of them paid a great price for this. Many women missionaries were unmarried

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11 *Ibid.*, 619.

12 *Ibid.*

and alone, undertaking long-term missionary work in China. Many of them spent their whole lives in a foreign land. The mission field provided full scope for their talents: they both trained the first group of educated women evangelists for the Chinese church and provided talented women intellectuals to Chinese society, training the first group of women teachers and doctors. These later became those who early on broke through the barriers of feudal tradition to receive public education and enter the ranks of the minority of women intellectuals. By the early 20th century, missionaries had trained nearly a thousand female teaching personnel.<sup>13</sup> They were active in every facet of preaching ministry; for example, churches, hospitals, school organizations. Analyzed from the perspective of women's studies, the educators trained by the churches, having been profoundly oppressed by feudal culture, located in subordinate status as part of the majority of women, established the new image of independent women and became a rebelling community to negate the traditional female role. In fact, compared to most women of their era, they gained self-liberation earlier and embarked upon the path of independence. Women of our senior generation, like Wu Yifang 吴贻芳 in education and Lin Qiaozhi 林巧稚 in medicine, are outstanding examples of these women.

Although missionaries initiated and first advocated collaborative service of both sexes in the life of the churches, the tradition of role categorization by gender that had been shaped over thousands of years still restricted many women in fully realizing the potential of their gifts for service. Since at the time the majority of denominations had no rules concerning the ordination of women, women missionaries and their Chinese co-workers were in the main equally excluded from serving in the pulpit or responding to the

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13 Ibid., 551.

call to holy orders, even though there was no lack of highly qualified persons among them. Prior to 1949, in Chinese churches nationwide, ordained women co-workers were scarce as could be. The complicated ordination of Li Tian'ai 李添媛 (Florence Lee Tim Oi), an Anglican deacon in the Hong Kong-Macau diocese, is somewhat typical.

During the “war of resistance [against Japan] period” Deacon Li was deacon of the Anglican Chapel in Macau, and presided over that church’s affairs. Because of the fall of Hong Kong, priests were barred from holding services in Macau. To cope with the extraordinary demands and difficulties of wartime, Deacon Li resolutely accepted ordination from the Bishop of Hong Kong, R.O. Hall, becoming the first ordained woman priest in that denomination. Unexpectedly, this action violated the Anglican canons denying ordination to women. At the time, the Archbishop of Canterbury asked Bishop Hall to abrogate Rev. Li’s position. In the face of such harsh reality, Rev. Li, considering the situation as a whole, determined to give up carrying out the duties of her holy orders.<sup>14</sup> Decades later, the Anglican Church held a service of thanksgiving on the 40th anniversary of Rev. Li’s ordination, using an indirect and face-saving manner to express to this handmaid of God, who was during all that time profoundly wronged, the denomination’s high-level apologies and public admission.<sup>15</sup>

Li Tim Oi’s experience is representative in one aspect: that though the church had made particular contributions to promote women’s liberation in and outside the church in establishing a relationship of male-female equality, the profound influence of traditional views still limited the church’s capability to comprehensively and completely

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14 Li Tian'ai 李添媛 [Florence Li Tim Oi] 生命的兩点 (Raindrops of my life), (Hong Kong: Anglican Book Centre, 1996), 23-38.

15 Ibid., 31.

interpret God's creative intention, especially in recognizing women's assumption of holy orders. Now as in the past it is still undergoing a long process of understanding.

To sum up, this phase of the church's ministry to women, in terms of its scope of instruction, methods and number of persons involved, and compared with later circumstances, did break some new ground, was pioneering and creative in a preparatory period, laying the foundation for the flourishing of women's ministry that began after the Cultural Revolution and the rejuvenation of the church. Today, our church's women evangelists, women's groups, women's choirs, women's conferences, YMCAs, etc., in content and method, to a certain extent still follow the traditions founded and shaped by the missionaries in the period of initial expansion; at the same time, they have made considerable innovations.

Even though women experience definite limits in terms of ordination, still, in other aspects of service in the church, objectively, service in the church offers fulltime women staff a huge space for realizing their gifts; they have a significant role, one that cannot be replaced. In opening up women's ministry, women missionaries had a leadership role and functioned as pioneers in their promotion of the women's liberation movement in Chinese society. Theirs was a role of historic significance.

### *Stage 2—Transformation and Refining (1949-1979)*

The establishment of the People's Republic of China (1949) signaled the transformation of the nature of Chinese society. China ended its dark semi-feudal, semi-colonial history and entered a brand new historical period of socialist society. Due to the changes in the nature of society, the church experienced unprecedented challenges and attacks, which triggered self-reflection and renewal at a deeper level for

them. Faced with new historical options, the interactions and restraints of religious, social, political, economic and cultural factors pushed the Chinese church onto the path of “Three-Self” reform. Three-Self was a product of historical conditions as well a necessity for the church’s witness in society, allowing it to regain space for its existence and development in new historical conditions.

Devoting itself to establishing harmonious relationships between the sexes that are more in line with human nature is one of the major achievements of China’s socialist revolution. Thinking on equal rights of men and women established in the practice of the revolutionary liberation movement has not determined the basis of the equal status of the sexes in the socialist system. Women’s social status underwent a huge change, comprehensive and unprecedented. The Chinese church and its ministry to women, as located within this transformation of the social system, could not but experience the impact and pervasiveness of this total change in the society, and the denominational tradition of denying ordination to women began to be greatly challenged. The course of this change differed from the experience of change in women’s status in the Western churches. In China, the influence of an external transformation in thinking was deeply felt; in the West, in addition to social impact, there were many more factors of a change in thinking within the church itself (such as theoretical aspects including exegetical views, church canons, doctrine, etc., as a result of serious examination and debate over the relationship between the sexes). Thus feminist theology preceded and moreover used feminist exegesis as theoretical evidence for changes in theological views.

The Chinese church, embarked on its “Three-Self” road, on one hand gained its historical independent self-initiative and self-management of the church and was deeply inspired

and imbued with expectation. At the same time, it was as if a new life was taking shape; the Chinese church was in a period of evolution, fully experiencing the labor pains of a woman about to give birth. In the environment of the new society, with the desire to explore and put into practice the path of indigenization, it faced rigorous challenges.

After the 1950s, as our church's ministry as a whole began to experience comprehensive shrinkage on all fronts, including women's ministry due to a decrease in women in the population, the scope of the ministry was greatly reduced. There were three main aspects to this:

- 1) At the outset of the nation's founding, the government took over all categories of organizations that received foreign financial aid. These were mostly church-run hospitals, schools and charities; their staff severed their church affiliation. Many people began to stay away from worship in the churches, among them a considerable number of female medical personnel and students and faculty of women's schools. The number of women Christians plainly diminished.
- 2) In the course of "Three-Self," the church determined to have no further relationship with Western mission boards tainted by colonial encroachment and this included severing financial contacts. Some churches already in financial straits because their source of funds was cut off, found it even more difficult to support themselves. In order to satisfy the demand for self-support on the one hand, in times of a large decline in the number of worshippers on the other hand, many churches began to merge or to cease meeting. In the late

1950s, all churches in China implemented united worship and the number of churches declined steeply. In the Beijing area alone, what had been over sixty churches and meeting points fell to four in the late 1950s. Prior to the Cultural Revolution, there were very few Christians in the churches. In the country as a whole, the few dozen seminaries and Bible schools could not maintain themselves due to funding and admissions difficulties and underwent a process of merging at this time. After numerous mergers, by the 1960s the scope of theological education was greatly contracted and only Nanjing Union Theological Seminary was left. In the meantime, a great number of clergy and co-workers, including women evangelists, faculty, and students, left the church or found other opportunities.

- 3) In the late 1950s, Chinese religious policy was more under the influence of the left-leaning thinking of the Soviet Union, and carried out a line of weakening, meant to bring about the early demise of religion. The entire Chinese society was in the midst of a historical calamity and religion was no exception, experiencing public persecution and attack. The policy of “freedom of religious belief” was seriously trampled upon, and churches and the seminary were forced to close. Public religious activities no longer existed, Clergy and co-workers, including women teachers were sent to farms and factories to do physical labor.

Women’s ministry in the Chinese church, having embarked on the Three-Self path, saw a profound change in its practice, fully embodying the principles of independence

and self-management, and a self-run church. At the same time, due to the challenges of these changes, women's ministry faced all sorts of difficulties. Although individual churches made breakthroughs in the ordination of women, due to the fact that the church's ministry overall was contracting, this had little impact for the greatly reduced numbers of women clergy (even fewer than teachers) and teachers in terms of realizing their potential. The whole ministry of the church, including women's ministry, was reduced to maintaining the status quo. With the Cultural Revolution, the church came under attack and its ministry completely halted.

### *Stage 3—Rejuvenation and Rebuilding (1979--)*

With the end of the Cultural Revolution, and a comprehensive evaluation of all policies by the Party Central Committee that included self-examination and criticism of the religious policy, the policy of "freedom of religious belief" began to be implemented, causing an unprecedented situation for Chinese religious circles. A relaxed religious policy and factors like the thirst for love and reconciliation, people's quest for the spiritual world and high-minded morals and ethics brought about an unprecedented resurgence and astonishing development in Christianity. The church's development prompted vigorous development in women's ministry. In the twenty years since 1979, women's ministry in general can be summed up as follows:

#### *Rapid growth in the number of believers*

Since 1979 when the church began to resume normal and open activity, the number of Christians in the Chinese church has shown constant and rapid growth, with women outnumbering men among the believers, resulting in a

gender imbalance in the churches. According to partial statistics, women today account for 70 percent of all Christians, even more in some places. Women outnumbering men is not confined to the church in China, but is a common characteristic of most churches worldwide. Many experts identify one cause for this to be that among the conflicting interests in society, women are the first to be marginalized, the easiest group to sacrifice. This has become a nearly universal phenomenon in various countries and societies in today's world. Religion's characteristic consoling function makes it all the more attractive to women who stand in need of comfort and assistance.

### *Rapid increase in the proportion of women clergy*

The increase in women believers naturally leads to a need for more women clergy and co-workers. In devoting oneself to pastoral practice to "run the church well," large numbers of women evangelists have been called to serve and are blessed with pastoral gifts. Since 1980 when the church ordained the first women clergy since the end of the Cultural Revolution, and for nearly twenty years since, the CCC&TSPM around the country have ordained larger numbers of women. The following statistics give an idea:

- \* Up to October 1999, 378 women had been ordained in China, 370 of these, or 97 percent of women clergy, were ordained following the end of the Cultural Revolution;
- \* These 378 women clergy represent 24 percent of all ordained clergy, or one-fifth.
- \* There are 415 women elders and 498 women teachers (assistant pastors); most of these were ordained in the last twenty years;
- \* There are 1239 women evangelists (not yet ordained);

- \* In seminaries and Bible schools, the number of women students has increased and women account for over 50 percent of students at some seminaries.

In the 18 [21 as of publication—ed.] seminaries and Bible schools, the number of women teachers has increased to over one-third. Among these are two female seminary presidents.

### *Women's sense of church participation is strong*

With the high proportion of women in the church, as well as other factors added in, women frequently express a more active sense of participation toward the church's ministry. Lay women are generally as high as 70-75 percent. In participation and assuming responsibility such as leading all sorts of meetings, Bible evangelism, church greeters, member visitation, cleaning and hygiene, preparing the service, selling books, finance and accounting, musical accompaniment and choir, etc., and all sorts of other service to the church, they have become the main force in church ministry everywhere. "Great is the company of the women who bore the tidings" (Psalm 68:11) [Chinese Union Version follows alternate reading as "company of women," NRSV has "company of those."—ed.] This verse is often used to describe the depth and breadth of women's participation.

