PART III

Rereading Tradition
Introduction

In the last two decades, a group of intellectuals in Mainland China have come to the fore participating enthusiastically in Christian studies, especially in the discussion of Christian theology. Since not all of them proclaim themselves to be Christians, they are conventionally called “cultural Christians”. Many of these “Cultural Christians” attempt to promote a “Sino-Christian theology”. The main aim of this paper is to discuss the relation of Sino-Christian theology with biblical studies and the Christian tradition.

Before embarking upon discussion of the main theme, it seems necessary first to clarify the terms “Cultural Christians” (wenhua jidutu) and “Sino-Christian theology” (hanyu shenxue). The term “Cultural Christians” is somewhat ambiguous and controversial. It is ambiguous and even misleading because it seems to imply that “cultural Christians” are “Christians” in a “cultural” instead of “religious” sense. In other words, they are “non-religious” and thus different from those who profess Christianity as their religion. The term “cultural Christians” also seems to imply that other Christians are “un-cultural”, which may mean un-civilized or barbaric in the Chinese context. Furthermore, the demarcation between “cultural Christians” and, if there is such a term, “religious Christians” is far from clear. Some people can be Christian in both “cultural” and “religious” senses of the word. Even Liu Xiaofeng, probably the best-known representative of “cultural Christians”, uses the term to refer to intellectuals from Mainland China with personal faith in Christ, rather than a person who simply is interested in studying Christianity as a cultural phenomenon without any personal religious faith in Christ. According to this definition, in terms of personal faith, “cultural Christians” are also “religious Christians”; they are not “religious Christians” merely in the sense that they are...
not officially registered members of any Christian church or regular church-goers.

With regard to the term “Sino-Christian theology”, it should be clarified that it means literally theology (shexue) in the han-language (hanyu), more conventionally known as the Chinese language (zhongwen). The expression “hanyu” is a more recent construction, reflecting the awareness that China is a multi-ethnic country, in which there are many ethnic minority groups, although they are overshadowed in both cultural and numerical senses by the tribe of han. Thus, it is more accurate to call the official language of China “hanyu” rather than “zhongwen”, which literally means the Chinese language or the language of China because there are many languages being used by different ethnic groups in China.

In the relevant literature, one can always find two types of definition of Sino-Christian theology. Broadly speaking, “Sino-Christian theology” could refer to any theology written in the Chinese (han) language, rendering it possible to trace the history of Sino-Christian theology back several hundred years. In the narrow sense of the term, Sino-Christian theology may designate specifically the theological thinking of “cultural Christians” or the scholars from Mainland China pursuing the academic studies of Christianity. In this sense, Sino-Christian theology often considers itself as the philosophical expressions of individual religious beliefs in the academic settings of the humanities and social sciences in the universities in Mainland China. It also presents itself as an alternative radically different from the “indigenous theology” advocated by the Chinese churches and seminary-based dogmatic theology. The following discussion will be confined to Sino-Christian Theology in its narrow sense, and the review and retrospection below will concentrate on a journal called Logos & Pneuma: Chinese Journal of Theology (1994-), published by the Institute of Sino-Christian Studies (ISCS) in Hong Kong, the major academic platform for “cultural Christians” and chief promoter of Sino-Christian theology for some years.

This paper consists of three main parts. The first part attempts to offer a critical review of the relationship between Sino-Christian theology and biblical studies, and thus draws attention to the fact that Sino-Christian theology has not been well-recognized by the Chinese churches, due to its failure to integrate itself with biblical studies. There are many possible factors contributing to such a situation. As widely acknowledged, the field of biblical studies has not received the academic status in Mainland China to which it is due for social,

---


4 Given the title of the said conference, it is rather clear that the conference expects a review and retrospection of Sino-Christian theology in its narrow sense; otherwise, there would be no need to confine it to “ten years”.
cultural, and political reasons. Moreover, with respect to the academic background of individual scholars, very few of them have received adequate training in biblical studies. More importantly, even those scholars occupied in the studies of Sino-Christian theology might not have fully recognized the academic character of biblical studies and its importance with respect to theological thinking.

The second part of this paper argues that among the advocates of Sino-Christian theology, there are a number of rather basic misunderstandings or misconceptions with regard to biblical studies that should be to be rectified. Moreover, as biblical scholarship in Mainland China is expected to be enhanced in the foreseeable future, sooner or later Sino-Christian theology has to take seriously its relationship with the Bible and biblical studies. If advocates of Sino-Christian theology were to pay more attention to the academic, humanistic, and intellectual characters of biblical studies, and look for a more interactive relationship between Sino-Christian theology and biblical studies, it would be conducive not only to the wider acceptance of Sino-Christian theology in academia and in the Chinese Church, but also to its integration with the Christian tradition.

The final part of this paper endeavors to suggest that in the long run, Sino-Christian theology may better appropriate the rich Chinese cultural resources, including the methodology of scriptural studies within the Chinese tradition, such as the Buddhist method of doctrinal criticism. In doing so, Sino-Christian theology may develop some rather distinctive approaches to Scriptures and biblical interpretation, and thus make its unique contribution to theological studies worldwide.

**Retrospect on Sino-Christian Theology and Biblical Studies**

In the present Chinese world, the principal force in biblical scholarship consists of researchers from theological seminaries, especially those outside Mainland China. The research strength of Mainland China scholars, one has to admit, remains relatively weak in this area. To date, articles on biblical studies by Mainland China scholars have been meager, and even fewer among them have been able to master the methodology generally adopted by contemporary biblical scholarship. To the present author’s knowledge, there are a few academic books on Old Testament studies published in Mainland China, but the most notable of them remains a book co-authored by a young scholar in Mainland China and a senior scholar from Hong Kong. With regard to the academic standard at the post-graduate level in Mainland China, taking New Testament studies as an example, the author regards one particular Master’s

---

thesis on the “new view on Paul”\textsuperscript{6} to stand out from those of others in terms of its demonstration of knowledge of the recent developments in international scholarship. Nevertheless, compared with a Master’s thesis on the same subject by a student from Hong Kong,\textsuperscript{7} the former still shows a considerable shortfall in terms of both basic philological training and acquaintance with the latest discussions in the current international academic world.

The under-development of biblical studies in Mainland China is not merely due to its unfavorable external environment; it is exacerbated by the failure of advocates of Sino-Christian theology to recognize properly the present academic status of biblical studies. It seems that Sino-Christian theology still has not given enough weight thematically and methodologically to the Bible or biblical studies, let alone made it an indispensable component of Sino-Christian theology. Leung Ka-lun (Laing Jialin), a church historian teaching at a theological seminary in Hong Kong, once criticized the theology of cultural Christians, especially in terms of the methodology which separates their theological thinking from biblical studies:

Most of them are interested merely in Christian thought and its philosophical implications, and the main subjects of their studies are those theologians in history who were original in theological and philosophical thinking (especially modern theologians), so that they do not follow the conventional approach (or tradition) of theological studies: exegesis → biblical theology → historical theology → systematic theology → applied theology → practical theology; they rather deal with the thinking of those theologians separately without taking biblical studies into account. For them, it is less important whether these thoughts are orthodox or heterodox, and even whether they are conformable to the teaching of the Bible is not a matter of their concern. Therefore the so-called Christian theological thought is actually the thought of some historical figures who proclaimed themselves Christians. Normally it is impossible to do such kind of theological research in theological seminaries.\textsuperscript{8}

Though sharp in his wording and controversial in his presuppositions,\textsuperscript{9} Leung’s

\begin{itemize}
  \item[9] For instance, it is not necessary for Christian theology to follow the linear and irreversible path suggested by Leung Ka-lun: exegesis → biblical theology → historical theology → systematic theology → applied theology → practical theology. It is also
\end{itemize}
observation of the separation between theological thinking and biblical studies among the Cultural Christians is essentially accurate.

There is no doubt that Biblical Studies constitutes only a tiny proportion of the publications of ISCS. Generally speaking, Cultural Christians seldom quote the Bible in their theological writings, and even fewer devote themselves to in-depth research into biblical studies. Their research and writings bear no close relation to the Bible or biblical studies. Moreover, “Cultural Christians” are not supposed to be religious believers, and Sino-Christian theology presupposes no particular confessional stance with regard to the inspiration and the authority of the Bible. All of these factors create the impression that Sino-Christian theology is not very “biblical”, implying that it bears no relation to the Bible, and thus stands out of line with the Christian Church. As a result, the recognition of Sino-Christian theology among the Chinese churches in China and abroad remains very problematic.

The question of whether Sino-Christian theology could be well-received by Chinese churches is only of secondary importance; a more important question is that if the bond of Sino-Christian theology with the Christian tradition as a whole is based on its relationship with the Bible, and if Sino-Christian theology does bear no relation whatsoever to the Bible, would that necessarily entail the separation of Sino-Christian theology from the Christian tradition as a whole? If this is the case, there arises not merely a question of the recognition or popularity of Sino-Christian theology in the Christian churches, but of the legitimacy of Sino-Christian theology, which concerns the fundamental question of whether it is still a part of Christian theology. The question is then: Is Sino-Christian theology a kind of theology belonging to Christianity? In other words, is Sino-Christian theology to be recognized as a Christian theology at all?

In view of the curriculum of Theological Studies as a whole, Biblical Studies is merely a branch of the theological encyclopedia. Moreover, Christian theology is not necessarily confined to, or identical with biblical theology, being capable also of presenting itself in the form of philosophical theology or apologetic theology. Accordingly, Sino-Christian theology as apologetic theology can organize itself around the critiques raised by the non-believers against the Christian faith instead of proceeding directly from the inherent doctrines of Christianity. Apologetics may make reference to the Bible indirectly, implicitly, and occasionally, rather than persuade its opponents by quoting the Bible directly as an authoritative text or proof text. 10

In the rather complicated academic environment of Mainland China, with its possible to proceed from natural theology. Indeed, one can even understand the relationship among exegesis, theology and practice in terms of a hermeneutical circle.

millions of non-believers, it is quite understandable and even reasonable that Sino-Christian theology makes very scarce reference to the Bible. So the question of whether Sino-Christian theology is Christian is not to be determined by the frequency of direct biblical quotation. Given the fact that theological studies are increasingly specialized, even those professors of systematic theology in theological seminaries may not copiously cite the Bible in their works. In fact, a number of famous Western theologians, e.g. Paul Tillich, do not quote the Bible very often either. However, one cannot argue that Tillich’s theology must be inferior to that of Karl Barth simply because Tillich quotes the Bible far less often than does Barth.

The question as to whether Sino-Christian theology is Christian cannot be reduced to the question of whether it is biblical. From the very beginning, Sino-Christian theology has professed to assume an ecumenical or non-denominational stance, permitting it to make use of theological resources from any denomination of Christianity. In fact, ISCS publishes books from various branches of Christianity, including Catholic, Orthodox and Protestant. Therefore, Sino-Christian theology is under no obligation to take the Protestant stance of *sola scriptura* and to adopt the theological approach suggested by Leung Ka-lun. Certainly, in terms of theological position and methodology, one can confidently argue that even though Sino-Christian theology is seemingly not very biblical at the present stage, it cannot be proved that it is not Christian. However, the way Sino-Christian theology conceives of the relationship between theology and biblical studies remains an inevitable question. This is because even Catholicism and Orthodoxy, despite their recognition of the importance of tradition and of upholding no principle of *sola scriptura*, also attach great importance to the close relationship between tradition and the Bible.

Perhaps we may turn to the fact that although biblical studies should have been an important part of Sino-Christian theology, it remains the “weakest link”, if not the “missing link”, in theological studies in Mainland China. This assessment can be confirmed by a very simple review of the articles published in *Logos & Pneuma*. In terms of quantity, the proportion of the articles on biblical studies is slight: on average less than one paper per issue, which usually consists of more than ten papers. As for the background of the authors of articles related to biblical studies, the majority are scholars from theological seminaries in Hong Kong and Taiwan, rather than scholars from the universities of Mainland China. With regard to the main themes of the publications, only “*Genesis* and modern political philosophy” in *Logos & Pneuma* No. 15, published in Autumn 2000 (pp.9-82), seems closely related to the Bible; even then, the articles published on this subject concentrate more on political philosophy than on the interpretation of *Genesis*. Among the articles related to biblical studies, other than some occasional and short book reviews
and reading notes, one can find only one paper giving a detailed linguistic study of the Bible and a survey of the development of Old Testament studies. However, the main concern of all these articles is still the theological-philosophical ideas in the Bible, e.g. on suffering, the idea of human being, social ethics, doctrine of God, Christology, and so on. Without paying enough attention to the fine analysis of Scriptural texts, most of these discussions focus on some rather general theological ideas. The only one embracing an attentive interpretation of a Scriptural text is nevertheless a translated article, which also focuses its attention on theological thinking - on the question of “poverty and affluence”. So to sum up, Logos & Pneuma as a whole provides very few articles offering in-depth exploration of Scriptural texts or biblical criticism, and the standard of its research has been far from in line with the international norm in biblical scholarship. With regard to other theological journals published in Mainland China, such as Jidujiao Wenhua

---


13 Mark Feng, “Jiuyue shenxue jinxi” (Old Testament Theology in Present and Past), Logos & Pneuma 3 (Autumn 1995), pp.73-86.