### *Emphasis on organizational construction*

Due to the all-round development of the ministry of our church, the number of women Christians continues to rise. "Extensive and profuse" has become a characteristic of today's women's ministry. Uniting women is a top priority. At the proposal of some women clergy, in November 1993, the Committee on Women's Ministry was formally set up by

the CCC&TSPM. This was the first women's organization of national scope in the history of the church in China. Up to the present, eighteen such "Women's Committees" have been set up at various provincial-, municipal- and autonomous-region-level bodies of the church. In addition, in places where "Women's Committees" have not yet been set up, six churches have assigned women liaisons. Three churches are actively organizing preparatory Women's Committees. Establishment of women's organizations is receiving the attention and care of more and more churches.

### *Women are entering leadership positions*

Along with the increase in the proportion of women ministers, and women's full participation in church ministries, as well as high numbers of lay participation in church management in this period, increasing numbers of women have begun to enter leadership positions in the church and are active in leadership ministry at every level; from the national to the provincial, municipality, and county levels of every CC and TSM leadership, a number of women are involved. The number of women senior pastors increases every year and a large number of women serve as leaders in meeting venues. These sisters are not only participants in such activities as women's prayer groups, Bible studies, World Day of Prayer, or choirs, they are organizers and supervisors. In many church-run charities such as senior homes, kindergartens and clinics, the person in charge is, for the most part, a woman.

In the great and historic process of the rejuvenation and rebuilding of the Chinese church, women's ministry is very promising. Women's gifts are many and they have never before gained the full expression and affirmation they do today. Women's status in the church is no longer what it was in the past. Within the worldwide church as a whole, the

witness of China's church women is also a focus of attention, particularly on the question of women's ordination, which has perplexed so many churches.

At the same time women's involvement in church ministry has received grace and blessing, it also faces even greater new challenges and causes for reflection:

### *1 Theological theory and practice of ministry*

The particularity of the historical changes in the Chinese church has meant that it has experienced a ministry in which practice has taken precedence, with the church plunged in advance into the complex, even painful, theological debates and process of exploration that in many churches emerged over the long term. This also led to the feeling in the church of regret at our present stage that construction of theology is inadequate. This is the weakness in Chinese church ministry today; how could women's ministry not be affected? Changes in women's status in the church, especially the considerable number of women's ordinations, on the one hand witness to how the church in changing times heeds the calling and leading of the Holy Spirit, accommodating the demands of historical developments and social progress. As women's ministry developed, the church accumulated quite abundant practical experience. But at the same time, since social reform factors did more to change the status of women in the church than did the church and theology, the result was that during this process of change, it lacked the proper theological underpinnings and theoretical foundation. This became a bottleneck at the level of deep consciousness for the church in the search for equality of the sexes, especially inhibiting women's ministry from deepening on the theological level.

In recent years, the national committee on women's ministry has joined the national CCC&TSPM in developing Theological Reconstruction, successively organizing two ground breaking events: a seminar and a sharing session on feminist theology, feminist exegesis and women's ministry. The promotion of this work at the theological level has made new progress and gains, and has made a beneficial attempt for exploring and discussing methods of feminist theology and hermeneutics in the future.

## 2 *Becoming "one in Christ" and traditional Chinese culture*

How to enable the integration of the gospel with one's ethnic culture, how to use one's people's traditional culture to express faith has for many years been the major task for the elder generation of the church and for those who followed as well as one of the channels they devoted themselves to in putting the roots of the gospel into the soil of the culture. The influence of traditional views is deep-rooted, and over the long process of cultural accumulation, has formed its own system of "harmonious" relationships between the sexes. Even so the light gained through feminist theology and exegesis by delving deeply into the scriptures indicates that there exists between Jesus' behavior toward women in the Bible and his value orientation repugnance and conflict toward the many biased views of women in traditional culture, including the traditional Chinese culture of male superiority. The cultural background of the Chinese church determined its inability to take on the manner of expression and models of thinking of Western feminist theology. How shall we witness to the gospel of Christ in the context of our own traditional cultural values which run counter to God-given equality of the sexes? How to attempt, while respecting

the ambience of conventional forms of expression in the traditional culture, foster and seek to construct a view of relationships between the sexes that differs from traditional views—and one that witnesses to God’s inclusive love? Is it possible—without damaging traditional “harmony”—to build a new model of harmony in Christ? This would generate not only reflection on constructing and developing a feminist theology and feminist exegesis suitable to Chinese religious feeling, but more importantly, inquiry into how, in the traditional cultural context, to develop a methodology for feminist theology and exegesis.

### 3 *Participation in ministry and decision-making*

Compared with the amount of work by women in church ministry, their involvement at a decision-making level falls short. Especially in senior church leadership at the national and provincial levels, the proportion of women is even more universally on the low side and in some places, it is zero. It seems as if women have only the right to work, but not opportunities to be involved in decision-making. Even though in recent years our church has ordained a considerable number of women and their proportion shows a trend toward growth, it does not compare to the number of women in the church overall, and is far from adequate to satisfying the needs of the church, especially the development of women’s ministry.

Developments and changes in the church today are causing adjustments in the traditional views held by many people. Many no longer lightly term a demand for the right to participate in a group or community “fighting for power,” for fear of “old ideas” and “exclusivity.” On the contrary, looking at the development trend in the whole ecumenical church, churches have increasingly valued the proportion of three groups participating at the decision-making level—women,

youth and lay people. The goal is a greater expression of “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ” (Ephesians 4: 12). Thus, today the proportion of certain groups in decision-making has become a major index for assessing its status. As early as the 1991 Fifth National Chinese Christian Conference, a group of women co-workers for the first time raised the proposal that 30 percent of delegates to the conference should be women. But in fact, their number only reached 21.3 percent. Five years later, at the Sixth NCCC, another appeal came from the Committee on Women’s Ministry, but though the proportion of women delegates to that meeting rose by 5 percent, it still did not reach the anticipated goal of 30 percent.<sup>16</sup>

The church’s experience of ministry indicates that when the church is able to offer more branches space to realize the potential of their gifts in involvement in service, then the church is able to give greater expression to Christ’s abundance. The participation of women believers at the decision-making level embodies an important sign of Christ’s abundance.

#### 4 *Women’s Ordination and Role*

According to the tradition of division of labor in the church, women co-workers have frequently been mainly involved in women’s ministry, and have often participated and served in the capacity of “pastor’s wife” and “woman evangelist.” Following on the needs of the church’s ministry, the scope of their service kept expanding. Holy orders, once seen as forbidden territory for women, also opened to women in the end. However, changes in attitude came much more slowly than institutional changes.

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16 Cao Shengjie 曹圣洁, 妇女神学与中国教会 [Feminist theology and the Chinese church], (*Nanjing Theological Review*, No. 2, 2000): 36.

Today women pastors are accepted everywhere and the majority are the first or the first generation of woman pastor in a church or place. No matter whether for that church or for the women pastor herself, all experience a change—from nothing to something new—all experience or are experiencing an adjustment between traditional female status and identity and a quite dissimilar role, reflecting a process of acceptance and self-acceptance. According to the understanding of the Committee on Women's Ministry, there are individual churches which, although they admit women co-workers in their ordained status, nevertheless are not yet prepared to provide for them to perform their duties as an ordained minister. Additionally, speaking of our church's experience as a whole, though the ordination of women has been accepted by the majority of churches, there remain a few areas influenced by the constraints of historical tradition that are still not accustomed to accepting women's ordination (such as the church in Inner Mongolia). This shows that there exist issues of difference and imbalance for women's ordination. There is another situation that shows up in a minority of women pastors themselves: they would rather decline or give in, especially when a male pastor is also present and they are not able to take up ordained ministry. Besides this, there are also a few women co-workers who are not willing to be ordained. The reasons for these last two situations may be many, but we cannot exclude the possibility that this may be caused by the influence of traditional views.

At present the development of women's ministry in the Chinese church is in the midst of its most dynamic period in history and an abundance of experience has been built up; at the same time, serious challenges await. For women's ministry, the burden is heavy and the way long.

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## **A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON WOMEN'S ROLE IN THE CHURCH**

从圣经看妇女在教会中的作用

SUN MEICI 孙美慈

How female clergy see the function of women as shown in the biblical church in terms of their own role as women clergy, and how, on that basis they seek to improve women's self-awareness for active engagement in the ministry of the Chinese church, fully realizing their potential therein in order to give expression to their true worth as God created them: this is worthy of our serious consideration and discussion.

The CCC&TSPM adopted the "Resolution on Strengthening Theological Reconstruction" on November 23, 1998. This resolution was positively received and participated in by the Committee on Women's Ministry. The seminar on "Women's Ministry and Theological Reconstruction" was an excellent practical response, taking their own experience as a starting point and using women's angle of vision to undertake new and serious reflection, study and discussion on the proper role and value of women in the church and society as found in the Bible.

### **1 The role of women in society and the church in Genesis**

The earliest mention of women in the Bible is found in Genesis 2:18: "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.'" "Helper" in the original language is a noun,

thus “helper” [in the Chinese Mandarin Union Version it is translated as a verb “to help him”—ed.]. It could also be translated as “supporter,” and others, like Phyllis Tribble, reflecting on the phrase “it is not good that man should be alone” propose that the term “help” be translated as “companion.” In the original, “live alone” expresses “separately,” even “estrangement”: thus, Phyllis Tribble holds that only when God created woman did man become complete and in harmony; separation and estrangement result from “liv[ing] alone” and only the creation of woman brings man “out of despair to salvation,” “released from death.”

Moreover, this word “help” occurs twelve times in the Old Testament. Many of these instances refer to Yahweh’s work, mainly describing God’s help to the Israelites (See Exodus 18: 4; Deuteronomy 33:7, 26, 29; Psalms 33:20, 115: 9.11, 121:2, 146.5). Such help is definitely not ranked; no order of importance is intended. On the contrary, it brings to mind the fact that in the end only the strong can aid others. This does not imply, as some would have it, that the creation of woman was to help him (the male), to be his assistant, someone whose status was of course inferior. Of course, this writer has no desire to go to the other extreme by suggesting that women are necessarily better than men, but to indicate that it is necessary for us to move toward an accurate understanding of the true meaning of what God has revealed to us in Genesis.

Through the story of creation, we are enabled to see that people need social relationships. The creation story also highlights peace and equity between men and women as mutual subjects in companionship. Since God’s creation of humanity, God has hoped that humans would build intimate relationships of harmony and mutual assistance. This also shows that this society was constructed in common by men and women. Today, whether in the family, the society, or the

church, women too play a decisive role, and an irreplaceable one. The mutual domination of patriarchy and male superiority was a result of the estrangement between God and humans, human beings with each other, and humans and nature following human sin. Investigating the Bible to find God's earliest original intention in creation, we find that God created man and created woman in God's own image (Genesis 1: 26-27). Here we see that though man and woman are different, in the beginning they (man, woman) were created plural and not singular. It is very obvious here that the first humans created were an integral entity and not singular. Humanity is composed of males and females, male and female are in an association of interflow, mutual reliance, mutually benefit, mutual love, mutual help, and mutuality. Only thus can the image of God be fully embodied in human nature.

Therefore, whether male or female, if not in company with others, a person cannot become fully human, or find their true self. In Genesis, the man calls the woman "bone of [my] bone, flesh of [my] flesh" (Genesis 2: 23). This apt and visual metaphor precisely voices men's and women's reciprocal and intimate relationship. Moreover, the person emphatically made known here is one connected through relationships, and at the same time also a distinct person. Men do not have to imitate women, nor women imitate men, for God's real intention in creation is that humans reveal their authentic selves. This "authentic self" is precisely that which embodies God's abundance; this "authentic self" will, then, in the whole of human society (naturally including the church), have his/her authentic role and worth. In short, it is only when men and women coexist in mutual love and mutual assistance that God's image can fully appear.

Some may use the account of humanity's fall in Genesis 3 to make unwarranted charges against all women, making them the cause of men's misfortune by bringing the curse

upon them. Phyllis Tribble points out that the reason the snake tempted the woman was because she was intelligent and shrewd, more of a challenge than the man. The woman answered the snake fluently, and furthermore discussed complex “theological” issues with it. Looking back, the man seems more passive, so the woman spoke for them. Eve saw the fruit in the tree and it was pleasing, as well as making one wise, and so she picked it, ate it and gave some to her husband. The Bible does not include any sense that the woman “tempted” the man, and the man did not express any hesitation or unwillingness.

The whole story does not genderize sin, nor specially put the blame on the woman (or the man). The concrete expression of sin is that after eating the forbidden fruit, they shrank back, hid themselves and made a scene: the man blamed the woman, the woman blamed the snake: symbolizing the estrangement and separation between humans, between man and woman, between humans and nature (the snake, the earth) and the inner separation of the person from the self.

Traditional thinking in the church takes chapter 3 of Genesis as a story of the fall of humanity in which the woman tempts the man to sin. We can say that this is the reading of wishful thinking by patriarchal theologians. Phyllis Tribble holds that what is recorded in Genesis 3 is the course of the struggle between life and death: “Life” represents harmony, contentment and unity. Though it is not flawlessly perfect, nevertheless it has matured in the midst of various limits. “Death” represents hostility, wrath and abandon; thus in “death” difference becomes antagonism and rank becomes oppression. Human sin is in no way due to morals or gender, but originates in the struggle between life and death, spirit and desire. Patriarchal theology, however, sees the male as spirit and the woman as desire, and so forces spirit (man) and desire (woman) into binary opposition and declares

that sin begins from desire (woman). Woman thereupon becomes the scapegoat and the origin of original sin.<sup>1</sup>

The result of human sin was to do great damage to relations between the two sexes. Men put the burden of responsibility upon women and women pushed it onto the snake (nature). From then on, men had to struggle with the earth in order to eke out a livelihood. Women had to bear the pain of childbirth as well as suffer men's control over them. The whole order of creation lost harmony and became distorted and incomplete. Kwok Pui Lan 郭佩兰 points out that today we must recover the harmony in the created order. If we persist in this opposition between men and women, if men continue to regard themselves as always in the right, and if women silently accept their oppression, willing to be humbled, then we are continuing to maintain this "degenerate order," without understanding that God's original creation was completely good; we ignore the great power of the gospel.<sup>2</sup>

Therefore, men and women should seek a "reunited relationship" in order to establish an equal, harmonious society, as is their duty, and they must do their utmost for this.

## **2 Women's roles in church and society found in other books of the Old Testament**

Women of every description are found in the Old Testament in various roles, yet there are several women whose lives provide a glimpse of the positive and crucial roles women

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1 From Zhou Huashan 周华山, 假如上帝是个女孩子 [If God were a woman] (Hong Kong: Subculture Ltd., 1994), 197.

2 Kwok Pui Lan 郭佩兰, "妇女神学与华人教会" [Feminist theology and the Chinese churches], in 何笑馨 He Xiaoxin, ed., 华人妇女神学初探 [An exploration of Chinese feminist theology] (Hong Kong: Lutheran Theological Seminary, 1988), 93.

have played in history. Judges records the life of a woman prophet adept with both pen and sword, the woman judge Deborah—when the nation of Israel was being invaded and harassed by enemies, she led the Israelites to a military victory, enabling them to live in peace for forty years (See Judges 4:4 – 5:31). It is worth mentioning that, in the midst of this battle, there was another woman who appeared quite delicate, but was both brave, resourceful and courageous. This was Jael. When the war was in its final stages, she killed Sisera, the enemy leader, providing the solid assurance of victory. The Book of Ruth records the story of Ruth, a good and kind Moabite woman (not an Israelite), a touching story of how she took good care of her mother-in-law that has moved so many women and improved the relationship between so many mothers- and daughters-in-law, thus bringing harmony to families and stability to society. Later, Ruth became the great-grandmother of Israel's great King David, and part of the lineage of Jesus Christ. In the Book of Joshua also, we find the Canaanite woman Rahab who, because of faith, hid two Israelite spies. In protecting Israel's war, she too made a definite contribution. Later Rahab was also entered in Jesus' lineage.

### **3 New Testament women**

Even more excellent women are recorded in the New Testament and their roles are even greater. First of all is Mary, mother of Jesus. Bishop K.H. Ting often spoke of Mary. He felt that Mary was first of all an outstanding representative of humanity. In his essay "Creation and Incarnation," he writes: "And in the person of Mary we see the pinnacle and the crystallization of this process of preparing.... In her person God could at last anticipate the appearance of a sufficient spirit of dedication to serve as the carrier of Incarnation. ...Mary's assent played a decisive

role.... She stands in our midst and with her love, her dedication, her cooperation, brings our Lord Jesus Christ among us.”<sup>3</sup> Mary gave a fully obedient response to God’s request: “Here am I the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word” (Luke 1:38). The Incarnation became a possibility because of Mary’s entirely selfless offering of herself and her heartfelt deep love of God. Mary became the symbol of humanity’s cooperation with God. K.H. Ting held that Mary was not just Mary alone on her own, she was one member with a conscience of a small group that cooperated well together with God. This small group knew God’s might, knew that God desired to save all humanity. They knew that God’s holy task required human cooperation and they dedicated themselves to it. This “small group” appears not only in the four gospels and in Paul’s epistles, but in successive generations in the church, and in today’s Chinese church. It is because of the existence of this “small group” that the church has been able to develop very well.

It is well known that a group of women is written of in the Bible who dearly loved Jesus, who followed him everyday and when the Lord was nailed to the cross, they were there, keeping watch, keeping company with Jesus in his suffering. At dawn on the day of Jesus’ resurrection, they were there, hearts filled with reverent love of him, as they went to anoint his body with oils. Upon his resurrection, Jesus appeared to them first and they knew the Lord had risen indeed; unable to wait they ran to tell the good news of his resurrection to the disciples.

This “small group” is also recorded in Paul’s Gospel and letters. Romans 16 tells of a group of respected women. Verses 3-16 and verse 26 mention twenty-one names, ten of them women, eight of whom Paul mentions only by first

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3 K.H. Ting, *Love Never Ends*, ed. Janice Wickeri (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000), 289-290.

name. Two are mentioned by their status in the family: Rufus' mother and Nereus' sister. In Romans 16:7, Paul salutes his own relative, Junia, who was in prison with him, saying, she is "prominent among the apostles!" This tells us Junia was an apostle, which makes it very clear that Jesus also conferred the position of apostle on women.

Women played important roles in the apostolic era, establishing the church along with male believers. They were the preaching companions of Paul and other co-workers. Paul 16 mentions the names of many woman disciples, such as Prisca, Tryphosa and Tryphaena and others. Many women opened their dwellings so that the believers of the early church could have a place to gather; these became the cradles of the church. These women included Mary (Acts 12: 12), Lydia (Acts 16: 11-15), and Nympha (Colossians 4:15). There were even women who assumed a leadership role in the church, like Phoebe, deacon of the church at Cenchreae (Romans 16:1). The Greek term "deacon," would more accurately be interpreted as a leader entrusted to be in charge of preaching and governing in the church. Used of Paul and other disciples, the norm of address would be equivalent to the English "minister" (See 2 Corinthians 3:6; Colossians 1:7; 4:7) or "servants" (See Romans 15:8; 1 Corinthians 3:5; 2 Corinthians 11:15; Colossians 1: 23; Thessalonians 3:2; deacon is also applicable to men (1 Corinthians 3, 5). Paul referred to himself as deacon (Colossians 1:25). Deacon was an honored position: "Deacons likewise must be serious, not double-tongued, not indulging in much wine, not greedy for money; they must hold fast to the mystery of the faith with a clear conscience. And let them first be tested; then, if they prove themselves blameless, let them serve as deacons. Women likewise must be serious, not slanderers, but temperate, faithful in all things" (1 Timothy 3:8-11). In this passage, we see that Phoebe's responsibilities were extensive and included

preaching the gospel, teaching, serving and caring.

Historians point out that Paul entrusted Phoebe to take the epistle to the Romans to Rome. Romans was the most important of Paul's epistles. Martin Luther called it "the Bible of the Bible." At the time, to have a woman pass on this epistle was highly significant. The Jews of the first century took rare journeys to carry out business. Phoebe had to travel north to Macedonia and from there by ship to Rome. For a young woman to make such an arduous and long journey was hardly imaginable. No wonder Paul had such high praise for Phoebe and asked the church to treat her as would befit the saints (Romans 16:1-2). She is the only one from Cenchreae to be mentioned by name. It is clear that Phoebe's role and position as leader was quite distinguished.<sup>4</sup>

Another woman who took on an important role in the early church was Prisca. Her birthplace was Pontus, a province in Asia Minor. Paul, together with Prisca and her husband (Aquila), preached and founded churches in Corinth and Ephesus. Paul publicly thanked Prisca for aiding him in time of danger and expressed his deep gratitude (Romans 16:3-4).

When he mentions Prisca and Aquila, Paul usually puts Prisca's name before that of Aquila (four times out of six: See Romans 16:3; 2 Timothy 4:19; Acts 18:18, 26). This is rare in the patriarchy of Jewish society.

Additionally, in the early church, many women took an active part in the church's ministry. Among them was the woman disciple Junia (Romans 16:7), highly praised in this passage; Rufus' mother, who treated Paul as a son (Romans 16:13); Euodia and Syntyche, who struggled beside Paul in the work of the gospel (Philippians 4:2-3); also Mary, Tryphaena, Tryphosa and Persis, who have all worked

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4 Zhou Huashan, 107.

hard and served the gospel and the church (Romans 16: 6, 12), and also his woman co-workers Nympha and Claudia (Colossians 4:15; 2 Timothy 4:21). He exhorted Timothy to treat older women as mothers and younger women as sisters—with absolute purity (1 Timothy 5:2). Paul’s respect and appreciation for women is clear. This is poles apart from the patriarchal structures of rabbinical regard for men as superior to women.

We can see from the above that women and men in the early church participated alike in serving the Lord’s church, they played mainly four types of roles: (1) preacher, like Prisca; (2) the deacon or leader, like Phoebe; (3) exercising pastoral care for the flock, like Dorcas (Acts 9: 36-43); (4) having a nurturing role, like Mary’s home (Acts 12:12); Apphia’s home (Philemon 2), Lydia’s home (Acts 16: 14), and Nympha’s home (Colossians 4:15).

The women of the early church won Paul’s respect and admiration; He worked personally with them in active participation in the ministry of the church. Their untiring efforts were inseparable from that work. Thus, women’s position was raised and affirmed, through their own efforts and striving.

Of course, today in the Chinese church there are many women who genuinely dedicate themselves to every task in the Chinese church, their active involvement and tireless efforts have won the respect and affirmation of the majority of believers. But some women evangelists, though in the eyes of believers well qualified to be evangelists and pastors. Yet when faced with the offer of ordination, they make excuses because their husband is not yet ordained and refuse ordination for themselves. They based this on biblical verses like “man is the head of the woman,” “the husband is the head of the wife,” etc., because they wonder how they can possibly be ordained if their own husband is not. Others bring up some of Paul’s pronouncements to

oppose having women ministers, and are even opposed to women preaching and being involved in other church ministries. I have often heard people opposed to women's broader engagement in ministry quote Paul's most famous "hold your tongue" commandment: "women should be silent in the churches, .... For they are not permitted to speak ...." (1 Corinthians 14:34-35), along with "I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent" (1 Timothy 2:12). E.M. Wendell believes that this commandment does not come from Paul himself, because it is in contradiction to Paul's doctrine of equality: that in Christ "There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female"; for all are one (See Galatians 3:28).<sup>5</sup> However, in the Chinese church it is widely believed that this passage comes from Paul's own hand.