Xuekan (Journal for the Studies of Christian Culture, 1999-) and Jidu Zhongjiao Yanjiu (Study of Christianity, 1999-), the situation is quite similar.

The current under-development of biblical studies in Mainland China might have been brought forth by several factors:

1. **The political atmosphere:**

   In Mainland China, the Bible is usually regarded merely as a sacred object for believers’ worship and devotion, so it is only supplied in churches and not available in bookstores. In other words, it is an object of religious piety rather than a subject of academic study. The political factor is well-exemplified by a conference held in Kaifeng, Henan province, in September 2002. Co-sponsored by Henan University and the Association of Chinese Comparative Literature, while most of the papers presented at the conference pertained to biblical Studies, the conference was held under the title “Hermeneutics of Classics and Communication of Culture”. According to the editors of the conference volume, the word “Bible” was dropped in the official title of the conference because it was too politically sensitive. The conference organizers had even once planned to publish a collection of the papers in a very remote province in order to avoid attention from the government. Although the collection was finally published by a renowned publisher in Beijing, the incident showed that biblical Studies remains, in the minds of scholars at least, a rather sensitive discipline in Mainland China.

2. **Rigidity of the requirements of the discipline:**

   For most of the current scholars in Mainland China, Christian Studies or Theological Studies is still a brand-new field to which they switch their studies from other academic disciplines such as history, literature, and philosophy. It is straightforward for those scholars to switch their studies from history to church history, or from sociology or anthropology to empirical or field studies of Chinese Christianity, for it requires no essential change in methodology. The switch from philosophy to philosophical theology or systematic theology, though different in their methodology and the required background training, remains not so difficult. However, in pursuing biblical studies, those scholars from other disciplines need almost to start afresh as beginners due to the rigidity of requirements for the requisite training. With regard to New Testament studies, one’s knowledge of the Greek language, Greek philosophy, and the history and culture of the ancient Greco-Roman world could be of a little help. However, for Old Testament studies, the case is more complicated in that it requires proficiency in several ancient languages (including Hebrew), knowledge of the

---

20 Lu Long-guang & Liang Gong eds. *Shengjing yu Wenxue Chanshi* [The Bible and Literary Interpretation] (Beijing: Renmin wenxue, 2003).
ancient myths, history, culture and society, etc., as well as understanding of methodologies of modern biblical studies. It is not easy for academia in Mainland China to overcome these hurdles by themselves and to reach the international standard in biblical scholarship.

3. The ignorance of the academic character of biblical studies:
In its “Notes for Contributors”, Logos and Pneuma shows a rather interesting attitude worthy of rumination:

(The journal) treasures the intellectual, cultural and academic character of the contributions, and no articles of sermon, spirituality, and pure exegesis will be accepted. All the results of academic studies of Christian theology from the perspective of different disciplines (systematic--fundamental theology, biblical Scholarship, Church history, the history of dogma, the history of Jewish thought), Christian human sciences (philosophy, ethics, history, philology and aesthetics), Christian social sciences (politics, sociology, psychology and anthropology), and religious dialogue are warmly welcomed.21

What puzzles the author most is why, on the one hand, the research products of biblical scholarship are welcomed, while on the other, “pure exegesis” is rejected. Though no clear definition of “pure exegesis” is given in the “Notes for Contributors”, one can infer from the context that “pure exegesis”, comparable to sermons or literature of spirituality, is supposed to be lacking in “intellectual, academic, and cultural character”. The prevalent exegetical practice of some Chinese churches might have given people such an impression or prejudice that “pure exegesis” is something without “intellectual, academic, and cultural character.” However, what is worthwhile questioning is whether “pure exegesis” is really such.

Prospect of Sino-Christian Theology & Biblical Studies
Students of biblical studies may find that there are many academic books attempting to interpret the Bible from the perspective of social sciences.22 Likewise, the aforementioned M.A. thesis of Liu Tsui-yuk also attempts to interpret a passage from the Bible by using a sociological method. Some Asian theologians even tend to express their theological thinking by means of biblical interpretation. Taking Madang: Journal of Contextual Theology in

21 Logos & Pneuma, “Gaoyue ji Gaoli” (Notes to Contributors), Logos & Pneuma 1 (Summer 1994), pp.4-5.
East Asia (Seoul: Sungkonghoe University Press, 2004-), a newly-started journal of contextual theology in Korea, as an example, four of the five articles in the first issue of the journal are clearly related to biblical exegesis.23

Owing to their contextual nature, there is no doubt that this kind of biblical interpretation carried out by Asian theologians, who aim at making the Bible relevant to the Asian context(s), might be “subjective” to a certain extent. However, their “intellectual, academic and cultural character” is also rather evident, which can be seen from the considerable references to the results of the contemporary Western academic world, the analyses of the historical context of biblical documents, the training in original languages involved, and the background knowledge in history, archaeology, and even sociology. Sometimes, this kind of contextual exegesis also encompasses the social and cultural analysis of contemporary contexts.24

In a sense, one could say that exegesis is fairly intellectual in that even the most basic exegesis indeed requires knowledge of the scriptural texts, the history and culture involved. Moreover, probably no classical text in this world other than the Bible has been studied by so many methods, and one should not forget that hermeneutics, a prominent discipline of contemporary humanities, has been conducted for a rather long time in the context of biblical exegesis. Furthermore, the methodology of contemporary biblical scholarship is quite similar to the methodology adopted by contemporary international academia as the methodology of studying and interpreting texts in general. Therefore, exegesis may also be seen to be quite academic. Finally, without confining their studies to the Scriptures as ancient classics having a far-reaching influence on human history, the exegetes may study the Scriptures with the contemporary social or cultural problems in mind. For instance, some scholars have attempted to reflect on the problem of the encounter of faiths and cultures from exegetical perspectives.25 The “cross-textual reading” of the Scriptures advocated by Li Chi-chang (also known as Archie C. C. Lee) illustrates clearly how one’s cultural context might affect one’s reading of the Scriptures, and how biblical exegesis may


play a vital role in cross-cultural dialogue. All these speak well for the cultural character of exegesis.

As stated above, the line of demarcation between “pure exegesis” and “biblical scholarship” is blurred, and it is too simplistic to make a sharp division between “biblical scholarship” and “pure exegesis” in the measure of the so-called “intellectual, academic, and cultural character”, because even the most “pure exegesis” more or less measures up to the criterion. There is no reason for Sino-Christian theology to preclude biblical exegesis from its horizon. If one of the aims of ISCS is to improve the academic status and level of Christian studies in Mainland China, it has to pay adequate attention to, or even work energetically to promote biblical studies, including biblical exegesis. Therefore, in order to show how to interpret Scripture with the tools of the contemporary methodology in humanities and social sciences, and also to show that exegesis can be highly “intellectual, academic, and cultural”, it is advisable for ISCS to be more open to academic exegesis and to translate more books on exegetical methodology and/or books on the biblical interpretations and hermeneutics. If biblical studies were to attain its due academic status in China, the academic status and the legitimacy of Sino-Christian theology would be consolidated and strengthened.

Certainly, it is not realistic to expect that biblical scholarship in Mainland China will be able to measure up to the international standard in a short time. Nevertheless, the present author has always been cautiously optimistic about the future of Christian studies in Chinese. In the foreseeable future, the scholarship of Sino-Christian theology, not excepting biblical studies, is expected to make considerable progress. This prudent optimism, rather than being the product of the ignorance of the current difficulties and handicaps, is derived from those hopeful signs noticed personally by the author.

To the knowledge of the author, some theological seminaries and ecclesiastic institutions of Hong Kong, Taiwan, and overseas countries have already sent a number of fellow workers to teach subjects related to biblical studies in Mainland China, e.g. the Chinese Theological Seminary of Hong Kong, the Lutheran Seminary of Hong Kong, Taiwan Theological Seminary, as well as some other overseas institutions. In spite of being conducive to the progress of the biblical scholarship of Mainland China, such teaching support is rather loosely organized; the most systematic and substantial support of an advanced international level being that from the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK), which will have a far-reaching influence on the development of biblical scholarship in Mainland China.

The Divinity School of Chung Chi college of CUHK has hosted for a

number of years a lecture series called “Chuen King Lectures”, which has been delivered by various world-renowned biblical scholars, including Abraham Malherbe (1996), C. K. Barrett (1996), Gerd Theissen (2000), Jack M. Sasson (2001), Morna D. Hooker (2001), and I. Howard Marshall (2006). In addition, the professors of the Divinity School have organized a number of academic conferences on biblical studies, e.g. the “Ethnic-Chinese biblical Colloquium”, with participants from Mainland China and overseas held in May 2004. Moreover, the School supported the aforementioned conference, “Hermeneutics of Classics and Communication of Culture”, described as the first academic conference related to biblical studies held in Mainland China in the past several decades. The conference was followed by a second, “Biblical Colloquium in Memory of the Centenary Anniversary of the Birth of Professor Zhu Weizhi”, co-sponsored with Nankai University, held in July 2005. The publication of the series of biblical studies edited by Lu Long-guang (also known as Lo Lung-kwong) and Liang Gong27 will play a positive and important role in the development of the biblical scholarship in Mainland China.

More importantly, with the financial support from the United Board for Christian Higher Education in Asia, several students from Mainland China have already undertaken their doctoral studies on the Hebrew Bible at CUHK. Their training, including methodologies of contemporary biblical criticism, as well as Hebrew and other ancient languages, is no different from that of the famous universities in the West. Among the teachers one can even find some world-class scholars such as the late James Barr. Though many of these students had not been adequately trained in the studies of the Hebrew Bible before coming to CUHK, the education they have received in Hong Kong has been in line with the international standard. It is expected that even though the standard they achieve might not be the same as that attained at first rate universities in Europe or USA, their research capacity will, without doubt, far exceed that of many current Mainland China scholars. Their returning to the Mainland after graduation may enhance significantly the overall standard of biblical scholarship in Mainland China.

What merits special attention is that many of these doctoral students in the Hebrew Bible program are not Christians, whose research is purely from

---

an academic perspective and has no direct connection with their personal religious belief. They are living testimony to the fact that biblical studies can be a non-confessional academic field of research and not necessarily a confessional discipline that may only be conducted by religious believers. Scholars as such may pursue their research, from the viewpoint of academic specialization, in literature, history, Western culture, and even West Asia studies, as well as religious studies. It is believed that they may substantially enhance the biblical scholarship of Mainland China in terms of both quality and quantity. However, the significance of their studies to the construction of Sino-Christian theology remains uncertain, for their research might have no direct and necessary relationship with Christian theology.

Theology & Bible from a Chinese Perspective

As shown in the above review and investigation, how to conceive the relationship between theology, Bible and biblical studies remains a vital problem for Sino-Christian theology.

In the present Chinese academic world, there are two prevailing approaches to linking theology with the Bible. The first approach, supported by Leung Ka-lun and many teachers of theological seminaries, emphasizes the authority and the priority of the Bible in theological thinking, and pursues a one-way linear path from exegesis to theological tradition and then to application. The weakness of this approach lies in its ignorance of the dialectical relationship between the canon and the tradition: canon creates tradition and vice versa, and both have their own fluidity; that is to say, tradition involves negotiating identity with and within canon. The other approach is known as “contextual interpretation”, which has been influenced to a greater or lesser extent by the Asian theological movement, and which adopts a method similar to that of the contextual biblical exegesis or contextual theology prevalent in neighboring regions. Although it does not first pursue an “objective” interpretation of Scripture and then apply it to a concrete situation, it does take the here-and-now situation into account as a constructive element of the interpretation so as to establish the possible significance of a particular passage of the Bible to the current situation, especially the political, economic and social contexts. However, contextual exegesis, unlike the first approach, tends to be rather subjective or arbitrary, and gives priority to its relevance to the present context rather than to its link with the Christian tradition.