To investigate this claim, one has to begin with the term "speak" in the original language. Then we discover that in the original it means: "chattering or jabbering on and on," which is different from "teach" in 1 Corinthians 11:5 (translated as "prophesy" in Chinese). One of the reasons these women make all this unnecessary racket, may be because there are some principles they don't understand, so they call for an explanation during the gathering, but are hopelessly muddled, adding to the confusion in the room. Paul wanted to prohibit [such situations] in order to avoid adding to the disorder in the gathering, commanding them (women), "If there is anything they desire to know, let them ask their husbands at home. For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church" (1 Corinthians 14:35).

In 2 Timothy 12, Paul says, "I permit no woman to teach or have authority over a man; she is to keep silent."

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5 E.M. Wendell, *The Feminist Theology Landscape*, Chinese trans. Xi Chengjun 习承俊 (Hong Kong: Joint Publishing, 1994), 98.

There are also those who think this is not Paul writing, but something added later by another author. However, the traditional view is that Paul did write it, but that here “teach” in the original Greek means “chide,” or “instruct” or “guide”—it is not the same word used for “prophetic teaching” in the original. If we look at what precedes and follows the verse, we learn that it is pointing to the church Timothy pastors in Ephesus, where a small group of women dominated their husbands, chiding them at every turn, waving their hands around, bossing their husbands around, and furthermore perhaps doing this in front of a lot of people at the gathering. But in speaking of arguments that could arise over male-female attire and relationships, Paul emphasizes gender equality. For example, in 1 Corinthians 11: 8-11, we see the mutuality of gender equality.

In the Bible, we see women being set free through the gospel, as well as both sexes becoming “one” in Christ. This relationship is in no way simply an abstract concept, rather it should be applied in life. Hurley points out that “becoming one in Christ, does not mean that there is no difference between man and woman, or that they become one [physical] body or one nature; Paul’s concept of the body is that one body has different limbs and though the limbs are many, it is still one body” (1 Corinthians 12:12-13). Therefore, a woman pastor does not have to learn to handle things like a male pastor does, or act like a man; a woman must claim her status as woman. A woman’s gender is in no way a barrier, but her glory (1 Corinthians 11:11-12). Though men and women are different, they do not supplant each other, but look after each other, complete each other.

Furthermore, Paul never insisted on a rigidly defined persona, so neither man or woman need impose a set role on the other or restrict the other’s development. Paul made it clear that a woman could, on the basis of her status as woman, be involved in serving (the church), but he insisted

that woman was an independent person and that the two sexes could collaborate in developing a complete human life.

In addition, when Paul spoke of the husband-wife relationship, the organic relationship becomes even clearer. When Paul speaks of that relationship he is also addressing both parties. For example, in Ephesians 5 he requires wives to be subject to their husbands but at the same time requires husbands to love their wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:22-25). This makes it clear that maintaining a good husband-wife relationship is something both sides must work at.

Of course, in the matter of gender, Paul is after all a man who lived at a specific time in history. Looking at his opinion of women, though it is a huge breakthrough, it is very important to take into consideration the context of the society of the time and Jewish cultural tradition. His view of the women’s issue is inevitably limited. We cannot thoroughly discount the traditional fear and disparagement of men toward women of his day.

In any case, Schussler-Fiorenza points out that in its gradual process of institutionalization, the early church mixed in some patriarchal qualities, such that by the second century, the roles played by Christian women were greatly reduced. Women were refused entry to the church’s holy orders—bishop, minister, deacon. Therefore, women exegetical scholars have renewed emphasis on uncovering Jesus’s views on equality, so the gospel that inspires women would not be likely to be deceived by a church that gradually revolves around men.

In sum, for women the Bible is an extremely important book, it can be both used as a pretext for the supremacy of male privilege, and can also act as an important resource for women in gaining equality. Therefore, women must begin from their own experience and proceed in an analytical and

discriminating way in their interpretation of the biblical tradition, enabling the Bible to make its proper contribution to building a more equitable society.

Today we see women reading the Bible from their own perspective. The first step in exegesis is recognition of woman as a “human/person,” created by God, in God’s image, having a whole and complete human nature and value, capable of independence and self-determination, who believes that God created men and women equal. God has both “father” and “male” characteristics as well as “mother” and “female” characteristics. Of course, God is abundant, and cannot be fully known by humans applying human male or female qualities, but when we take a female perspective for a new realization of God, then we can know God’s abundance. At the same time, feminist exegesis changes to some extent some erroneous concepts in traditional theological thinking, with the result that women believers, clergy and evangelists can take a more active part in every ministry of the church in more areas of China.

Women’s roles in the church are increasingly active and important now. They have become the main force in church life and service today and women believers have become a large group within the church. If the church continues to treat women’s issues according to traditional views, the self-development of the church is bound to be obstructed. At the same time, we know that women’s issues are very complicated and cannot be resolved in a short time. They are affected and restricted by religious, political, economic, social and cultural factors. Further, women’s liberation goes in step with social development, so social macro circumstances also impact and restrict the course of women’s liberation. In the present church system and structure, we cannot deny that prejudice toward women and varying degrees of discrimination remain. Improvement in women’s status

requires that all believers strive to cast off the former male-centered traditional theological thinking, and come to a new understanding and thinking about the true meaning of God's creation of men and women, affirming the worth and status of women. On the issue of treatment of women, we should both oppose the kind of thinking that sees women as inferior to men from birth, that says women should not be ordained and cannot take part in sacraments and decision-making around important matters, and also disapprove of extreme ways of handling things, such as the sort of approaches that deliberately distort women's characteristics, or mechanically apply a male behavior pattern. We should see in men and women the characteristics given each of them by God. Only when both, on a foundation of self-affirmation, mutually cooperate and go forward together can they create a harmonious and happy environment.

We believe that through collaboration of the whole body of male and female believers we can convince the church not to undertake exegesis from a male perspective only, but to add a female perspective in doing new theological reflection for a fuller understanding. Such an understanding will leave nothing to be desired. It will expand our vision, enrich our faith lives and move closer to the truth. Before God and in Christ, male and female are equal, all are beautiful, all are beloved by God. In the family, in the church and in society, women have their places. The collaborative knowledge and effort of every woman and the whole body of men and women believers is needed to discover how to bring out women's intelligence and wisdom, reflecting the role and worth of their "true selves," in beautiful witness to God. We are convinced that the vigorous rise of women will be a driving force in the rejuvenation of the church. The role of women is crucial; it cannot be underestimated. It can be said that women naturally are already to be found in the church,

they are rising as part of society, and they are heading step by step to the realm of the spirit.

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## UNDERSTANDING PAUL'S PROHIBITIONS AGAINST WOMEN IN FIRST CORINTHIANS

如何理解哥林多前书中保罗对妇女的禁令

WANG PENG 王芃

Among Paul's New Testament epistles, there are passages that perplex women readers today. These include 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 ("...women should be silent in the churches.... For it is shameful for a woman to speak in church."); 11:4-16 ([women] "should wear a veil"); and 1 Timothy 2:11-13 ("I permit no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent."). These are the most blatant.

Already in the 1920s, there were Chinese women Christians who called these passages into question. For example, Dr. Zhang Zhujun 张竹君, who worked with the Red Cross, was said to be the first Chinese woman to deliver a sermon from the pulpit. She disapproved of Paul's statement concerning women preaching in church. She believed men and women were equal, so why should women not be permitted to preach? When Ms. Cheng Guanyi 诚冠怡 debated the issue of women being appointed as clergy, she raised the exegetical question of whether biblical teachings could be applied in different circumstances. Ms. Ding Shujing 丁淑静, the first Chinese Secretary of the Chinese YWCA 中华基督教女青年会, once pointed out that Jesus' attitude toward women differed greatly from traditional Jewish practice.<sup>1</sup>

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1 Kwok Pui Lan 郭佩兰, 从华人妇女的角度谈释经学 [Exegesis from Chinese women's perspective], in 亚洲处境与圣经释论 [Biblical hermeneutic in the Asian Context], ed. Archie Chi-chung Lee 李焯昌 (Hong Kong: CCLC, 1996), 252.

These path-breaking Chinese Christian women endured many difficulties in order to bring Chinese women's roles in the church to their full potential, and did pioneering work in feminist exegesis, church structure, and gender equality in practice.

Over eighty years have passed since their achievements. But though in the majority of places women preaching and being ordained are no longer an issue in today's Chinese church, yet hidden discrimination against women still exists. Paul's interpretation of Old Testament Bible passages and its impact, still unconsciously dominates our views.<sup>2</sup> As today's Chinese women Christians, how should we regard Paul's prohibitions against women? In what follows, I want to consider this question by focusing on theological entry points and current methods of reading the Bible and how Paul treated women.

## 1 "Literal" interpretations of the Bible and their limits

Although as we read them today the several passages mentioned above are not easy to understand, yet in fact in the history of the church, in the history of the women's movement for liberation and even in social and cultural life they have had a lasting impact.

In the Middle Ages, the literal interpretation of these passages became the major evidence supporting the view of women as inferior, to the point that people thought that

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2 Happily, since the 1980s, in biblical research and preaching, Christian women in the Chinese church, applying feminist exegetical methods, have made some beneficial attempts and discovered much new and heartening light; for example, in 1997 the Hong Kong Women Christian Council published *In God's Image—Feminist Exegesis*, which included Siu May Kuo's 郭秀梅 "The Moabite Woman Ruth" and Rev. Gao Ying's 高英 "The Relationship between Martha, Mary and Jesus from a Woman's Perspective."

among the creatures God created, women's position was between men and animals—though higher than animals, they were not to be mentioned in the same breath as men. In their view, though women had souls, they lacked the capacity for higher rational thought, moral discernment, acumen and theological understanding that men possessed. This dangerous observation led to the repudiation of women's education, and to a tacit lowering of women's social status.<sup>3</sup> During the Victorian era in England, there was some fondness for these several passages as well and some willingness to interpret Genesis 3:16 literally (“I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children”), and to quote these passages to oppose giving women anesthesia during delivery; they were also used to refuse women the right to vote.<sup>4</sup> There is no lack of examples, historically or in the present, of what these literal interpretations have wrought for women: belittling of status and depriving women of their well-being, all of which are at variance with the spirit of the gospel. Theologian E. Brunner was exactly right when he pointed out: “If we resort to a number of passages and insist on their literal interpretation, this shows that our attitude toward the authority of the Bible both runs counter to the spirit of the gospel, and also is legalistic.”<sup>5</sup>

Though we cannot categorically deny the value of a literal interpretation, in fact on the question of the role of women in the church alone, there are many passages in the Bible that, just on the level of a literal interpretation, show

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3 William F. Orr and James Arthur Walther, “1 Corinthians,” in *The Anchor Bible*, 262.

4 Ji Boxun 纪博逊, 创世记注释 [Commentary on Genesis], vol. 1 (Hong Kong: CCLC, n.d.), 159.

5 Ye Jingde 叶敬德, “卜仁尔（布隆纳）的婚姻神学” [Brunner's theology of marriage], in 基督教文化评论 (Christian cultural criticism), No. 6 (Guiyang: Guiyang People's Press), 265.

women in the early church in positive and vigorous roles; for example, Mary, the mother of John whose other name was Mark (Acts 12: 12), Lydia in the church at Philippi (Acts 16: 14-15), Phoebe in the church at Cenchreae (Romans 16: 1-2) and so on. Names like these would form a long list. But how can we prevent their precious witness from being cancelled out, or drowned, by a traditional simplification of the prohibitions against women found in Paul? Facing these passages that bewilder us and are made difficult to grasp by the separation in time and space, it is essential for us, with the prerequisite of upholding the authority of the Bible, to find another method of biblical interpretation. Paul says: "...the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Corinthians 3:6). The goal of all our methods of biblical interpretation is seeking this "life," hoping to know what God is saying to us through the Bible passages. At times, especially when looking at the Chinese Union Version of the Bible and other Bible translations of these passages and dealing with them in a literal, simplified way, we are not only like blind people seeking to describe an elephant only through touch, easily mistaking the part for the whole, and diverging from the spirit of the gospel, we are objectively damaging the authority of the Bible.