Both approaches make use of the established methodologies from regions other than China. A more original approach formed within the Chinese

The academic world is that of “cross-textual reading”, proposed by Li Chi-chang (Archie C. C. Lee). It is true that cross-textual reading is a method highlighting the characteristics of the Chinese context; namely, a number of believers in Chinese context would read the Scriptures in comparison or contrast to some Chinese classics, and thus probably may interpret various passages of the Bible in a way radically different from the conventional interpretation. One can find precedents of this sort of cross-textual reading in the history of Sino-Christian theology in the broad sense of the word. Furthermore, were the method adopted by Sino-Christian theology, it might lead to a kind of theology with distinctive Chinese characters. However, how does the cross-textual reading distinguish itself from comparative literature? What is its possible significance for theological methodology? Not even these issues been adequately clarified by the proponents of cross-textual interpretation of the Bible, let alone the relationship between cross-textual interpretation of the Bible and the Christian tradition.

One of the characteristics of Sino-Christian theology is its use of materials from traditional Chinese culture. Interestingly enough, if one investigates the way in which Chinese culture conceives of the transmission of tradition, one finds that Confucianism (especially the tradition of “xin-xue”, literally speaking, “heart-mind learning”) and Buddhism (especially the Ch’ an school) emphasize the succession of “heart-mind” over that of “scripture”, which is only the testimony to the former. Similarly, the Bible reads, “Do all you can to preserve the unity of the spirit… There is one body and one Spirit… one and the same hope… one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God…” (Ephesians 4: 3-6; Jerusalem Bible). It is noteworthy that there is no mention of “one Scripture”. In fact, the canon adopted by Roman Catholicism is slightly different from that of Protestantism. Therefore, instead of adhering to “one Scripture”, Sino-Christian theology could inherit the ecumenical Christian tradition in terms of “one Spirit” or “one heart-mind”, which may include not only the faith and hope belonging to the domain of Spirit or heart-mind, but also the object or content of faith (one Lord, one God) the one heart-mind attested to and the liturgy (one baptism) testifying the transmission of the one heart-mind.

If the Christian identity of Sino-Christian theology is also largely dependent on its relationship with the Christian tradition, a further question is raised as to how to decide whether Sino-Christian theology is a continuation

---


rather than a disruption of the Christian tradition. According to the analysis given by Christoph Schwöbel, there are three different ways to understand the continuity of the tradition in the history of Christianity. The first model, introduced by Irenaeus of Lyon, is to understand tradition as a “continuous chain” of the original message which is preserved in the unbroken apostolic succession from apostles to the present Pope. The second understanding of tradition is the “consensus model”, which suggests that the Christian tradition is preserved in one consensus of faith, e.g. the *consensus fidelium* suggested by Vincent of Lérins, which means the faith held by all believers of all times. The third model adopts the strategy of “return to the origin” of the tradition, called by Reformers *ad fonts*, namely, returning to the Bible as the yardstick for tradition.32

As many cultural Christians do not have strong connections with the Christian churches and sometimes even consider themselves outside the ecclesiastical polity, it is not easy for Sino-Christian theology to accept the first model, which comes rather close to the stance of Roman Catholicism. In fact, it is also difficult to demonstrate the concrete ecclesiastical (not to say “apostolic”) succession of Sino-Christian theology in historical terms. As has been noted, since Sino-Christian theology in its present stage of development remains not very “biblical” in its appearance, the adoption of the third model may not be helpful either. Therefore, the second model is perhaps a more feasible approach to understand how the theological activities of Cultural Christians can continue the Christian tradition. This is because despite having no formal affiliation to a Christian church, they do share the faith of Christians. As Schwöbel points out, the problem of the second model lies in its need for the third model as a supplement, for what the consensus of believers of all generations and all places signifies remains rather unclear.33 Certainly, the stress on consensus in the second model and the emphasis on Scripture in the third model do not conflict with each other.34 For Sino-Christian theology, the virtue of the second model, nevertheless, might precisely lie in its seeming limitation pointed out by Schwöbel. The distinctiveness of Sino-Christian theology lies in its emphasis on the language it employs. Owing to the close linkage between language and its living context, the consensus of the believers in the Chinese context is not necessarily expressed in an unambiguous universal language (comparable to Esperanto) and thus cannot be identical with the language of the Scriptures or the ecumenical creeds. It, nevertheless,

---

32 Christoph Schwöbel, “Rationality, Tradition and Theology: Six Theses”, in Marcel Sarot & Gijsbert van den Brink eds., *Identity and Change in the Christian Tradition* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1999), pp.179-180.
33 Christoph Schwöbel, “Rationality, Tradition and Theology: Six Theses”, p.181.
shall and can be re-interpreted or translated in the Chinese context. If the mission of theology is to construct the future of the tradition by using the inherited faith and resources, compared with the other two models, the second model of understanding the continuation of tradition is eligible to provide for Sino-Christian theology greater hermeneutic space, and more possibilities of participating in and therefore enriching the Christian tradition.

Other than its contributions to the understanding of Scripture and the transmission of the Christian tradition, the Chinese cultural resources may also inspire some alternative paths in approaching the relationship between theology and biblical studies. For instance, the Chinese Buddhist method of doctrinal criticism, which attempts to criticize, rank and organize the scriptures according to their different theological contents, may provide for biblical theology a possible method for handling the question of theological diversity within the canon. The method is similar to “content criticism” in biblical studies, also called “theological criticism”, for the “content” refers to theological content. Underlying this kind of theological criticism is the presupposition that the ultimate authority does not lie in the Scriptural texts but with the Holy Spirit, who inspired the Scriptures. The theological criticism is not to use a non-theological or non-Christian authority to reject the Bible; but, as Luther had also said, to “urge Christ against Scripture”. It presupposes that the Bible was written by human beings susceptible to mistakes and thus bears the theological opinions and orientations of the authors or the editors. Therefore, with regard to the relationship between theology and the Bible and biblical studies, it is of no necessity that theology should be unilaterally determined by the Bible or biblical studies, whereas theology can also conduct a critique of the theological formulations in different parts of the Bible; by doing so, a hermeneutic circle may be formed. It is possible that this approach to biblical studies has been secretly carried out throughout the entire history of Christianity, but has been seldom adopted publicly and systematically, with the exception of obvious examples such as Martin Luther and Origen. However, almost every school of Chinese Buddhism regards this kind of doctrinal criticism as an indispensable component; in fact, Zhang Chunyi (1871-1955), a Chinese promoter of Mahayana Christianity, has already tried to apply the

method to the criticism of different Scriptural texts. In short, as stated in the above, Sino-Christian theology is capable of making its unique contribution to the Christian tradition as a whole by making use of its cultural resources.

**Between Church and Academy**

To sum up our discussion, biblical studies remains under-developed in Mainland China for many reasons, one of them being the failure of advocates of Sino-Christian theology to recognize the academic, social and cultural characters of biblical Studies. This failure reflects a deep-seated problem facing Sino-Christian theology, which is an intellectual movement advocated by a group of Chinese intellectuals interested in the academic studies of Christianity but not necessarily affiliated to any Christian church. For Sino-Christian theology, as an intellectual movement evolved from academia, an important problem is how to conceive its relationship with Christianity, especially the Christian churches and the Bible. Whereas many church leaders have rejected Sino-Christian theology on the grounds that it does not look particularly “biblical”, this paper argues that Sino-Christian theology seldom makes reference to the Bible on legitimate grounds that are both practical and theological. However, this paper also suggests that it remains desirable for Sino-Christian theology to develop a more proper interaction with biblical studies. Such interaction will consolidate the Christian identity of Sino-Christian theology, make Sino-Christian theology more acceptable for the Chinese churches, and help Sino-Christian theology to make better use of its cultural resources, including the methodology of scriptural studies in the Chinese tradition, in formulating some rather distinctive approaches to biblical studies. However, for Sino-Christian theology, the problem concerning its relationship with the Bible or biblical studies remains merely part of the wider problem with regard to its relationship with the Christian churches, as well as the problem of the Christian identity of Sino-Christian theology. These questions are so far-reaching that they need to be further discussed from a number of other perspectives.

---

This experimental essay seeks to use an inter-subjective hermeneutic to read the texts of Paul and Confucius intertextually. The reading is concerned with crossing borders and fusing horizons in cross-cultural interpretation. The paper will read Paul’s messianic (Christological) predestination language using the lens of the Confucian millennial understanding of Datong (Great Togetherness). It will also read Paul’s eschatology in tension with Confucius’ political and moral philosophy of recovering the golden age, namely the Zhou dynasty. The hope is that a more responsible and creative reading can become a viable option for how we understand human history, time, salvation, and the role of human beings in God’s redemption of the whole creation.

**Intersubjectivity of Cross-cultural Interpretation**

An intersubjective reading assumes a rhetorical-hermeneutical reading process that is interactive and persuasive in its communication. In *Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10*, I allotted a considerable amount of space to spelling out the significance and process of an interactive model in biblical reading and cross-cultural hermeneutics based on rhetorical theories. The rhetorical interaction among text, writer, and reader is based on rhetorical and literary theories which are less intentional and articulate in noting the significance of multitenual influence, the subjectivity of a text and its reader as well as laying out a two-way reading process.

1 Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Confucian classics and Romans in this paper are the author’s.
The term “intertextuality” was coined by Julia Kristeva to indicate that a text does not exist in a closed system of its own but in interrelation with other texts through quotations, references, allusions and influences of various kinds. The intersubjective influence conveyed through the medium of a “text” is clearly seen in the “various cultural discourses” because “the text is a tissue of quotations drawn from innumerable centers of culture.” The assumed locus of meaning-production in this inter-subjective process has shifted from the author to the reader. Both axis of intertextuality—via the writer (who is the first reader) and the readers (who are co-producers of textual meaning)—allow the “dialogism” or “heteroglossia” (exchange of language in M. Bakhtin’s understanding) of texts to work in the genesis of meaning.

The processes of reading- and meaning-production are always dialogues between the writers and the readers. The authority of interpretation does not reside in the frozen text or in the first writer, but is to be found in the interactive process of the text, involving both the writer and the reader, which I have previously termed “rhetorical interaction”. Gadamer writes of the intersubjective and inter-interpretive understanding process which is productive and reproductive. A text not only carries meaning but allows readers to create meanings. Similarly, readers not only interpret text, they are being read by texts, viz., their stories are made meaningful by the texts. Because understanding and reading processes are reproductive and productive, a writer cannot control the meaning of a text and limit it to just his own “original” intention.

The question then is: to what extent does this intersubjectivity between text and readers exist? On the extreme case, one may argue that any text can be “rewritten” by readers, as reader-response theories have shown. For example, Roland Barthes would even argue for “the death of the author,” thus putting the

4 Julia Kristeva, “Word, Dialogue and Novel”, in Toril Moi ed. The Kristeva Reader (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986); Kristeva, however, does not think that texts function for readers as an intersubjective network; they function only as intertextual networks.


8 Yeo, Rhetorical Interaction in 1 Corinthians 8 and 10, as the title of the work indicates, see also pp. 15-49.


authority of interpretation only on the text and the readers. Similarly, Culler writes, “There are no moments of authority and points of origin except those which are retrospectively designated as origins and which, therefore, can be shown to derive from the series for which they are constituted as origin.”

Confucian Messianic Expectation, *Datong*, and Recovery of the Golden Age

Both motifs of messianic consciousness and national salvation are present in biblical (Jewish and Christian) and Confucianist utopian history, but the dynastic change and hope of the return of the golden age is quite distinctive of Chinese history. Yet the Confucian political ethics and the biblical (especially Pauline) theology are intertextual lenses I often use to understand history. Jewish and Christian views look to a transcendental reign of God beyond national history. In those views, eschatological and millenarian hope is not only about national salvation, it is also about cosmic salvation (cf. Rom 1:20, 25; 8:20-22). In critiquing the domination of various empires, Jewish and Christian views portray the God of history whose intended will of salvation “invades” the world and becomes the telos (goal) of history. The question I often ask in reading Romans 8 is: Does Paul’s argument regarding Christ as the telos (goal, purpose) of cosmic salvation provide a comprehensive narrative that excludes other narratives?

As we will see in this section, the majority of Confucianists, in contrast to the biblical view, see the Chinese Great Togetherness/Harmony (*Datong*) as a realization of a past golden age. Is that Confucianist view too parochial?

We will take a look at both traditions rather independently before concluding with an intertextual reading of these two. My intention is not to make the claim that my reading of Romans 8 is the only valid, or even a better one, than those that have been offered by previous biblical scholars. My intention is to use my Confucianist lens to re-read Romans 8 and to argue that this is another plausible reading. In the reading process, I also hope to use Romans 8 to offer helpful critiques to some of my Confucianist assumptions of history so that my Confucianist-Pauline hermeneutic will broaden my understanding of how God is at work in and beyond a particular cultural process and historical tradition.

13 This paper does not deal with the question of “indeterminacy” and “completing plausible interpretations”, which I dealt with in “Culture and Intersubjectivity as Criteria of Negotiating Meanings in Cross-cultural Interpretations”, in *The Meanings We Choose* Charles H. Cosgrove (ed.) (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2004), pp.81-100.
In contrast to the Pauline vision of Christ narrative of God’s cosmic salvation, the Confucian vision of national salvation posits a moral transformation of humanity in the hope of recovering the previous ideal dynasty. There are a few observations we can summarize regarding the Confucian view of salvation. These observations will serve as lenses for me to read Romans 8. I must admit that my selective understanding of Confucian political ethics is influenced by my interest in some of the themes in Romans 8 as well.

**Recovery of the Golden Age (Datong)**

First, the recovery of the golden age as the *Datong* in Confucian thought looks backward at history for the ideal goal within its social-political context. This strikes me as a prominent spatial-temporal frame that Romans 8 also uses. Confucius (or known as Kong Zi, 551-479 BCE) regarded the Western (Earlier or Former) Zhou (1050-770 BCE) as the “golden age,” only 200 years or so earlier than “Spring and Autumn” (Chun Qiu, 770-476 BCE) when he was born. Later Confucians were also fond of looking to antiquity as a prototype of an ideal age to which people in a disintegrating society should look. To them, antiquity was not a pre-civilization Garden of Eden but the golden age of Zhou as the era of highest human achievement.

Confucius’ understanding of *Datong* is not nostalgia for the good old days. His messianic hope of recovering the golden age of the past served primarily as a backward stretching of the imagination of Chinese who were living in a state of cultural and moral deterioration. Confucius wanted the Chinese to contemplate the Great Harmony (i.e., *Datong* in Chinese) in the perfect world. His *Datong* utopian hope was a critique of their chaotic and deteriorating society.

Continuing the tradition of Confucius, Mencius’ social utopian understandings combine to form a government that is responsible to the people; Mencius also teaches that a royal government (*wangdao*) seeks to benefit all by distributing resources fairly according to the “well field system” (*jing tian zhi*), and requires all to contribute according to their abilities.14 It is a socialist system of government based on division of labors, consideration for others, and communal solidarity.15

---


15 For example, Mencius (Meng Zi) taught King Xuan of Qi the reason of Wenwang of Zhou. He possessed a large piece of land and yet it was considered too small by his people. The reason was that Wenwang shared it with his people. (Mencius 1B, 2). See *The Chinese Classics: With a Translation, Critical and Exegetical Notes, Prolegomena and Copious Indexes*, vol. 1, James Legge trans. (Reprint; Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 1960), pp.153-154.
Second, the self-perception of Confucius as the “messiah” (heaven-sent and heaven-chosen) to bring about the ideal of the golden age is a distinctive ethos in Chinese philosophy. “Messianic” consciousness is not just a biblical or Pauline concept; it is evident in Confucianism as well. Bauer’s research into this messianic concept in Chinese history shows Confucius as a self-conscious, “predestined messiah” of his own society.16

Confucius identified himself with the duke of Zhou (Zhou Gong), the brother of the founder of the dynasty, Wuwang (Warrior King), who was regent for Chengwang, Wuwang’s son and successor. The Analects (Lun Yu) often mentions the duke of Zhou, and some scholars have suspected that perhaps Confucius longed to be such a personality and restore the lost golden age.17

The self-perception of messianic consciousness seems to be the legacy of Confucianism. Subsequently every Confucianist has the conviction and aspiration to serve one’s country after completing a moral education. That legacy also makes Confucian moral philosophy political in function. After all, the political semantic domain of the title, Zi (tzu), being the title of Confucius (Kong Zi [Kung-tzu] is his name in Chinese), reflects an assumption of Chinese reality. The title Zi was first used to refer to royal princes and kinsmen, then to wise counselors of feudal lords, and finally to philosopher-teachers.

The significant point in Confucius’ yearning for the restoration of peace and order in the world is his understanding of the heavenly mandate, i.e., the calling that is from the world beyond for him to fulfill, and the mission of saving the society in which he lives. Throughout Chinese history, few people had as clear a calling as Confucius. In Historical Records (Shi Ji), there is an account of Confucius as the ideal ruler:

Three months after Confucius had assumed the government of the state (Lu), even cattle dealers no longer cheated others by demanding excessive prices; men and women walked along different sides of the road, and objects lost on the streets were no longer picked up. (Shi Ji 47:667b)18

Confucius did have the ambition to be a political leader, but the hope was unfulfilled.19 Confucius’ despair is recorded in the Analects 9:9: “The phoenix does not come; the river gives forth no chart. It is all over with me!” The phoenix is a mythical creature belonging to the heavenly realm that sends forth scientific references:

19 This interpretation regarding Confucius is popular in the Tang (618-906) and Qing dynasties (1644-1912), see Ching, *Mysticism and Kingship in China*, p.207, n. 7.
messages concerning the arrival of sage-king Shun. The river chart is a gift given to Zhou king during his enthronement, the chart maps out his territory indicative of a peaceful reign.\textsuperscript{20}

\textit{Political Morality in Confucian Datong}

Third, the intended purpose of heaven for Chinese society in Confucian thought focuses on political morality as a consummation of salvation of that society. Of course, the concern of salvation is the main theme of Paul’s letter to the Romans; salvation, as related to the righteousness of God, is about creating the people of God who will live a life of holiness in Christ.

The assumption of this political morality is that the Confucian \textit{Datong} vision as a trans-historical reality can be seen in Confucius’ teaching of Tian Dao (“the Heavenly Principle” or “the Heavenly Way”). How did the uncrowned king reign and bring about \textit{telos} in Chinese history? He reigns by being and teaching other to become \textit{ren ren} (persons who love). Thus Confucianism emphasizes moral education rather than warrior nobility, political virtues rather than political prosperity, relational harmony rather than kingship kinship. Confucius believed that \textit{Tian} not only gave birth to the people but continued to regenerate and sustain them. Thus, in terms of morality, Confucius regarded \textit{ren} (love) as the fountainhead of all virtues. He exhorted all to actualize \textit{Tian-ming} (mandate of Heaven) by committing themselves to \textit{ren}, because \textit{ren} is what makes human beings human. In terms of political morality, he emphasizes that the sage-rulers are to be virtuous, providing an example for others to follow, and thus bringing about the renewal of the society (\textit{Great Learning [Da Xue] 1:1}). The \textit{Doctrine of Mean} (\textit{Zhong Yong}) likewise states that if a sage-ruler knows how to cultivate his own character, he will know how to govern other people (20:11).

As a result of his vision of political morality, Confucius did not popularize a patriarchal lineage of royal succession. Rather, he advocates virtues of \textit{ren} and righteousness. He mentioned that Yao and Shun were regarded as virtuous rulers who left their thrones not to their sons but to the best qualified candidates. \textit{Analects 4:13} recounts, “If [a king] is able to govern his state with the disposition of modesty and propriety (\textit{li-rang}, i.e., “yielding”) [possibly including the idea of readiness to give it up], what trouble can he have? If he is unable to govern the state with modesty and propriety, what has he to do with the rites and propriety?”\textsuperscript{21}

In imagining the existence of goodness and beauty in a perfect society, Confucius’ \textit{Datong} vision emphasized music, propriety, character, and harmonious interpersonal relationships, because the Zhou dynasty is the prototype of

\textsuperscript{20} Ching, \textit{Mysticism and Kingship in China}, p.211. The \textit{Analects} translation is that of Ching.

Datong. Confucius believed that beauty and goodness were the foundations or the source of music and propriety, and that the potential for beauty and goodness resided in every person.

Mencius (372-289 BCE) is the first person who fully developed Confucius’ ethical and social philosophy in the political realm. His sense of a vocation to save the world is also clear, even though the time cycle for him has not come. He explained his commitment based on two reasons: First, he believed in the goodness of human nature, that every human being should have a messianic consciousness. His democratization of an inherently good human nature motivated the conscience of the people toward social responsibility. Second, he believed in the “quasi-mystical notion of a salubrious force pulsating through all beings”22 (hao-ran zhi qi), i.e., because “heaven does not speak... people are the only court of appeal and decide whether or not a dynasty has the ‘mandate’. A new ruler must be ‘introduced’ to both heaven and the people before he can be certain of his office. It is therefore a basic premise of every ideal government that the prince owns everything in an ‘equal manner’ with the people.”23 His second point is also a democratic one, but of the mandate of heaven. Such a view suggests that the validity of heavenly mandate needs approval from the people.

Cyclical Movement of History
Fourth, the Confucian democratization of messianic consciousness of all people for their society works and continues in the cyclical movement of history. The typical Chinese cyclical worldview works well with the periodization view of history. Since the view of historical time is cyclical, the periodization cannot be progress but instead a spiraling alternation between order and disorder. Long ago, Mencius said: “Since the appearance of the world of men, a long time has indeed elapsed, consisting of alternating order and disorder” (3B, 9). Not in keeping with that worldview, Mencius (2B, 13) delineates cycles of history in the following dispensations: (1) from the sage-kings Yao and Shun and Yu (24th-23rd centuries BCE) to the founder of Shang, (2) from the founder of Shang to the founders of Zhou (23rd-12th century BCE), and (3) from the founders of Zhou to Confucius (12th century to 551 BCE). The alternating sequence of old-new periods is attempted in the Qin dynasty, and the old-new-old pattern becomes evident in the earlier Han dynasty (206 BCE-6 CE).24

Given this Chinese cyclical/spiraling understanding of history, national salvation involves the rule of law and the propriety of virtuous rulers and
democratized rule of virtue by all self-perceived educated Confucianists. As such, sage (philosopher) and ruler are inseparable, i.e., crowned kings have to be virtuous and virtuous persons (*ren ren*) can be uncrowned kings.

A popular Confucianist understanding of political messianism in China is that in a five-hundred-year cycle there would supposedly be a ruler vested with the heavenly mandate to reign over China. Bauer gives examples of messianic consciousness in Chinese history, and not all these figures are strictly political rulers. The first is the duke of Zhou (who died in 1105 BCE according to traditional chronology); next is Confucius (551-479 BCE); then the historian Sima Qian (Ssu-ma Ch’ien, ca. 145-90 BCE); the illegal emperor Wang Mang (45 BCE -23 CE); and the philosopher-emperor Yuandi (508-555) of the Liang dynasty.25 Bauer notes,

Curiously enough, men who did not live during these periods of renewal also believed that this messianic idea applied to them, particularly Mencius. He is the first to explicitly discuss this five-hundred-year rule (Mencius 2B, 13 and 7B, 38).26

This Confucian messianic mandate of saving the world lies in the consciousness of the political commitment of his moral philosophy. Confucian moral philosophy serves its political purpose of bringing about peace in the world through the process of self-cultivation, family harmony, and nation governing.

The Narrative of Christological Predestination for “Jews and Gentiles” in Romans 8

Turning to Romans, we note the thesis of Romans 8:28-30 to be a discussion of the eschatological community of sonship created by the Spirit. Perhaps, the Confucian emphasis on the mandate of heaven fulfilled in the ethical life of a community has guided the way I read Romans 8. From my reading I understand that the ethical life force saves a community as it forms harmony in a world of suffering and moral deterioration.

Leaving aside the difference between recovering history (alternating cyclical view of history) and looking forward to the future (eschatological view of history), the Confucian vision of Datong is similar to the ideal presented in Romans 8:18-30, which spells out the salvific hope (Rom 8:20, 24-25) or future glory (Rom 8:17, 18, 21, 23, 30; cf. 1:23) of all God’s people (Jews and Gentiles) together with creation in the context of present suffering (8:17, 18-23, 26). Paul encourages the audience to hope as the children of God (Rom 8:18-30).27 Paul

assures the community of faith that human weakness is overcome by the intercession of the Spirit and the loving purpose of God.