## **2 Return to the *Sitz im Leben***

The historical critical method can help us to break out of predicaments in our understanding of the text to a great extent, taking us back to the times in which the passage was located, and permitting us to understand the real background that produced it.

"Around the world today, study of the Bible points to two objectives. First, to search out the original sense of the passage in its original historical context—the message the author or editor wanted to convey. Because of the

history and distance is so remote, this is not easy, but it is unavoidable. Modern tools, including all types of critical methods, can help to accomplish the task. The other objective is to interrogate every sentence: what meaning does it have for our times, for our place?"<sup>6</sup> Historical criticism points at the first objective. Although today in the Chinese church and even in seminaries, biblical scholars still have misgivings about this method, in fact in reading the Bible, everyone, to a greater or lesser extent, consciously or unconsciously, has applied it. For example, when interpreting accounts of polygamy in the Old Testament or the teachings of Paul regarding the relationship between master and servant in the New Testament, we cannot believe that there is still a need for polygamy or slavery in our times. Again, for example, when we are reading Paul's demand to the women in the church of Corinth that when praying or teaching they must cover their heads (1 Corinthians 11:4-16), most churches in the world today believe that this was meant as worship etiquette for the church in Corinth in his day, and not at all for worship in churches today. For "Paul simply accepted the cultural context of his times, but had no intention of seeing these as permanent rules."<sup>7</sup> Which is to say that Paul's prohibitions on women in the church in Corinth existed in the particular conditions of the time and are not a teaching for women at all times and places, everywhere and absolutely.

Returning to the conditions of social life in biblical times is an important step in the historical-critical method.

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6 Fang Zhirong 房志荣, "中国人如何读圣经" [How do Chinese read the Bible], in 亚洲处境与圣经诠释 [Biblical hermeneutics and the Asian context] (Hong Kong: CCLC, 1996), 138.

7 Malar Chinniah, "Women in the Early Church and the Interpretation of Paul's Letters Today from a Feminist Perspective," in *In God's Image*, 114.

Previous research has already provided us with some possibilities for understanding the situation of the time.

The Corinth of Paul's day was a city of slack morals and rampant licentiousness. Because of this, Paul felt that in such conditions, it was better to err on the side of caution and severity, so to avoid those outside the church criticizing Christians as being too lenient, or exposing Christians to temptation.<sup>8</sup> At that time public morals were in decline and women of position usually led lives of seclusion, staying in their homes and rarely going out. At home, they could receive no one but their husbands. They could not be present at banquets, could not go out alone, could not attend public occasions and certainly could not make their opinions known on public occasions. What kind of women were those who did take part in public activities? They were the hundreds of female priests in the temples, temple prostitutes, who met clients on the street everyday at dusk.<sup>9</sup> Those who stayed at home and seldom came out were the good women; those who uncovered their heads and showed their faces were the prostitutes. This was the social background of Corinth when Paul lived.

The women's liberation brought by Christianity constituted an attack on and challenge to traditional social customs, and also caused some problems. In the church at Corinth, there were very possibly some women who took leadership posts, and Paul seems to have worked with them without hesitation. It was the same at other churches, such as the church at Philippi and so on. But at the time Paul wrote this epistle, some problems had emerged at the church in Corinth, divisions and cliques, a lack of order in worship, etc. Paul may have felt the women in the church there could not shirk responsibility for these problems.

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8 William Barclay, *Commentaries on the New Testament* (Chinese version) (Shanghai: CCC&TSPM, 1999), 1571.

9 Ibid.

The biblical injunction that “women should cover their heads in church” has had enduring influence. Even today in Europe, men must remove their hats, while women need not. Even tourists at St. Peter’s Basilica in Rome must comply with this demand, and of course, women must wear some kind of head gear. At the big churches in Rome during the summer tourist season, women can wear sunhats outside and in, while men must follow the rules and take off their hats when entering a church. Long hair is women’s badge of honor (1 Corinthians 11:15: “but if a woman has long hair, it is her glory. For her hair is given to her for a covering.”) This is a long-standing custom. Only in the early years of this century have women begun to wear their hair short. In Paul’s circle in his day, voices opposing women were always strong.

Using literary criticism to investigate 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 in the context of the surrounding verses, the Hebrew term for women in verse 34 might be better translated as “wife.” Linked to the following sentence, 14:35, and to Ephesians 5:24, these all indicate the husband and wife in a family. Normally in Judaism, the male-female social relationship is that of husband and wife and thus, in this passage, Paul’s main focus of attention is the married couple in the family and not a relationship of social subordination as of men and women in society or the church. In 1 Corinthians 11:5, Paul suggests that women can pray and preach in church, so the “women should keep silent in church,” does not include in prayer or preaching, otherwise it would contradict this passage.<sup>10</sup> Linking to the language in context of passages in 1 Corinthians 14:26, 33 and 40,

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10 Some scholars who study this passage from the perspective of Redaction Criticism 编修考据, believe that 1 Cor. 11:34-36 is was not originally written by Paul, but added later. They base their reasoning on the fact that it contradicts 1 Cor. 11:5.

what is stressed here is “all things should be done decently and in good order” (14:40), “For God is a God not of disorder but of peace” (14:33). Set beside the passage that follows, “ask their husbands at home,” it is quite possible that “not permitted to speak” is because these wives tend to interrupt the prayers and preaching. No matter what is being indicated here, it is as Calvin said, the specific thing being talked of here is of no importance. What Paul is prohibiting can only be those behaviors that are at odds with the ceremony of worship and teaching.<sup>11</sup>

Looked at from today’s point of view, these sorts of prohibitions are derived from the values of a male-dominated society. Of course, no one can transcend their own historical and social context. We cannot be overcritical of Paul in applying our feminist liberation views.

Some think that Paul’s prohibitions against women may stem from his integration of his stress on women’s rights and position. On one hand, he encourages and even admires those women Christians who enthusiastically serve in the church: “I commend to you our sister Phoebe, a deacon of the church at Cenchreae, so that you may welcome her in the Lord as is fitting for the saints, and help her in whatever she may require from you, for she has been a benefactor of many and of myself as well” (Romans 16:1-2). In addition to Phoebe, Roman 16 opens with a long list of names among which, women’s presence is striking, proving that in Paul’s eyes, there are many women in the church “who have worked hard for the Lord” and deserve to be recorded in history. On the other hand, faced with the many problems in the Corinthian church, Paul worried about the behavior of women there, especially the wives, when it diverged from the virtues of kindness and reticence or did harm to their husbands and the image of the church and so he put forward

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11 Footnote 2, 312.

some strict prohibitions. “All things are lawful,’ but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up” (1 Corinthians 10:23). In Paul’s eyes, the social effect and influence of the behavior of people in the church were of great import.

### **3 Another look at the creation stories on which Paul based his view of women**

Among Paul’s prohibitions against women, he mentions a number of Old Testament passages as basis for his position. Most of these are found in Genesis.

1 Corinthians 11: 12, for example (“For just as woman came from man, so man comes through woman; but all things come from God.”), cited from the J document Genesis 2:21-23) And 1 Corinthians 14: 34ff (“...should be subordinate, as the law also says”): the source of this is unknown, however, biblical scholars, judging on the basis of the context, think it may be quoted from Genesis 3:16. 1 Timothy 2:13 (“For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor:”), cited from Genesis 2: 21-23 and Genesis 3.

On the basis of historical-critical examination of the source material, modern scholars call Genesis 1:1 to 2: 3 the P document (or P tradition or P canon), meaning that from the perspective of literary form and style, the writer might have been a scholarly priest. The diction and style of Genesis 2:4- 4-26 is substantially different from that of the first chapter and is thought to have its source in the J tradition. J represents the sacred name of Yahweh, in Hebrew Jahweh (now mainly written Yahweh; in Chinese 雅威 (Yawei), while in the P tradition such as in Genesis 1, God is Elohim. The first and second chapters of Genesis differ not only in style and diction as well as in the form of address for God,

moreover their treatment of male and female gender is different. In Chapter 1 here, man is the last to be created, emphasizing the concept of man as a whole; the focus is not on the gender difference between man and woman: “in the image of God he created them, male and female he created them.” In Chapter 2, the story in the Garden of Eden, the gender difference between man and woman has become obvious and the order of creation has become “Man-animal-woman,” and the woman is now the last to be created.

Paul’s views on women and marriage are basically founded on the theological thinking in the J tradition of woman being created after man. From the perspective of feminist exegesis today, this interpretation of the J tradition must be re-examined.

In terms of the Hebrew vocabulary in the original, the meaning of the word “Adam” means “humanity” or “human” in the majority of cases; it has no gender. Only in some places in Genesis 2 and 3 is it equivalent to a proper noun, like “the male of the first human couple.” Contemporary biblical scholars in translating or commentating on this term in Genesis 1-3, influenced by feminist exegesis, are all very careful. For example, in the Chinese Union Version Genesis 2: 7 includes the name Adam, and says the human being “became a living being with a soul,” while the English-language Revised Standard Version says: “God Yahweh formed man from clods in the soil and blew into his nostrils the breath of life. Thus man is a living being.”

The French Ecumenical version, the Traduction œcuménique de la Bible (TOB) and the French Jerusalem Bible also translate the passage this way. The English and French translations lack the phrase “with a soul”: “became a living being with a soul (有灵的)” and “his name was Adam.” With regard to the omission of “soul,” Ji Boxun explains: “The RSV translates this as “being,” the Hebrew *nephesh*, the King James or Authorized Version has *ling* or “soul” which the

RSV astutely avoids, because it might make modern readers think of the soul's immortality. This is not a Hebrew concept, but a Greek one. For Hebrews, "soul" is not a part of the human being, rather it is the whole living person, just as this passage clearly states, including the body with the addition of the breath that gives it life."<sup>12</sup> "Named Adam" is not in the original, but is added in the Chinese Union Version. The breath of God was not only breathed into Adam, but into all created human beings.

Therefore, this passage mainly stresses that all humanity gains life directly from God. No matter what ethnicity or what country people are from, no matter whether male or female, his (her) life comes alike from the breath of God, beginning with this sacred "breath[ing] into."

#### **4 Understanding Paul's prohibitions from the perspective of women today**

The second objective in understanding the biblical understanding, is to interrogate a sentence of scripture for its meaning in context. Paul Ricoeur says that the ultimate goal of hermeneutics is to take that which has no relation to ourselves and make it ours. The historical-critical method takes us into the socio-historical conditions of the (biblical) text. This is the pre-supposition for understanding the text, the necessary first step in reading the Bible. But this is not the ultimate goal, the ultimate goal is to leap across the distance and make the text the light that illumines our times and our lives.

##### *1 Freedom and order*

1 Corinthians 14:34-36 raises for us a subject that is ancient,

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12 Footnote 3, 120.

yet is always with us: the tension and regulation between freedom and order. Women in the Corinthian church faced regulation between these two. At the start, the Christian way brought people a great feeling of having achieved liberation, a life distinguished by spiritual freedom (See 1 Corinthians 14). At the appointed time, the disciples settled and led lives in the sacraments, with order and moral regulation.”<sup>13</sup> The free and orderly life, as far as the church was concerned, was crucial. First, the church was not a noisy place without standards or regulations. Order, quiet and solemnity were essential, far from racket and commotion and quarreling. A solemn and respectful atmosphere was necessary, leaving space for believers to compose their hearts for God to move through their souls. At the same time, whether or not the church members could live out the behavior proper to lives of faith bore upon the existence and development of Christianity itself. The proportion of women in the church has always been quite high, thus women’s example, the modeling role of women, seems highly important. “‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things are beneficial. ‘All things are lawful,’ but not all things build up” (1 Corinthians 10:23). This statement of Paul’s is addressed to all Christians, whether male or female; whether living in ancient times or today. Are “all things” lawful? True, Christ has already liberated us from the slavery of sin; the truth has made us free (See John 8:31-36). But this freedom bought at great price must come with three limitations: 1) it must be beneficial; 2) it must build up; and 3) it must glorify God. All freedoms must stand the test of these three standards.