Focusing on Romans 8:28-30, we note a few key insights of Paul, which may be similar or different from the teachings of Confucius:

**Sovereignty of God (Theos) and Transcendence of Heaven (Tian)**

First, in the context of an imperfect world, the sovereignty of God (Theos) speaks of the comprehensiveness of God’s purpose in creation; this is similar to the macro vision of Confucius’ political ethics and its grounding of ethics in the transcendental Tian (heaven). The point of God’s comprehensive purpose will extend Paul’s understanding of predestination in a cosmic dimension later (vv. 29-30), and there, the language of predestination is set in the context of encouragement and not judgment. Here (v. 28), Paul argues that “all things work together for good for ‘those who love God,’ who are called to his purpose” (8:28). "All” (panta) includes suffering, sin, weaknesses, adversity, or bearing of the cross. “Works together” (sunergeó) means assist or profit towards benefit. Not all things serve the comfort of the people of God, but all things work together to their salvation. God does not cause everything but God uses every event, good or bad, towards an eventual greater good. "Eis agathon" is goodness realized eschatologically, goodness being understood as the telos of God’s creation. Nothing will be meaningless and stay outside God’s purpose (eschatologically; cf. Rom 14:16). Cranfield summarizes the point well:

We understand the first part of the verse, then, to mean that nothing can really harm – that is, harm in the deepest sense of the word – those who really love God, but that all things which may happen to them, including such grievous things as are mentioned in verse 35, must serve to help them on their way to salvation, confirming their faith and drawing

---

28 “Those who love God” is the common designation in the OT of God’s elect, the Jews (see Exo 20:6; Deut 5:10); this phrase is now used here to refer to Christians, Jewish or Gentile alike. See C. E. B. Cranfield, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Epistle to the Romans*, vol. 1, 6th ed. (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1975-1979), p.424 on “those who love God” as a designation of Jewish piety.


32 Or as Dunn puts it, “the temporal purpose... of moving history and through history to its intended end.” See James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, *Word Biblical Commentary* (Dallas: Word, 1988), p.482.
them closer to their Master, Jesus Christ. But the reason why all things thus assist believers is, of course, that God is in control of all things.\textsuperscript{33}

All things do not work together for good on their own, but God’s sovereign act is the under-girding force behind God’s absolute control and omniscient (all knowing) power over everything.\textsuperscript{34} God is able to bring good out of all things, and that is the Christian hope.\textsuperscript{35} Paul gives the faithful assurance that the future belongs to the children of God. This assurance strengthens the people of God as they struggle with sin and suffering. The future is secured because it is grounded in the eternity of God. The eternal counsel/purpose of God in creation becomes the very purpose of humanity.

\textit{Eschatological Adam (Christ) and Ideal Community (Datong)}

Second, for Paul cosmic salvation is inextricably connected with God’s \textit{primordial goal of transforming the fallen world} by means of the eschatological Adam. Analogously, the mandate of heaven (\textit{tian-ming}) is to transform the morally corrupted world for Confucius. I understand the eschatological Adam as the realization of an ideal community (\textit{Datong}) rather than a salvation by means of an individual. I also understand Romans 8 to mean that the power of God’s gospel redeems the \textit{whole} creation. The power also revealed the righteousness of God (Heaven). The ultimate purpose of God’s righteousness is to restore all to wholeness and to bring the totality of creation back into loving relationship with God.

Paul begins with God’s love for believers through God’s sovereign election and calling, and ends with God’s divine purpose of our glorification through Jesus Christ (see the five aorist verbs in vv. 28-30). This is a narrative that speaks of the Oneness of God who is impartial and whose righteousness revealed in Jesus Christ is based on grace. Even though the first point (on the narrative of Christ for the cosmic salvation) may look hegemonic to (post)modern readers, the second point (on grace and faith) qualifies the first point by grounding the narrative within the socio-political context. I believe the Confucian moral critique of political ideology has given me a helpful lens to read Romans 8 with a political perspective also.

Against the Roman ideology of violence because of polytheistic faith, Paul’s narrative lifts up the Christ event as just/fair because it is based on a principle of “from faithfulness [of Christ] to faithfulness [of Christians]” (1:18). Romans 8:28-30 seem to underline the hope of cosmic salvation which “characterizes the life in the Spirit to be the life of those who are righteous by

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{33} Cranfield, “Romans 8:28”, p.212.
  \item \textsuperscript{34} Douglas J. Moo, \textit{The Epistle to the Romans} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), pp.527-58.
\end{itemize}
faith.”

Against the competitiveness and boasting of house-churches in Rome (e.g. Jewish and Gentile Christians) – a manifestation of similar Roman ideology of boasting – Paul appeals to the narrative of Christ as the unifying force for them to welcome one another based on grace.

But why isn’t the narrative of Christ as articulated by Paul an imperialistic one? The narrative of Christ has its universal effect (“Jews and Gentiles”), but it does not seek to “conquer”, it seeks to include all by means of grace. Though it is one narrative for all, it does not have to be seen as imperialistic. Having multiple narratives cannot guarantee that they will not conquer each other; in fact, conflicts among these narratives will more likely result in violence if divine grace is not their driving force. The narrative of Christ is one championed by the grace of God. If there is one narrative of the eschatological Adam (ideal community, also Christ) sent by the Creator to be the way for co-existence of many, then that plan of salvation deserves consideration by all. The question is: who is that eschatological Adam? What is the plan of salvation?

“Pre-horizoning” of Christ and Predestination of Individuals

Third, in light of the moral freedom I find in Confucian political ethics, I see the same moral freedom in the language of predestination in Romans 8. I know it is possible to see the predestination language as a doctrine that separates believers from unbelievers (sheep and goats), but I want to suggest another plausible reading. That is, the predestination language is a theological understanding of God’s cosmic salvation through pre-horizoning of Christ as the ultimate purpose. This is a comprehensive narrative for humanity, including the vision of Confucius and others, while at the same time differentiating these narratives for the sake of enriching the whole.

The problem is that, the language of “predestination” or “pre-horizoning” looks parochial to many. Grayston argues that, “The old word is ‘predestined’ (as in NRSV) – which means that the destination is chosen, but not the names or the number of those who will reach it. The Greek word might be Englished as ‘pre-horizoned’ – meaning that God has marked out the limits but not those who stray beyond them.”

Predestination means to mark out a boundary or horizon beforehand to serve as a goal or purpose. The verbs protithêmi and proorizô and the noun prothesis refer to planning, purposing, or resolving to do something. All of these terms convey the idea of initiating an action. The program of God’s salvation for humanity is set in motion as God marks out the purpose,
without predetermining every action in the process. In other words, it is plausible to read Romans 8 as describing the beginning in which God marks out a destiny for humanity – such as the Confucian understanding that to be human is to actualize virtue in a community. That telos (goal) or destiny, in this biblical text, is Christ who is God’s paradigmatic Savior of the world (righteousness of God) through faith by grace. The paradigm is qualified by “through faith by grace”. Therefore, what is predestined is primarily not believers or unbelievers but Christ, the purposeful creation of God by means of God’s ideal community characterized by faith and grace.

“Firstborn” and Virtues of Faithfulness and Love
Fourth, analogous to the ethical salvation of Confucian society via virtue and becoming ren ren (loving persons), Christ was portrayed in Romans 8 as the first born (prototokōs) and the defining horizon. Humanity will be formed (proorizō) and become sharers (summorphous; cf. Phil 3:21)\(^\text{39}\) in the image (eikôn) of God’s Son.\(^\text{40}\)

“Firstborn” speaks likewise of the resurrection life of the new age; Christ as the first born “implies his preeminence but also his sharing of sonship with numerous Christians”.\(^\text{41}\) The image of the “firstborn” as used in the Old Testament refers to one who receives the birthright, thus one who is the heir having a position of preeminence, prestige and power. The term is also used often in the Old Testament to refer to Israel as God’s chosen, beloved one, instrumental in God’s salvific plan.

“Firstborn” is also a messianic term, an epithet for the Davidic King (cf. LXX Psalm 88 [89 in English Bible]:28) who will restore Israel.\(^\text{42}\) When this messianic term is used for Jesus, its nationalistic (David) and ethnic (Israel) connotations seem to be overturned into an inclusive paradigm of salvation for all who believe. Jesus trusted in God and was faithfully obedient in suffering and now is the pioneer of salvation for all who respond in love to God’s call to believe and follow in Christ’s footsteps.\(^\text{43}\) The narrative of Christ is for the Jews and Gentiles, Greeks and barbarians, male and female, and all social classes. The Christological means of salvation has its goal that all will be made in the likeness of the Son, set right with God and glorified at the parousia.

\(^\text{39}\) In Phil 3:21, the word is used to speak of the transforming body of lowliness to that of glory; thus, the resurrected humanity from the dead is emphasized.

\(^\text{40}\) Eikôn in Romans 8:11, 23 speaks of the resurrection body of God’s Son despite death, i.e., the end (resurrection) determines the destiny (life) of humanity. Note the similar theology as expressed in Ephesians and Colossians: God seeks to transform the whole Cosmos through Christ as the “first born” of this new creation.

\(^\text{41}\) Fitzymer, Romans, p.525.

\(^\text{42}\) See Byrne, Romans, p.273. Cf. Heb 1:6; Rev 1:5.

Foreknowledge of God and His Purposeful Acts

Fifth, predestination is often understood as predetermination of the individual decision process. It can also mean the sovereign purpose of God’s salvation for creation—sovereign in final outcome and sovereign in full control of the process. After all, Heaven (Tian) is sovereign, transcendent and all knowing.

Foreknowledge can mean to choose individuals beforehand for a special relationship, such as foreknowledge of the faithful response of selected individuals. But my reading understands foreknowledge to be foresight concerning the purposeful act of salvation in which believers will respond faithfully. Indeed, because of the sovereignty of God and eschatological view of history, foreknowledge can be understood as the Hebraic understanding of “knowing” with affection and predilection.

God has foreknowledge, God knows all, all the time, in all time. God knows the sweep of history in a moment—“line” of history in a “dot”. Yet when God creates, God is involved in history, God unfolds the moment into a spiral movement of history—recovering eschatological telos and re-imagining the golden age. What God knows and does in eternity appears to us as prior action. Throughout the unfolding of God’s plan, “light falls from the divine past and the divine future”. In Romans 8:28-30, the Christian’s hope rests in God who has been there for the people of God even before God’s call was known. Nothing is accidental in God’s plan, nothing is sheer luck or chance, and everything has a purpose in God’s creation.

One ought to be careful not to read the language of predestination as a divine prediction and a closed system of static fate; otherwise, the narrative of Christ could be comprehensive and yet rigid, or could be specific and yet exclusive. This language of predestination and foreknowledge is a reassuring one for those in suffering, weakness, and in need of grace. And foreknowledge of God should be understood in the eschatological view of history, i.e., God intends all humanity to have an affectionate relationship with God as children of God.

The Love and the People of God in Christ

Sixth, the Christian hope is knowing that, though God foreknew the costs of creating through the suffering and giving of his Son, yet because God is love and wills all humankind into loving relationship, God calls his Son(s) into obedience.

---


45 See Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, p.482; Fitzymer, *Romans*, p.525. See Gen 18:19, Jer 1:5; Hos 13:5; Amos 3:2; Psalm 1:6, 1 Cor 8:3, 13:12; Gal 4:9, 2 Tim 2:19.

46 Ernst Käsemann, *Commentary on Romans* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), p.244.

So God creates. This is similar to the general Chinese understanding that Heaven has empathy and passion (tian you qing) for all.

More importantly, the Confucian messianic consciousness helps me to understand the divine mission of believers in-Christ. The “in-Christ” destiny is probably not an election to mere privilege but more a call to responsibility that gives birth to the mission of God’s community. Election/calling means being called to a responsibility, assuming an office for duty.  

Verses 29-30 phrase God’s plan in four parallel clauses with the repeated key words “foreknew, predestined, justified”, and the climax of God’s salvific plan is the connecting verb “glorified”. Those who respond to God’s call to be in loving relationship with God are justified by the gift of God’s grace to be the bearers of God’s purpose. The link of justification brings the reader back to the central theme of stressing faithfulness/faith in Romans chapters 1-4.

Paul’s conviction of God’s plan progressing towards its goal makes him assert that the future glorification of humankind (Adam theology again, cf. Ps 8:5; Heb 2:8-10) is a completed action (gloried in the aorist tense) as far as God’s sovereign plan of salvation is concerned. In this way Paul seems to assure Christians of their hope in the proleptic consummation of God’s plan. This is the ultimate confidence Christians can have while living in the present and neither fully glorified nor totally released from the power of death, sin, and the law. Paul encourages them that the Spirit is working at this eschatological age, and God’s intention is to bring to glory all who have been justified by faith in Christ. As the redemptive process and unification of all creation of God’s plan continues, the readers are assured of being called as divine agents to proclaim the gospel and to transform the world.

Inter textual Reading of Pauline and Confucian Horizoning of Human History
The intertextual reading of the Pauline and the Confucian texts has not been explicit. I want to show how intertextual reading helps us differentiate each text from the other as well as cross borders for creative interpretations.

Inter textual Reading Between Confucius and Paul
I am aware of the huge differences between Paul and Confucius, Romans and the Analects, but I am challenged to try an intersubjective reading because that is an honest way I can read Romans 8 and Confucian classics as a Chinese-Christian. The intersubjective reading of Romans and Confucianism does not mean that the two cultures and theologies are all similar or the same.

49 Moo, The Epistle to the Romans, p.530.
Intersubjective reading only means that a Chinese-Christian reader allows his full subjectivity (thus his cultural repertoire) to come in full contact with the subjectivity of the text (thus textual context). It will be shown that the intersubjective reading has allowed the use of language not only to describe but also to recreate meaning of a particular text. For example, Paul’s highly theological and Jewish understandings of human beings, sin, Torah, Christ, salvation, are not the same as the humanistic and moral connotation of Confucius’ political philosophy. Yet they can be brought to dialogue, and as a result of this dialogue, Paul’s Christological lens is colored with the social and moral aspects of ethics and politics, and Confucius’ humanistic lens is colored with the theological necessity. Let me summarize my discoveries thus far.

**In-Group and Communal Language**

1. The intertexuality of the in-group language in Romans 8 and the communal understanding in Confucianism:

   Reflecting upon the process of struggle in my reading of Romans and Confucianism, it is fair to say that I take my reading clues from both texts in many respects. Two of the most influential aspects are the proleptic understanding of the in-group language of predestination in Romans 8 and the communal understanding of Confucianism.

   Paul is talking about those in Christ already; therefore it is an “in-Christ” language necessitating us to be very cautious, if not prohibiting us, to speak of the final destiny or salvation status of “those who are not in Christ”. How do we know they are not in Christ? To speak this message to non-Christians might cause misunderstanding or confusion. It is a language of *posteriori*, in the sense that only when one is in, and only from the perspective of the in-group, can one look forward to the assured state of glory. It is therefore not a language of prediction, as if history is a linear process.

   Both Pauline theology and Confucianist ethics have their universal appeal. Unfortunately, the narrative of Christ in Pauline theology has been used in Christian missionary movements to prejudge or condemn the destiny of others and rigidly exclude other narratives that might correct or enhance the narrative of Christ. After all, the purpose of Paul’s rhetoric in Romans 8 is to unite Jewish and Gentile Christians and proves the impartiality of God in the salvation of all humanity.

   Similar concern of hegemonic violence could be raised regarding Confucianist ethics. Though limited in its cultural ethos, the Confucianist ethic has reigned in Chinese political history to the point where Chinese rulers abuse their power by barring any questions regarding their ethical behaviors, and some Confucianists use ethics to justify their political power to rule over their “inferior”. These are distortion and abuses to both Paul’s and Confucius’ understanding.
The Pauline language of predestination is not an eternal comprehensive decree of God to discriminate between believers and unbelievers. It is, as I interpreted above, a communal understanding of the goal of conforming to the firstborn of creation. In other words, Jesus Christ does not simply represent himself, an individual identity. Rather, Christ, as the “pre-horizon” of God’s boundary of salvation, represents the corporate identity in which humanity will be called to conform, be transformed, justified, and glorified the Great Harmony (Datong) of God’s creation. The Son of God has the group identity of sons of God. Paul’s theology emphasizes shared sonship. The designations of Jewish and Gentile believers – “those who love God,” “saints,” “called,” “those God foreknew, predestined, justified, gloried” – have the identity of solidarity of ren ren.

I know Paul’s understandings of theology, Christology, ecclesiology is communal. Yet I must confess that because of my formal training in biblical studies in the West and my enculturation into the assumptions of modernity, I am often tempted to read Paul with an individualistic perspective. Doing a comparative study between Paul and Confucius helps me to overcome my bias. Confucius is helpful to my reading of Paul and vice versa. Confucius understands a human as a social being with personal selfhood. Confucius says, “Virtue does not exist in isolation; there must be neighbors” (Analects 4:25). “In order to establish oneself, one helps others to establish themselves” (Analects 6:28). Confucius’ understanding of the socialization process is that one authenticates one’s being, not by detaching from the world of human relations, but by making sincere attempts to harmonize one’s relationship with others. Similar language is used by Paul to speak of Christians being “pre-horizoned and conformed to the likeness of God’s Son” (8:29). The participation in the death and resurrection of Christ in Romans 5-6 speaks of a similar Christian socialization process whereby Christians authenticate their beings by imitating Christ.

**Spiritual and Ethical Humanity**

2. The intertextuality of the spiritual-ethical humanity in Pauline and and Confucian societies:

The notion that Paul speaks only of theology and Confucius speaks only of humanism is simply not true. They both speak of theological ethics of a particular community, be that in Roman house churches or in ancient China. We have seen that the Confucian understanding of being human is to live out the mandate of heaven, to be ren ren (“loving persons”). To be ren ren is to be courteous, diligent, loyal, brave, broad-minded, kind (Analects 13:19, 14:5, 51 See Yeo Khiok-khng, “Li and Jen (Torah and Spirit) in Romans”, What Has Jerusalem to Do with Beijing? Biblical Interpretation from a Chinese Perspective (Harrisburg: Trinity, 1998), Chap. 6.
17:6)—virtues that are to be actualized in public. To be a ren ren is to express and to participate in the holy as a dimension of all truly human existence. Fingarette writes, “Human life in its entirety finally appears as one vast, spontaneous and Holy Rite: the community of man (humanity).” 52 The human is transformed by participation with others in communal ceremony. And that is the mandate of heaven, that all may live in righteousness and orderliness in relation to others as a society of sacredness. Many of these ethical teachings of Confucius are helpful lenses for me to understand the ethical dimension of a spiritual community in Romans.

Thus Paul advocates different factions of the Roman house-churches to “welcome one another in Christ” (15:7) and to “greet one another with a holy kiss” (16:16) despite their differences. People are called into the “fiduciary community” (Confucian language) of sharing intentions, values, and meanings. This fiduciary community of sharable values is the “beloved of God” (Rom 1:7, 9:25) community in Christ to whom the Jewish and Gentile Christians in Roman house-churches belong. The fiduciary community advocated in the Analects does not have the notion that all persons will always finally agree. On the contrary, it is natural that diverse personalities will have differing visions of the Way. 53 Similarly, the “strong” and the “weak” in Romans are not encouraged to be other than themselves as they must hold true to their own “measuring rod of faith”. The singularly crucial point for both groups is “the continuous process of symbolic exchange through the sharing of communally cherished values with other selves”. 54

This similar emphasis in Paul and Confucius is presupposed by their social/communal understanding of human nature. In the Analects, for example, the self is a center of relationships rather than the center of an isolatable individual. The self is a dynamic, open organism which actively seeks human community for wholeness of life and is transformed through the work of Christ. In Romans 8, those God foreknows are the Christians, called into conformity to the firstborn, also having a communal identity of God’s new creation. The group is prior to individual; therefore Christ is prior to Christian.

Oneness of God and Violent Ideology
3. The intertextuality of Oneness of God (Heaven) in both Confucian and Pauline ideals in the context of violent ideology and polytheism:

Confucius’ preoccupation with political ethics has its “antireligious” tendency (Analects 5:13, 6:22, 7:21, 11:12) because of the violence and manipulation of “gods and ghosts”. Confucius is living in an age when superstition dominates peoples’ lives, thus his rationalistic tendency is to critique the archaic supernatural beliefs of the past. It is more accurate to describe Confucius as “unreligious rather than irreligious”. His wisdom is to advise people to keep an appropriate distance from spirits and earnestly attend to ethical responsibility toward others (Analects 6:20). And Confucius has his own religious life of praying and offering sacrifice (Analects 2:5, 3:13, 17, 7:34). Confucian Tian is both the creator and the field of creatures. Confucius thinks Tian is awesome and respected by all sages (Analects 16:8), Tian has intentions (Analects 9:5, 3:24), and Tian possesses understanding (Analects 14:35, 9:12). And more importantly, for Confucius, Tian is the source of moral power (Analects 3:24, 7:23, 9:5, 8:19, 9:6,12, 11:9, 14:35). Confucius transfers the tian-ming (“Mandate of Heaven”) from a highly political claim of the ruling family to a universally appropriated one for all. That is, Confucius seeks to popularize that elitist and political mandate of tian so that everyone can cultivate virtues and bring about universal peace and prosperity. As for the rulers, Confucius emphasizes that the sage-rulers are to be virtuous, providing an example for others to follow, and thus bringing about renewal of the society. Confucian ideals discussed here are good reminders to Christians that preoccupation with eschatological hope without attending to ethical responsibility to our neighbors is a weak faith. And religiosity without ethic can bring about violence that is often sanctioned in the name of one’s god(s).

For Confucius, the social understanding of being human speaks of the necessity of cultural pluralism but only within the boundary of cultured teaching (wen, jiao) – that of li (ritual propriety), yue (music), and ren (love) and other virtues. Confucianism will regard those who do not practice cultured teaching as immature persons (xiao ren, literally means “little persons”) or barbarians (non-Chinese). Similarly, the Pauline theology of the Oneness of God seems to pose a comprehensive narrative that does not condone polytheism. This is a difficult issue regarding the boundary of cultural and religious pluralism, and I will offer my tentative reflections.

The Oneness of God and the impartiality of God go together, and theologically they serve to respond to an inherent ideology of violence of the dominant Roman Empire. The cultural problem of Romans 8 is the polytheistic ideologies of patriarchy (in familial and societal structures), hierarchy (in institutional power structures), imperialism (in Roman, Herodian and even priestly politics), oppression (between the ruling elite and marginalized peasants), and colonialism (in racial tension and immigration situations), which resulted in violence – socially, politically and religiously.
The Roman ideology of polytheism and conquest is displayed in the splintered nature of Roman house-churches, evident by the various boastings (Rom 4:2, 11:18) of Jews and Gentiles. Paul argues that the will of God for Jewish and Gentile Christians in Rome is the righteousness of God. How can the Jew and the Gentile and the many factions within the Roman house churches live in harmony? Based on the Oneness of God (Rom 3:30, 16:27, cf. 5:15-19) of both Jews and Gentiles, Paul’s Christology in Romans 8 emphasizes the sovereignty of God in creation; thus the narrative of Christ is evident in Paul’s understanding of the salvation of Jews and Gentiles. The sovereign love of God creates by means of Christ’s redemption, and the predestined Christ in loving obedience is the divine plan of God’s creation and redemption of the world. Christ as the eschatological Adam (new humanity) has saved the first Adam (old humanity) from the bondages/slavery of sin, death, and cultural boastings.

Jews and Gentiles alike are addressed using the same terms (saints, those who love God, firstborn, called, predestined), so the promise, inheritance, and privilege of Israel are opened to all. The Adam Christology (Christ as the image of God) is inclusive of all because all shared the sonship with Christ. The Pauline answer is the Oneness of God, the impartiality of God, the righteousness of God by means of grace.