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13 Leon Morris, *New Testament Theology*, Chinese trans. Zhou Tianhe 周天和 (Taipei: Campus Bookstore, 1997), 367-368.

## 2 *Authority and the symbol of authority*

The passage on women's head coverings in 1 Corinthians 11: 7-12 repays a more careful discernment and reflection.

- 1) In explaining the reason for women's head coverings, Paul says: "For a man ought not to have his head veiled, since he is the image and reflection of God, but woman is the reflection of man" (1 Corinthians 11: 7). But in the passages related to creation, Genesis 1: 26-27, it says only "in the image of God," and "male and female he created them." In Genesis 2 we no longer find expressions like "in the image of God." Thus, the P document creation story already clearly tells us the possession of the image and reflection of God is not the man's alone. 1 Corinthians 11: 8 and following says, "but woman [was made] from man." This comes from the J document creation story, but in 1 Corinthians 11: 12 in which Paul concludes "but all things come from God," he returns to the P document.
  
- 2) 1 Corinthians 11:10 says "For this reason a woman ought to have a symbol of authority on her head, because of the angels," requires careful deliberation. A fairly good understanding of "because of the angels" usually deems that angels are the guardians of order, and of order in the church (See 1 Timothy 5:21). At the same time, they are observers of the human spectacle (See 1 Corinthians 4: 9). The second half of the verse is decisive here. If we seriously examine the original, we will discover that in the phrase "symbol of authority" the word "symbol" is not in

the original, but was inserted by the translators on the basis of their understanding of the context in surrounding passages. Why did they want to add a word here that was not in the original? As the word for authority is used here, and in the Chinese translation, the meaning can only refer to possessing authority, or capable. For the veil in “head covering” as a “symbol of authority” we can make an analogy to Elijah’s mantle. In 1 Kings 19: 19, Elisha, who was plowing, was willing to follow Elijah, who threw his mantle, symbolizing authority, over Elisha. In 2 Kings 2, “Then Elijah took his mantle and rolled it up, and struck the water; the water was parted to one side and the other, until the two of them crossed on dry land. ... (after Elijah was taken up Elisha went back and stood on the bank of the Jordan. He took the mantle of Elijah that had fallen from him and struck the water, saying, ‘Where is the Lord, the God of Elijah?’ When he had struck the water, the water was parted to the one side and to the other, and Elisha went over” (2 Kings 2: 8, 13-14). From what the emblem signifies, “head covering” and Elijah’s mantle are both marks of authority. That is to say, women in the church in Corinth were capable and had the duty to do their best to establish order in the church.

Besides, what must be emphasized is that in considering Paul’s views on women in the New Testament, we cannot simply look at a few passages; we must treat them as a whole. If we say that Paul’s discourse on women in 1 Corinthians is simply a sketch, then in Ephesians this sketch takes on more definition, is enriched and completed. In Ephesians 5: 31-33 especially, “For this reason a man will

leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.” Here he uses Genesis 2: 24 to point out the mystery of the relationship between Christ and the church, and the mystery of the family relationship between husband and wife. “Love” and “respect” are the best expression and illustration of the husband and wife relationship within the family relations. This is also the most important message of the J document Garden of Eden story (Genesis 2)—not the order of creation, but the inter linkage between one human being and spouse, the mystery of “becom[ing] one flesh” (Genesis 2: 24). The male and female sexes are not in opposition to one another, but mutual “helper[s]” (Genesis 2: 20), sharing mutual love and mutual respect (Ephesians 5:33). For as the Bible tells us, women are also created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27), and in their breath is contained that same grace of God.

## **5 Conclusion: Focus on the biblical message of reconciliation and establish a balanced view of women**

In his *Collected Writings*, Bishop K.H. Ting says: “We find the Bible with its central message of reconciliation and covenanting a source book for inspiring Christian people’s unity.”<sup>14</sup> And, in speaking of Latin American liberation theology, Professor Chen Zemin 陈泽民 also noted that

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14 K.H. Ting 丁光训, “Chinese Christians’ Approach to the Bible,” in *Love Never Ends, Papers by K.H. Ting*, ed. Janice Wickeri (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000), 390. A speech delivered at the joint meeting of the American Academy of Religion and the Society of Biblical Literature, 1990. English original.

our theological task is not liberation but reconciliation.<sup>15</sup> Today as we ponder the role of women in the church, these observations are inspiring to us. Developing a feminist theology and feminist exegesis for the Chinese church, must focus on the biblical messages of reconciliation and love and build up a balanced view of women. We should not simply reverse male dominance for female dominance, continuing the tension and opposition between the genders, but stress complementarity and integration, returning to God's purpose in creating them male and female, as the man and woman in the Genesis P document shared God's image (Genesis 1:27) and as in the J document, the pair helped each other as partners, becoming "bone of my bone and flesh of my flesh" (Genesis 2:20, 23).

The attitude toward women in traditional Chinese culture often went to one extreme or the other. Confucius, the representative of Confucian culture excluded women from the ranks of gentlemen, placing her among those of low social status: The Master said, "Of all people, girls and servants are the most difficult to behave to. If you are familiar with them, they lose their humility. If you maintain a reserve towards them, they are discontented." (*Analects*: Yang Huo 阳货 25, trans. Legge). In the conditions we live in today, this ingrained gender bias has not been fully eradicated. For example, in some poor, remote areas, abandoning female babies and depriving girls of education remain a cause for concern. On the other hand, Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Taoist culture are full of praise for the emotion symbolized by feminine beauty, and some literary works influenced by it, such as *Dream of the Red Chamber*, in which the author speaks through the protagonist to say he believes women are made of water and men of mud, portraying the

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15 Chen Zemin 陈泽民, "Reconciliation with the People," in *A New Beginning* (Canada China Programme, 1983), 20.

female image as bordering on the “celestial.” Neither of these two views of women considers them as persons of dignity and value equal to men. But it cannot be denied that in traditional Chinese culture there is much extant material that has been unearthed, in particular some female images of foresight and sagacity, courage and uprightness. There is no lack of such examples in the vast collection of historical documents and literature, as well as real life. Therefore, on the one hand we must use the light of the Bible to scrutinize traditional Chinese culture; on the other hand, we must excel at unearthing those positive source materials that can have an inspirational function to enrich our understanding of the Bible. The interaction of these two aspects will be beneficial to our establishing a balanced view of women.

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## **Women, Faith, Marriage** **—The Challenges of Marriage for Women: A** **Feminist Perspective**

妇女，信仰，婚姻—从妇女神学角度探讨妇女面临的婚姻挑战

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Wang Meixiu 王美秀, assistant professor of history at Beijing University, considers marriage and the family to be the unit of the cultural value system of a society that is most sensitive and swift in reacting to changes in social life. Along with developments and changes in society, ethical relationships in the family and moral standards in marriage are also sure to react. We can say that changes in marriage and family attachments reflect changes, development and progress in the whole cultural value system of society. This point is not only embodied in society but is also especially clear in the church, because the church gathers in numerous women believers. As a woman pastor, women believers frequently find it easier to bare their souls to me, sharing their struggles and plight, seeking support and help from faith. Among the problems women believers face, the greatest number are marital problems, because even today, women see marriage as the most important part of their lives. Following a sermon once, a sister shared with me the humiliation and pain of her twenty years of married life. I was deeply moved. This made me even more aware of the importance of feminist theology and feminist exegesis, and studying the Bible from a woman's perspective, uncovering women's experiences and spiritual understanding that has been overlooked by

men and decoding the Bible from within the context that women face, giving them the faith support and guidance that appears to be so very important.

1 *Modern Christian women's concept of marriage is a blend of Chinese culture and Christian faith*

Contemporary Chinese society can only be a continuation of Chinese history. Besides its fresh modern notions and mentality, this stage of culture is also a critical succession and reasonable extension of Chinese ethnic traditional culture. Traditional Chinese culture undoubtedly has a profound impact on contemporary Chinese women's state of existence, value orientation, role options and future development.

Traditional Chinese society saw women as inferior to men; of this there is no doubt. In two thousand years of the history of civilization, women have always been on the margins of society. Women's nature and status have never been taken seriously or affirmed. Whether in spiritual or material terms, women are always in a subordinate position. A woman's base position is determined at birth. There is a Chinese saying, "There are three unfilial things; of these, the worst is to have no heirs" [不孝有三，无后为大: Mencius-ed.] "To have heirs" refers in particular to continuing the patrilineal clan—its property and power, the sons in its lineage, but not the daughters. The *Book of Poetry* 诗经, in the section called "Minor Odes of the Kingdom" says:

Sons shall be born to him;  
 They will be put to sleep on couches;  
 They will be clothed in robes;  
 They will have sceptres to play with;  
 Their cry will be loud.

They will be [hereafter] resplendent with red knee-covers,  
The [future] king, the princes of the land.

Daughters shall be born to him:  
They will be put to sleep on the ground;  
They will be clothed with wrappers;  
They will have tiles to play with.  
It will be theirs neither to do wrong nor to do good.  
Only about the spirits and the food will they have to think,  
And to cause no sorrow to their parents.<sup>1</sup>

A son is given at birth a jade tablet (which is here translated as scepter; a symbol of male superiority) to play with, while a daughter is given a tile (a reference to using a spindle). The traditional saying has it: “Even a splay-footed son is better than the most beautiful daughter.” In the dire poverty of the old society, cases of female infanticide to reduce the number of mouths to feed in the family were frequent.

Over the course of their lives, females were restrained by the norms of the family. Daily life was confined within the limits of the home. “The men occupied the exterior; the women the interior. The mansion was deep, and the doors were strong, guarded by porter and eunuch. The men did not enter the interior; the women did not come out into the exterior. ...The men should not speak of what belongs to the inside [of the house], nor the women of what belongs to the outside. ...Things spoken inside should not go out, words

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1 Translations by James Legge, quoted from The Chinese Text Project (ctext.org). Most of the text of the *Book of Poetry* dates from the Western Zhou period (1046–771 BCE). The *Book of Rites* dates from the Warring States period (475–221 BCE)

spoken outside should not come in.” (See *The Book of Rites* 礼记: “Pattern of the Family” 内则). In short, the strictures on females in traditional Chinese culture nearly all have their origins in the need to establish, maintain and consolidate family order. Many of the constraints imposed on women by the feudal (Confucian) norms of etiquette and ethical code were unequal and peculiar. There are a number of famous passages in the *Book of Rites*, such as the requirement for female moral character: “she was taught ... the virtue, the speech, the carriage, and the work of a wife.” The implication being that women were not encouraged to have an independent character or social status; as for women’s intellect, the requirement was “a woman’s virtue is to have no talent” 女子无才便是德. Financially, women had no rights to private property, even her name was not recorded in the family genealogy: “A son and his wife should have no private goods, nor animals, nor vessels; they should not presume to borrow from, or give anything to, another person.”

Women were forced to observe “chastity,” the highest demand of Confucianism toward women. Song-dynasty philosophers had a famous dictum: “Starvation is nothing; loss of virtue is everything.” Furthermore, chastity arches were erected to memorialize women of virtue and encourage other women to pledge to protect their virtue to the death. Economically, women were dependent on their relatives. Spiritually, a woman submitted to the male she depended upon. The *Rites*: “The woman follows (and obeys) the man: in her youth, she follows her father and elder brother; when married, she follows her husband; when her husband is dead, she follows her son.”