This question of co-existence for humanity was also Confucius’ concern in the splintered society of his days. Confucius answers the problem of ethnic conflict, cultural deterioration, and moral confusion: “The person of humanity is naturally at ease with humanity” (Analects 4:2). In a Chinese-Christian terminology, the answer is that God’s Spirit (Rom 8:1) wills the faithful (all God’s people) to become fully human in loving relationship with others (ren ren), and the firstborn (Christ) makes it clear and possible for humanity to co-exist based on the principle of grace and faith (trust) rather than on cultural boasting. The power of God’s gospel is that it grants righteousness to all who place their faith (trust) in Heaven. That faith and grace is concretely expressed in our “faith” (trust) and “grace” towards one another.55

The conviction of Paul’s Christological predestination as the only plan of God’s salvation could be exclusive and even hegemonic. Yet we see that the subversion to and reversal of power overcomes the problem of exclusivism similar to the Confucian ethic of virtue (de) as the prerequisite for a person to become a ruler. If Christological predestination explains God’s interruption in human history (as seen in the death and resurrection of the Christ-event), then the Christ-event allows us to discern the meaning and intended goal of history. Thus an analogical or metaphorical understanding of how God is at work in Christ becomes a key hermeneutical tool. For God’s work is not limited by

---

culture and language, but God’s Spirit transcends culture and language while working in them. In other words, just as I see Confucian ethics being practiced in other societies, I also see how God-in-Christ is at work in other cultures and traditions.

God’s involvement in history through his firstborn of creation is the narrative and mythos of deciphering meaning out of chaos, redemption out of violence in all societies. No matter how great the magnitude of violence and destruction is in the final conflict of human history, the ren ren (full humanity in loving others) and the Crucified God in his death as the firstborn do not accept the “will to power” of any ideology: not the violence of the Pax Romana, the murderous jealousy of Cain (Gen 4), or the Lion of Judah (Revelation). The ren ren will rule by means of virtue and not physical force. Confucius’ political ethics of de (virtue) has the drawing force of virtuous rulers guiding the nation by means of his moral excellence, without exerting physical force. Analects 2:1 writes that “those who rule with de (moral force) are like the North Star that seated in its place yet surrounded by multitude of stars”.

The Crucified God incarnated as the Lamb of God does not accept tragedy, but establishes redemptive meaning. The resurrection confirms Abel’s and Christ’s innocence. The voice of Abel, the “son of Man” was raised up to heaven. Confucius may die without realizing his aspiration of finding a virtuous ruler, yet his political ethic reigns in China for two millennia. Confucian de (virtue) can be self-sacrificing, and the Cross is a “violent” event, but they do not condone violence. The end of the crucified Christ was the beginning of new life. “Christian eschatology follows this Christological pattern in all its personal, historical and cosmic dimensions: in the end is the beginning.”56 There is hope amid all historical ambiguities because God’s future transcends history and God is the actor in history.

Confucius’ anthropological and moral ideals are grounded, and thus legitimized, in the patriarchal kinship and ancestral cult. Thus, we see on one hand, the moral vitality and cultural inclusiveness of Confucian vision of national salvation; on the other hand, we see the rigidity of propriety and the violence of pre-determinism. It is not a surprise to see that Confucius’ philosophy is a political and moral one, and that he is worshipped as an “uncrowned king” and the greatest teacher. The irony is that at times his moral philosophy seems unable to transform his assumptions regarding the political reality and rigidity of tradition; thus the result is that many are taught to observe their places and to maintain proprieties within the given culture.

The Confucian vision of national salvation for China is a noble one, and his vision of retrieving the golden age in the Shang and Zhou dynasty can supplement Paul’s eschatological emphasis. Unfortunately, Confucian retrieval of the

golden age was often taken in a linear view of history. In the next point I will discuss the Confucian view of time and that of Paul.

Paul’s and Confucius’ Understanding of Times

4. The intertextuality between Paul’s and Confucius’ understandings of time: Confucius’ vision of the ideal regent is of an ethical but not a religious person, largely because of his preoccupation with the society, and because of the changes in worldview from the Shang to the Zhou: the new worldview emphasizes the here and now – a helpful critique of the preoccupation of the future in Paul’s eschatological theology. The Chinese concept of time is cyclical, or rather, a spiral of two interlocking sets of “heavenly stems” and the “earthly branches”. Confucianists view history as moving in a spiral motion, unlike the linear view of Paul. Confucianists have a dynamic understanding of time, unlike the modern, scientific view that time is merely a linear progression of past, present, and future – the past is taken to mean the passing of the present, future is the prolongation of the present, and the present is the only possession one has. Chinese seldom talk about absolute time but time associated with events – dynamic time. In the Confucian process of production and reproduction, time never comes to an end or repeats itself.

The linear view of time is too static; the cyclical view is too closed a system. A synthesis of both views can be done if we understand the biblical understanding of past, present, and future as not tenses but modes of existence and aspects of action. In other words, God’s narrative in human historical time is what predestined Christology is about. The present is our spontaneous and continuous experience of the Holy despite our current historical ambiguity and despair. The past refers to realized acts of God in history. The future is the coming (advent or parousia) of the radically new creation of God assured by the past and to be realized in the present. The manifest destiny of history through Christ is God’s new creation towards wholeness. The dynamic understanding of God’s working in history is not simply a linear or a cyclical but a spiral process. Redemptive event can happen at kairotic (opportune, meaningful time), thus repeating moments.

The traditional Confucian worldview believes in the constant flux of the universe following a “predictable pattern consisting either of eternal oscillation between two poles or of cyclical movement within a closed circuit. [So]... all

59 On especially the differentiation of future and advent as well as novum, see Moltmann, The Way of Jesus Christ, pp.22-28.
movement serves in the end only to bring the process back to its starting point.”60 However, in Paul’s view, historical events are dated backward to the beginning of Creation, and the end of history is defined by Christ.

In Chinese history events are dated cyclically every sixty years or from the rise of new emperors. And the dominant view in Chinese history is to look for a golden age in the past – in other words, the circle of degeneration characterizes Chinese history – and it is the circle of conscious cultivation of selves in harmony with society or cosmos that will bring back the golden age.

For 5000 years or so, Confucius has reigned without a crown, yet his moral philosophy is not subversive enough within the political culture to transform Chinese society seeking the recovery of the golden age. Looking backward without looking forward does not allow him to see the possibilities and hopes of the future. The conservatism of looking to the past will provide some guidance, but creativity in re-appropriating the past could bring about freedom and hope as he would look to the future for openness and direction. Yao and Shun are exemplary rulers, but only within the historical contexts and problems. The notion of an uncrowned king may liberate the idea that kingship is not lineage and all can become kings, since education and wisdom are not limited to or by an elitist few. Yet, the question is whether the Confucian ideal of a philosopher-sage becoming a king is a philosophical legitimization of the old kingship, or a replacement of the old using a new paradigm of kingship.

**Conclusion**

I used to think Confucius and Paul were incommensurable (that probably is still true if an intertextual reading is not used), but a cross-cultural reading of the Pauline text and the Confucian texts has helped me understand that their differences can complement each other. Confucius’ political context is a helpful lens for me to reread the political power of Paul’s gospel mission – an ecclesial space that will transform and replace the larger political space. Confucius’ ethical insights have led me to observe the communal problems faced in Romans with regards to group behavior and identity. Paul’s theology of Christ clarifies the personal and political salvation of the Chinese. Paul’s cross-cultural sensitivity with Jewish and Gentile Christians helps me overcome the possible ethnocentrism of working with mono-cultural texts such as that of the Analects, the Mencius, and Romans. Lastly, Paul’s eschatological definition of the goal (the end) of history from the future supplements my Confucianist retrieval reading of history from the past golden age. The openness of the future will surpass the past, the New Jerusalem will transcend the Garden of Eden, but eschatology does not delete the golden age (e.g., Datong), just as future does not discount history. My Chinese-Christian worldview now has stretched to include

---

past, present, and future in the full spectrum of dynamic time. Despite the recurring or spiral movement of dynamic time, it has a forward thrust towards the creation of God’s people based on the incarnation of faith and grace. The virtue of Christ and Christians is faithfulness and love and hope for the salvation of humanity and the whole cosmos.
“Enlightenment” is a “term for the major intellectual and cultural movement of the 18th century, characterized by a pronounced faith in the power of human knowledge to solve basic problems of existence”.¹ Most scholars agree that the beginning of the Enlightenment could be traced back to 1680, but whether it concluded in 1789 with the beginning of the French Revolution or passed through the revolutionary and Napoleonic periods till 1815 or even latter than 1815 was still debatable.² One thing is for sure that the period of Enlightenment has covered the European area in the 18th century. The term “enlightenment” comes from French “lumières”. It means illumination and inspiration. In German “Aufklärung” means illustration and clarification. In this essay, I will adopt the “Enlightenment” as a historical movement in Europe and “enlightenment” as the goal of the movement which seeks illumination and clarification, but sometimes both are interchangeable.

Kant published “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?” in Dec 1784, who defined the ideal of the Enlightenment as follows: “Enlightenment is humankind’s exit from its self-incurred immaturity”.³ Kant believes that it is possible for mankind to use one’s own reason that only depends upon one’s own resolution. “Immaturity is the inability to make use of one’s own understanding without the guidance of another. Self-incurred is this inability if its cause lies not in the lack of understanding but rather in the lack of resolution and the courage to use it without the guidance of another.”⁴ Through such a definition, Kant appeals to using one’s own reason bravely as a motto of the Enlightenment shows, “Sapere aude”, that is to say, dare to know! However, pursuing enlightenment is absolutely not the monopoly of the Enlightenment. It is legitimate for any age to seek resolution and courage to use reason independently in order to dare to know.

⁴ I. Kant, “An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?”, p.58.
Context of Sino-Christian Theology

In the current trend of thought of pursuing enlightenment in the modern China there have been far more enthusiastic propagandists than theorists. That is to say, the Voltairian figures outnumber the Kantian figures. But the Voltairian way of enlightenment, which treats religions as superstitions, is only one possibility among many. It is irrefutable that such a way has dominated the scenario of modern China.

In 1915 Chen Duxiu (1879-1942), one of the three founders of Chinese Communist Party, founded The Youth Magazine, which was renamed New Yourth latter on, and led the movement of New Culture pursuing democracy and science enthusiastically. The movement was very influential. Any critique against feudalism and blindness was welcome everywhere. Independent thinking became a sacred goal. In the first issue of The Youth Magazine Chen Duxiu says:

The superiority of Europe to others lies in the rise of science and the theories of human right as well. It is just like that two wheels are indispensable for a cart. The modern time is moving on day by day. Everything and every event have to resort to the principles of science in order to define their rules. The end is that all thoughts and actions must definitely follow reason and exclude superstition. All ignorance and inappropriate behaviors should be terminated. If our people would like to catch the West and get rid of dark ages and superficial culture, we should emphasize both science and human right.⁵

Chen Duxiu has emphasized both science and human right (democracy) as the indispensable two wheels of a cart by creating a slogan “Mr. D and Mr. S”. Science is a synonym for reason here, because resorting to the principles of science is the same as following reason. What has been enthusiastically expected is all ignorance and inappropriate behaviors will be brought to an end. Chen Duxiu’s expectation of enlightenment tends to be over optimistic, because the flourishing development of science might mean high technology but not necessarily pervasion of reason.

The Voltairian enlightenment intends to replace Christianity with Deism or Atheism.⁶ Religion is dealt with as another name for superstition. Exalting reason is the same as discarding religion. For instance, the then president of Peking University Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) appeals for the substitution of religion with the aesthetic education. He thinks that “the origin of religion is nothing other than the constitution of our own religious functions” and the issue of religion in the West belongs to the past.⁷ He tries to internalize religion just

⁶ Li Feng-ming, Fuertai [Voltaire] (Taipei: Dongda,1995), pp.77-123.
⁷ Cai Yuanpei, “Yi Meiyu Daiti Zongjiao” (Replacing Religion with Aesthetic Education),
like aesthetic feelings because the issue of religion has passed away. But from his time up to now religion stands the long lasting none the less. It is not only that the aesthetic education has not taken the place of religion at all, but also that religions are booming up everywhere in the modern world. The issue of religion does not pass away at all. Moreover, the global growth of Christianity in the 21st century is going to reach her historical peak.8

There has been a blank of deep reflection on enlightenment. On the one hand, during the great mass fervor of pursuing “Mr. D and Mr. S” promoted by the New Cultural Movement, Chinese intellectuals tended to oversimplify enlightenment. In the fact, to exit from human’s self-incurred immaturity is not as easy as the slogan of “Mr. D and Mr. S” shows. On the other hand, Nietzsche as a severe critic of the Enlightenment and a precursor of the post-modern thinking has aroused the interests of many modern Chinese intellectuals who tended to skip over enlightenment as something out of date. There has been a great amount of literature about Nietzsche written by famous Chinese thinkers and scholars who are fascinated by Nietzsche.9 In an essay I have written:

The reasons why there have been interests in Nietzsche in the modern China are multiple. There is a need of transforming the loser image for Chinese through the superman philosophy of Nietzsche; the critique of Nietzsche against Christianity is in accordance with the trend against the West which has been represented by Christianity; the “God is dead” trend of thought starting from Nietzsche is in resonance with the Chinese mentality against the Western religion; and there is a longing for a colorful world of the philosophy of arts initiated by Nietzsche.10

The neglect of reflection on enlightenment, no matter it is caused by oversimplification or the interests in Nietzsche and the post-modern thinking, implies a lack of solid ground for the construction of enlightenment. Moreover, in this decade pursuing economic growth and modern technology

---

have rapidly transformed China from a pre-modern society into a modern society which is moving on to the post-modern scene. If the reflection on enlightenment is still in short, there will be a terrible blank for the ground of a modern society. The result is that the basic structure of such a changing society will be unstable.