These special prescriptions for women were nothing more than a great high “human barricade,” keeping women out of the mainstream of social life. As a gender, this made women into political, economic and cultural outsiders. Traditional Chinese women, whether in real life or in

literature, had only two outlets—the same two as Hua Mulan. Either pass herself off as male, buckle on armor, go into battle and gain a noble title by rendering meritorious service in fighting the enemy; or shed her armor and return to civilian life, “Take off my wartime garb and put on my old dress,” stay in the women’s quarters (i.e., waiting to be betrothed), and become someone’s wife. This was the female plight. We could say that marriage and family were the whole of a traditional women’s space for life. The male was firmly in control of the ruling power and could foist some ideologies in keeping with male taste onto females, so the image of the traditional woman was created according to male fancy and desires. The female role, status and nature were entirely manipulated, determined and elucidated by men. The process of the symbolization of women in patriarchal society was one of the gradual depreciation and exploitation of the majority of women.

Modern women’s view of marriage both has its origin in tradition but is located in modern times. Modern China’s traditional marriage has been assaulted and impacted by modern trends of thought. The attacks modern people’s marriages face are mainly the influence on society of materialist consumption and preoccupation with pleasure-seeking. Since the 20th century, the sexual realm in every developed nation has undergone a succession of huge changes. The “sexual revolution,” which is actually a comprehensive challenge to traditional sexual relations and ethics, has spurred people to undertake anew reflection, evaluation and revision to sexual tradition. This revolution reached its height in the 1960s. Under the impact of this sexual revolution, traditional morals and ethical value systems came apart.

As luck would have it, in the 1970s and 80s, China implemented the policy of reform and opening and the gates of China at long last opened to the outside and things of

the developed countries, good and bad, poured in. China's people, too long constrained and too impatient to wait, absorbed things from outside, without time to filter them first and embraced them lock, stock and barrel. These things included some ethical and moral views that were too extreme and open, which as a result had a great negative impact on traditional Chinese marriage. A Western historian said: "the impact of the sexual revolution is practically worldwide, and its greatest impact on the human spirit has been a moral confusion." Traditional moral and ethical views influenced by Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism underwent an unprecedented challenge, with the result that trial marriage, pre-marital cohabitation and extramarital affairs became common occurrences. The divorce rate soared and moreover the number of one-parent families increased as a result of extramarital affairs.

The younger generation especially has a dim view of marriage. Individualism and pleasure-seeking proliferate uncontrolled. With such pleasure-seeking as goal and irresponsible views of marriage and family, people pay attention only to satisfying their own desires, and ignore the needs of family. Not a few people see marital love as the individual's private life, nothing to do with others, separate from morality, personal integrity, and responsibility. Thus have traditional views of marriage and family been shaken. People are no longer willing to take lifetime responsibility—popular sayings like "nothing lasts forever, so enjoy it while you can"; and "Why not make a splash?" affect many people's views. The former prime minister of Britain, Margaret Thatcher, in March 1982 commented to the effect that we are now reaping what was sown in the 1960s. Those fashionable theories and permissive public-pleasing claptrap created this social background, the old virtues of self-restraint and self-control have all been erased. The families of many Christian women were also undergoing this type of attack

and felt the impact of modern thinking in their families as well as in themselves.

The effect of Chinese culture on women believers is profound and far-reaching, though some are somewhat more affected by traditional culture, while others feel the effects of modern culture more.

As Christian women, they live as members within Chinese culture and, at the same time, they are affected by biblical culture. They understand marriage and family from a biblical perspective and their view of marriage frequently comes from evangelists. Though 60 to 70 percent of church members are women, those standing in the pulpit doing the work of giving guidance—the evangelists—are overwhelmingly male. Male evangelists can only teach from their own standpoint; ordinary women Christians have no exegetical ability, and can only get their understanding of the Bible from evangelists. Their faith is devout and they uphold the authority of the Bible, so they dare not slight the evangelists' teaching. The message the majority of women Christians receive from evangelists is a rather uniform one—that women in the home should be patient and obedient. In fact, sometimes it is not that male evangelists deliberately discriminate against women—their own gender means they have no way to understand women's innermost struggles. Thus they easily overlook women's plight. It is very difficult for women Christians to pour out to them these private matters like marriage and family pain. These male evangelists find it very difficult to identify with these sisters as a woman minister or other women Christians would.

A high government official, a man, who after presiding over a women's meeting and having heard reports of all sorts of actual prejudice against women and how women's rights had been abused, said with deep feeling: "If you say we deliberately discriminate against women, that's certainly not the case—each of us has a mother—and no

son would discriminate against his mother, yet we often do not consider, we even neglect, women's interests and ignore women's needs." It is often the same in the church, and for the same reason: evangelists, with or without meaning to, ignore women's plight and experience. On the other hand, in the course of preaching, the evangelist often cannot help but deliver a cultural exegesis. The Bible comes from God. It transcends culture, but also penetrates culture. God's revelation must be expressed in human language. In the process of expression it was inevitably affected by the Hebrew culture of the time—the Bible was birthed in a culture of male superiority and so it inevitably reflects this. If in interpreting the Bible, we do not pay attention to the background of its historical culture and times, but apply it mechanically, we will cause God's revelation to become rigid and not vitally enduring.

The church's most frequently used teachings for women Christians come from Paul, such as: "Wives, be subject to your husbands as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior" (Ephesians 5: 22-23). "But I want you to understand that Christ is the head of every man, and the husband is the head of his wife, and God is the head of Christ" (1 Corinthians 11:3). "Wives, be subject to your husbands, as is fitting in the Lord" (Colossians 3: 18) and many other similar passages that women hear and follow, exercising forbearance and humility. We have not overcome the limitations of culture in our exegesis, and so we run into conflicts, such as: "On the one hand the church teaches that brothers and sisters should love one another, that all enjoy alike the honor of God's image, yet on the other hand it teaches that men are the masters and women have a complementary gender role, so that women Christians should be obedient to their husbands and should make the

home their ultimate station of service in order to accord with biblical truth.”<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the woman’s role in making a home is irreplaceable; in establishing harmonious relationships in the family, children’s education and care for elders, women play an important role. A survey found that in over 60 percent of families, the task of caring for family members—children, seniors, etc.—fell on women’s shoulders, and women themselves feel that caring for children is their responsibility. Now on one hand there is an upsurge in public opinion that women should stay at home as housewives, while on the other hand society still uses male value as the standard by which to judge women, disregarding the effort they expend on marriage and family. In this way, if women want to gain approval and respect, they must expend much more effort and seek career success.

As part of Chinese society, women Christians’ view of marriage is on the one hand affected by their society and culture, and on the other hand, by church teachings. Internally in the church, those parts of the gospel that reflect culture are sometimes equated with truth, to such an extent that there is clearly inequality between men and women. The church must first rid itself of this phenomenon, otherwise it will be powerless to undertake a response in mission to the times, women in the church will feel more and more cut off from their surroundings, and when confronted with practical questions they will feel undecided, sensing a conflict between faith and real life.

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2 Wai Ching Angela Wong 黄惠贞, 性别意识与圣经诠释 [Gender consciousness and biblical hermeneutics] (Hong Kong: Hong Kong Christian Institute: 2000), 24.

## 2 *The Bible's teaching on marriage from a feminist exegetical perspective*

First, let us look at woman's position as God created her. In the creation story in Genesis: 1, "the peak of creation is the creation of humanity, for the result of the creation of other creatures is termed 'good'; only the creation of human beings is termed 'very good.'"<sup>3</sup> In this creation story, "So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1: 27). In this P source, male and female are merged into one, not separated. They are a whole, and from this, we can infer that there is no separation between them in terms of higher or lower status.<sup>4</sup> But male chauvinists invariably take the second creation story as proof of male superiority, especially Genesis 2:18, "Then the Lord God said, 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper as his partner.'" In fact, "helper" here has not the slightest suggestion of subordinate status. "'Helper (*ezer*)' appears twelve times in the Old Testament and refers not a few times to Yahweh's work; moreover, it is without rank or degree." Genesis 1:20 gives the best translation: "...but for the man there was not found a helper as his partner." In fact, a review of the times the Bible uses "helper" shows that "helper" is a role and not a status. "Helper" here is used in the sense of "complementary"; not to confirm status. And scholars also mostly believe that this use of "helper" is not only to indicate help in everyday life or in bearing children, but to become a companion, mutually assisting each other. Thus, we should

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3 Dai Haohui 戴浩辉, 妇女与古代诠释 [Women and ancient hermeneutics], in 读经研经释经 [The Bible: reading, studying, interpreting] ed. Lo Lung-Kwong 卢龙光 (Hong Kong: Chung Chi College, Chinese University of Hong Kong: 2000), 94.

4 Yang Keqin 杨克勤, 女男之间 [Between woman and man] (Hong Kong: Tao Sheng, 1995), 59.

best understand “helper” as a type of role, or position. A helper should be one who knows when best to stretch forth a hand to help. Like God, who gives humans timely help but does not pamper his beloved people.”<sup>5</sup> When the man calls the woman, “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh,” this shows even more this complementarity, this relationship of merging and friendship; only when male and female have a correspondence with each other and mutually assist one another can they gain completion. “So the primary message Genesis 2 has for us is not the sequence of creation, but that there should be a reciprocal union between a person and their spouse, the profound mystery of “becoming one body.” Between man and woman there is not opposition but mutual help.<sup>6</sup>

On the question of the male-female relationship in marriage in the Bible, we find the most extensive discourse on marriage in the writings of Paul. Several passages are frequently quoted by believers, especially Ephesians 5: 22-25, “Wives, be subject to your husbands, as you are to the Lord. For the husband is the head of the wife just as Christ is the head of the church, the body of which he is the Savior. Just as the church is subject to Christ, so wives ought to be, in everything, to their husbands. Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” In fact, “be subject to” is not a command, but a sincere call. The Hebrew verb being in the neutral voice, the best translation would be “voluntarily obey.”<sup>7</sup> The wife submitting to the husband is just like the church submitting

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5 David Atkinson, *Christian Ethics*, Chinese trans. Hui Si 汇思 (Hong Kong: Tiandao Publishing House, Ltd., 2002), 18.

6 Wang Peng 王芑, 如何理解哥林多前书中保罗对妇女的禁令 [Understanding Paul’s prohibitions against women in 1 Corinthians] *Nanjing Theological Review*, No. 43 (2000): 41.

7 Curtis Vaughn, *Ephesians*, Chinese trans. Hui Si 汇思 (Hong Kong: Tiandao Publishing House, Ltd., 1998), 136.

to Christ. It is in no way because they are forced to submit by God's command that Christians submit to Christ; it is a willing submission. At the same time, Paul also points out that Christ is the head of the church, but that there is a very large difference between this and the husband being the head of the wife; therefore, he also specially stresses "the body of which He (Christ) is the Savior."

In saying this, Paul indicates that he knows that his analogy does not cover every detail. Christ is the Savior of the church, but the husband will never be the Savior of the wife.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, we must not forget that Paul also gives instructions to husbands—that they should love their wives as Christ loves the church. Paul tells us that a husband's love for his wife is a lofty love and its distinctive feature is self-sacrifice, not self-satisfaction. This kind of love has as its aim the loved one's happiness. Paul also mentions that "In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies" (Ephesians 5: 28). This is not to show that the husband's love is limited; but that he loves his wife as much as he does himself. Actually, this refers to the nature of the love between husband and wife. It is the basis of his love. The husband should love the wife, for the wife is part of his body."<sup>9</sup>

We do indeed see in the Bible that in Paul's letters there are passages that reflect a great concept of equality, "As many of you as were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is no longer Jew or Greek, there is no longer slave or free, there is no longer male and female; for all of you are one in Christ Jesus" (Galatians 3: 27-28). But there are still some passages that seem belittling to women: "Let a woman learn in silence with full submission. I permit

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8 Ibid.

9 Charles A. Hodge, *A Commentary on the Epistle to the Ephesians*. Reprint. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1950), 332.

no woman to teach or to have authority over a man; she is to keep silent. For Adam was formed first, then Eve; and Adam was not deceived, but the woman was deceived and became a transgressor” (1 Timothy 2: 11-14) and so on.

We seem to see in the Bible Paul being inconsistent and conflicted. Actually, we must not forget that Paul lived in social surroundings that were extremely male-dominated. Paul attempted to harmonize the ideal concept of male-female equality of Christianity with the culture of his day. Cultural comparisons must be horizontal and not vertical. In Paul’s day, discrimination against women was a worldwide phenomenon. When Paul said the husband was the head, it was in order to say that the husband should love the wife with the self-sacrificing love of Christ. Saying this was quite a breakthrough for the time. When we study the Bible carefully, “We will unconsciously assume some specific cultural values as sacrosanct. The result is that in order to maintain gender values that were evolved in a specific culture, we make them into unchangeable biblical principles. This course of action results in a constant whittling away of the Bible’s abundance, forcing the different voices in the Bible to assimilate, thereby restricting believers’ ability to explore and pursue their interest in the world of the Bible and gain enlightenment from it.”<sup>10</sup>

### *3 The predicament of modern Chinese Christian women and their way out*

Along with reform and economic development, people moved from isolation towards openness, from poverty towards abundance and at the same time their values and ethics were also constantly changing. The family is the most basic unit of society and the one most sensitive to these sorts

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10 Wai Ching Angela Wong, 24.

of changes, which have caused an acceleration in the rate of break up of families: the divorce rate remains high and has continued to rise—a considerable number of these family ruptures are brought about because of extramarital affairs. When marriage is under attack, women are still in the weaker position. The instability of modern marriage means women cannot depend on a husband over the long term, so a woman must be self-reliant and independent, pursuing her own value and position. There are many women in the Bible that serve as models for us. Hebrew society regarded men as superior to women. Females were seldom listed in genealogies and histories. In Jesus' lineage, however, four women appear. This is clearly out of the ordinary and I think that the reason these four have been recorded is inseparable from their independent, iron-willed and unyielding characters and quests.

The Old Testament records the story of Tamar, an extremely wretched woman, who was wed to the firstborn son of Judah, named Er, who “was wicked in the sight of the Lord, and the Lord put him to death” (Genesis 38: 7). According to Hebrew tradition (Deuteronomy 25: 5-10), Tamar was then married to another son of Judah, Onan, so that the deceased Er might have descendants, but Onan shared the same fate as Er, and because what he did was displeasing to the Lord, he was also put to death. Tamar was once more a widow. Not only that, but because Judah regarded her as the cause of his elder sons' deaths, he was unwilling to marry her to his young son. We can say that at this juncture, Tamar's fate was sealed, because in Hebrew society the way for a woman to change her fate was more often than not through bearing a child. Although women were not thought highly of at the time, mothers were very highly regarded and respected.

We see that every woman in the Bible attached great importance to bearing children. They were frequently proud of the number of children they bore—or felt inferior because they bore few children or were ridiculed for bearing none. Biblical scholars believe that the reason Hebrew society so stressed child-bearing and the reason the status of mothers was held in such high regard was because of a misunderstanding of God’s promise: the offspring of a woman will strike the snake’s head (Genesis: 3: 15). They believed that only once a woman produced offspring could she have a share in God’s promise, and could she have value. In her hopeless situation, Tamar did everything possible to have a son. Although the method she used seems dishonorable from our standpoint today, as a weak woman with no alternative, this was the only way she could strive for her rights and status. In the end, Judah examined himself and said: “She is more in the right than I.” Thus, we can say that Tamar acted in order to find a way out for herself, as well as for her own worth and honor. She did not hesitate to brave life’s dangers in order to have a son by Judah. I very much admire Tamar’s spirit of courage and self-reliance; it was her unyielding will that allowed her to see the light at the end of the tunnel.

Every Christian reveres Jesus’ mother Mary. At the mention of Mary, we are reminded of her gentleness, kindness and patience, for this is men’s ideal image of the Madonna and our perspective on and appreciation of Mary is always from the male point of view. But when I make a careful reading of the biblical passages about Mary, as a matter of fact, people often overlook her most important virtues of bravery and strength. The angel appeared to Mary, telling her she was with child and would bear a son. For a young girl in Hebrew society in those days, this cannot but have been a huge challenge. It was a huge taboo for an unmarried woman betrothed to another man to become

pregnant, and so Joseph planned to dismiss her quietly (Matthew 1: 19). Mary faced huge pressure but bravely accepted God's plan: "Here am I, the servant of the Lord; let it be with me according to your word" (Luke 1: 38). In the days that followed she, with a mother's strength and patience, accompanied her own son in all kinds of circumstances, facing every kind of challenge. Beneath the cross at Golgotha, we see a great mother, who with incomparable strength stayed with her beloved son to the last. In fact, the first thing we see in Mary is her courage and strength and not simply the male-defined beauty.

These women are glorious examples for us. Courage, strength and self-reliance are the qualities that unfold before us, qualities that women of every age require. It is these qualities in them that we respect and admire.

Dr. Wai Ching Angela Wong of the Department of Cultural and Religious Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong, writes that in its early years of evangelism, Christianity bestowed on female believers a double-edged sword: faith gave limits, but also gave them new incentive and imagination. Consequently, three paradoxes quietly took shape: as missionaries got the idea to use Western Christianity to 'save' the oppressed women of China, women missionaries in a foreign land were discovering their own independent roles. As women missionaries wholeheartedly blessed these "good wives and loving mothers," women Christians were inspired by these women missionaries' lifestyles, examples of alternative choices outside the home for women. Christian women joined the church and her Western network as a fight for gender equality. We can say that the encounter of missionaries, who came with their Western colonial mindset, and [Chinese] women seeking

their own liberation and space to develop, had unintended consequences.<sup>11</sup>

Today's Christian women also gain strength and help from their faith, casting off their dependence on their husband or other men, thereby raising the status of women in the home. Of course, for women to achieve self-reliance is much harder than for men, whether formerly or now. We frequently hear terms such as women's crises, women's tragedies, women's plight. The establishment of the market-oriented economic system and market development does not automatically confer on women freedom and independence. In order for women to extricate themselves from reliance on men, an important aspect is movement of society towards value compensation based on earnings, which would enable women in the home to have independence, to have decision-making and economic power to allocate income. In this environment, women would naturally have more choices and opportunities, but at the same time this includes greater challenges and even harm.

Due to the aggressive development of the market economy and the withering of traditional moral standards, complete reliance by women on men, or women seeking men's protection to extirpate themselves becomes even more difficult. If women do not raise their own quality and accomplishments, there is bound to be more of the traditional sort of "the businessman cared more for money than for me" scenarios being played out in our times. In such circumstances, women could not but intensify their quest for freedom and independence, to raise their own spiritual and cultural quality in order to reinforce their ability to meet challenges. But with the advent of economic reform

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11 Wai Ching Angela Wong 黄慧贞, 宗教文化与妇女 (Religious culture and women), in 中国文化与妇女 (Women and Chinese culture), Conference presentation, 2002.

and openness that was symbolized by the operation of the market-oriented economy, the marginalization of the female labor force was obvious: the scale of female lay-offs was large, employment choice opportunities were small, and in some occupations the isolation of the sexes was severe, with shaping of public opinion by the media also forcing them to become marginalized. Therefore, women had to expend much more effort than men to fight for their independence.

In the course of China's shift from tradition to the modern, modern women underwent a profound and difficult transformation. In real life, they are liable to display a "dilemma" attitude: women's progress and development forever torn between being unable to pay attention to one thing without neglecting the other. While social conditions remain imperfect, if women strive to get a little of this, they lose a little of that. Faced with the changing aesthetic tastes, women cannot help but make the painful discovery that success in a career does not bring "success as a woman," but quite the opposite; one who leaves convention behind feels slightly off-kilter; there's a sense of having been "cast-off." When people call a woman "a successful career woman" [女强人, akin to "iron lady"-ed.], more often than not the term is meant as faint praise. For this reason a modern woman's liberation and development need to be fully integrated—incorporating traditional culture and modern culture, to correct between social reality and Christian faith, and molding the modern woman's personality in a healthy direction.

#### 4 *Theological theory should be integrated with believers' reality*

The rise of the women's movement can be said to be a kind of response and protest against a culture that all through the ages considered males as the center of humanity. The

growth and development of Christianity in human society, naturally was deeply impacted by patriarchal thinking. Feminist theology was produced precisely in answer to this kind of traditional theology. Western feminist theology arose from the modern human rights movement, though it later to a large extent broke through that movement and, from the 1860s to the present, like a gradually rising star it dazzled the eyes and was not to be ignored. Whether in terms of theological theory or in practice, it has achieved much. There are courses in feminist theology at many seminaries; many theologians and professors have even established church organizations to uphold and promote women's rights and interests. The focus of feminist theology is to stress uncovering women's experiences and via new commentary on the Bible lay bare the influence of patriarchal society on traditional theology, developing a more inclusive theological language and connotation and emphasize male-female relationship as mutual correspondence, interdependence, complementarity, equality and affection. At the same time, with the real context as a focus of introspection, it aims to explore the portents of the times, interrogate phenomena of inequality and affirm the importance and inspiration of the women's movement in order to enrich theological introspection.

Feminist theology also must recognize and understand the social structures of inequality between the sexes and the plight of women in order to combat male superiority, gender stereotypes and words and deeds that oppress women. Women should recognize what it means to be a woman, her dignity and worth, and turn these convictions into concrete action, advocating for the struggle for women's dignity and rights and ousting male gender images foisted upon women, no longer asking (themselves) "What do others want me to do?", but rather "Who am I?"

Feminist scholar Zhou Bi'e thinks that, "On the surface, women and gender research and feminism are (among) today's mainstream theories, but in fact, whether in academia or the culture, this area remains disadvantaged. It is not part of the mainstream, not even recognized. In such an unfriendly environment, to announce or vow that one is a feminist or to identify with feminist research, actually requires a lot of courage." For people to accept Chinese feminist theology is quite difficult: on the one hand there is the influence of traditional Chinese culture, while on the other hand, due to the misunderstanding of many biblical passages, people will normally be suspicious from the get-go of the term feminist theology and even discriminate on that basis. But for myself I think it has properly conveyed an important theological trend in today's church. Perhaps in the course of its development this or that error has appeared, but the development of any concept cannot emerge mature and perfect, it needs a groping, searching process, until it finds a healthy path.

In the Chinese church, feminist theology is only just emerging, whether in terms of theory or practice; it appears a bit scattered and superficial. And its integration with reality, the function of theoretical studies, is even weaker. It is mostly intellectuals among Christians who have an awareness of gender inequality. Many ordinary women Christians do not have this awareness, perhaps because most advocates of feminism are from the intellectual sector. Actually women with only lower to middle-school education, because of their personal conditions and limitations, have no resources with which to resist men, so they have no means to form an opinion. Women lacking resources need support from all sides. For example, there are women who have lived with domestic abuse for a long time, wives whose husbands have multiple affairs and who, because they have no regular work or means of support and lack the ability and

opportunity to fight for their rights, cannot but remain silent, swallow their anger and endure the humiliation in order to preserve a marriage that exists in name only. They are most eager to gain practical help from the church and other sources to enable them to have an independent existence, and to give them real guidance from a faith perspective.

The reason I am especially interested in women is not only because I am a woman, but also because God gives women and men equal grace, and because no matter whether in the course of my growing up or today, I have encountered many great, strong, striving women, who at home, at work or in society, support a home, the sky, and even an era on their own delicate shoulders.

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