While we turn back to those who are interested in enlightenment, it is noteworthy that those who pursue enlightenment superficially could bring forth another disaster. It is not unusual to see that an enlightener turns out to be an anti-enlightener very fast. Those who pursue enlightenment need to reflect on enlightenment in depth in order to prevent from becoming an obstacle of enlightenment. We must say that the superficial enlightenment is the enemy of Chinese enlightenment just like the feudal tradition. In this essay, we will first explore “irony of enlightenment” and “regression of enlightenment” in order to deepen the understanding of enlightenment and refrain from repeating the same mistake. And then we will propose Sino-Christian theology to focus on “enlightenment”. Pursuing enlightenment blindly in a way of ignoring religion will be trapped into anti-enlightenment. On the contrary, with the reflection on enlightenment offered by religious reference may help promoting enlightenment in a healthy way.

**Irony of Enlightenment**

American historian Carl L. Becker (1873-1945) published his serial lectures in 1932 as *Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers*.11 The subject of this book is very startling as he maintains: “And yet I think the Philosophes (philosophers) were nearer to the Medieval ages, less emancipated from the preconceptions of medieval Christian thought, than they quite realized or we have commonly supposed.”12 The reason is that, “passionate faith and an expert rationalism are apt to be united”13 While adopting reason in a very enthusiastic way, it is more like a faith rather than rationalism. The problem is that those who claim to be rational and are opposed against faith in an enthusiastically way are not aware of that they are constructing another faith by destroying the old simultaneously. In his words: “But, if we examine the foundations of their faith, we find that at every turn the Philosophes betray their debt to medieval thought without being aware of it.”14

The main idea of Augustine’s *The City of God* has been adopted as the title of the book. Like the city of God, heavenly city is the perfection of all beautiful ideals and wishes. Ironically, the Philosophes of 18th century are very rational

---

and objective in their outlooks, yet in the fact they are constructing their own heavenly city in a very irrational and subjective way.

_Old Men in New Clothes_

In the general perception, the 18th century is a rational age which has kept distance from the middle ages which emphasize the traditional authority and are filled with superstitions. The _Philosophes_ are thinkers of this rational age of enlightenment. They are supposed to be the model of independent thinking with reason. But Becker questions that whether they are actually the medieval old men only dressing in the new clothes of enlightenment.

According to the observation of Becker, what really decisive for ways of thinking are not reasoning and logic, but rather, the “climate of opinion” which he has adopted from Whitehead. The “climate of opinion” of the 18th century as the trend of thinking drove the Philosophers to pursue to be rational very enthusiastically. Ironically, the end of that age is the irrational and aimless destruction of Citizen Robespierre during the French Revolution. “We can watch this enthusiasm, this passion for liberty and justice, for truth and humanity, rise and sire throughout the century until it becomes a delirium.”

Becker thinks that it comes close to the truth by saying that the Philosophers of 18th century have developed their own beliefs rather than put heavy weight on reason. One of theirs beliefs is the worship of nature and natural law. They have adopted the scientific discoveries of the 17th century in order to set up the foundation of their own belief. They believe that nature functions precisely like a machine and natural law has taken the place of medieval God. Human beings should live with nature harmoniously just like that in the medieval times human beings seek to live together with God harmoniously. Since both human and nature are created by God and human beings are a part of nature, the human thinking and behaviors should be in harmony with the rules of nature.

But while facing the difficulty that human customs are not always in harmony with the rules of nature, those rational Philosophers turns out to be irrational by denying any disharmony. “No doubt the difficulty could be avoided by declaring that there was no disharmony.” In fact, it is impossible that any difficulty will disappear only by neglecting it. The result is the rise of dogmatism.

_Academic Works with Predetermined Conclusions_

15 Carl L. Becker, _Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers_, p.5.
16 Carl L. Becker, _Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers_, p.43.
18 Carl L. Becker, _Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers_, p.57.
19 Carl L. Becker, _Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers_, pp.63-64.
20 Carl L. Becker, _Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers_, p.66.
In addition to their worship of nature and natural law, the Philosophers of the 18th century construct “new history” as a view of history with a heavy value judgment. They believe that the modern time is far better than the past, so they want to get away from the past in order to get into the brand new era. Therefore they are not interested at all in the consecutiveness of history, but rather presuppose the common principles of human nature.21

Behind their presuppositions there is a deep psychological factor, namely the ambition to pursue the actions which change the world. “The reason is that the eighteenth-century Philosophers were not primarily interested in stabilizing society, but in changing it.”22 What interests them is not the historical fact of the past, but rather the future development from now on.23 To this end, the so-called “rational” thinkers are not interested in any fact more than effectual profits according to their belief. Now the objective rationality has been put away into the corner.

Ironically, the Philosophers have hold on a set of knowledge, just like those whom they are opposed to, namely the medieval scholastic scholars who hold on the revealed knowledge.24 Such a way of thinking with preconceptions has enabled them to get what they want from history without respecting historical facts. Their academic works of historical studies are running after predetermined conclusions even at the expense of falsifying history. According to the value system of “new history”, right or wrong can be finally judged. “This was the function of the new history: to make that distinction, which abstract reason was unable to make, between the naturally good and the naturally bad, between the customs that were suited and those that were unsuited to man’s nature.”25 The point is not to explore the historical past, but rather that how the ground of judgment can be derived from the historical past. If it cannot be found, then it can be made. In this sense, historical studies are nothing other than the service for a religion, namely the religion of enlightenment.

The problem of the Philosophers lies in their self-direction and self-performance. There is no distinction between their wishes and the rules of historical development. They firmly believe in the general principles. They believe that the general human nature is good, and it is very easy to be enlightened and to follow reason and common sense.26 Under such a mask of the rules of historical development, their wishes look like very rational and objective. Becker sharply points out that the Philosophers are self-deceiving unconsciously. “They do not know that the ‘man in general’ they are looking

for is just their own image, that the principles they are bound to find are the very ones they start out with. This is the trick they play on the dead.”

Becker mocks at their historical studies as a trick play on the past. They project their own images as the ideal images and their own principles as ideal principles.

Religion of Enlightenment

Becker has called the belief of the Philosophers as a religion of enlightenment, or a humanitarian religion of the 18th century, because it is a religion which esteems human beings as the highest standard. However, it looks like more a religion than a philosophy. Such a religion is an earthly religion. “The new heaven had to be located somewhere within the confines of the earthly life, since it was an article of philosophical faith that the end of life is life itself, the perfected temporal life of a man; and in the future, since the temporal life was not yet perfected.”

According to the religion of enlightenment, the heavenly city is located on the earth. The key words are “temporal life” and “future perfection”. Though humankind has not yet been perfected, yet it is its own savior. With the human endeavor and progress, perfection will definitely come.

That the belief of the Philosophers, who accuse religions of superstitions, has been termed as a religion of enlightenment is itself an irony. The eschatological hope of such a religion is that “posterity would complete what the past and the present had begun”. The Philosophers believe that the completion of the heavenly city lies in the hands of posterity. Because the coming ages will be far better than now, the Philosophers are capable of overcoming the dissatisfaction of the contemporary state with an optimistic attitude. “It is an optimism projected into the future, sustained by the conviction that what is wrong now will shortly be set right.”

In other words, the future becomes God. “It replaced God as judge and justifier of those virtuous and enlightened ones who were not of this world.” Thus the Philosophers are pilgrims who wait and hope for the future which will justify them as correct and righteous.

From the perspective of the religion of enlightenment, there was similarity between the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. Becker noted that De Tocqueville had regarded the French Revolution as a “political revolution which functioned in the manner and which took on in some sense the aspect of a religious revolution”. It was not only a political revolution, but a political revolution which依托于宗教的抱负和理想。
revolution carried out in a religious way. This new religion is a humanitarian
religion; its dogmas are liberty and equality as the sacred doctrines of the
Revolution; its worship is the civic festival; its saints are the heroes and martyrs
of liberty.33

Becker applies the observation of De Tocqueville further into the rise of
communism. “Like the eighteenth-century religion of humanity, the communist
faith was founded on the laws of nature as revealed by science.”34 Corresponding
to the faith of the French Revolution, the communist faith claims to be
the truth itself. “The new faith, like the old, looks to the past and to the future;
like the old, it sees in the past a persistent conflict, and in the future a millennial
state.”35 Becker observes the Russian Revolution, which is stepping into the
historical stages, in a similar way: its dogmas are the theories of Marx
interpreted by Lenin; its festivals are the days of the Revolution; its saints are
the heroes and martyrs of the communist faith; its icons are the portraits of
Lenin; it pilgrimage is a road to Lenin’s tomb.36

Repetition of History
In the last paragraph of Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosopher,
Becker sighs with emotion by pessimistically pointing out.

If that should by any chance be what fortune has in store for us, it is not too
fanciful to suppose that “posterity”, in the year 2032, will be celebrating the
events of November, 1917, as a happy turning point in the history of human
freedom, much as we celebrate the events of July, 1789. What then, are we to
think of all these “great days”, these intimations of utopia?37

Though a hundred years is a long time, yet human beings always repeat the
same story. While reviewing the October Revolution of 1917 in 2032, i.e. one
hundred years after publishing Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century
Philosophers, it is probably like reviewing the French Revolution of 1789 in 1932.
The October Revolution of 1917 could be as great as the French Revolution of
1789, and the former could also be as tragic as the latter. On the one hand, it is a
great epoch-making event. On the other hand, it is more or less only a repetition
of human history. Notwithstanding that it takes a long time for us to learn
something from history, Becker quotes Marcus Aurelius, “the man of forty years,
if he has a grain of sense, in view of this sameness has seen all that has been and
shall be?”38 What Becker strongly suggested was, the October Revolution of
1917 would probably be only another repetition of human history and therefore

33 Carl L. Becker, Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers, p.155.
35 Carl L. Becker, Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers, p.162.
36 Carl L. Becker, Heavenly City of the Eighteenth-Century Philosophers, p.165.
unable to lead to perfection. The collapse of Soviet Empire has proved his presentiment.39

Summary
Revolutionists become anti-revolutionists. Such an irony of revolution can be proved by many historians. But enlighteners become anti-enlighteners that has been easily ignored. Since the New Cultural Movement which appealed to enlightenment, have we really been enlightened?40

Regression of Enlightenment
The Frankfurt School based upon the Institute for Social Research of the University of Frankfurt since 1929 is very unique among those who criticize against the Enlightenment. According to the tradition of Marx they have severely criticized the Enlightenment, yet not without a hope for enlightenment itself. One of the best examples is Dialectic of Enlightenment co-authored by M. Horkheimer and Th. W. Adorno, the founder and the second major figure of the Frankfurt School.41 The opening words of the book point out a paradox: “the Enlightenment has always aimed at liberating men from fear and establishing their sovereignty. Yet the fully enlightened earth radiates disaster triumphant.”42

According to the definition of Kant that the Enlightenment seeks to overcome humankind’s self-incurred immaturity and use one’s own reason independently, it is necessary to get rid of fear which keeps human beings from being masters. Originally the Enlightenment was to get human beings free from fear in order to be masters, but on the contrary the result was a disaster of new enslavement caused by technology. From liberation into enslavement is itself a paradox. Horkheimer and Adorno claim that the Enlightenment has not succeeded yet.

Self-destruction
It states in the introduction: “It turned out, in fact, that we had set ourselves nothing less than the discovery of why mankind, instead of entering into a truly human condition, is sinking into a new kind of barbarism.” 43 To the surprise of most people, the Enlightenment does not bring into civilized human condition,

39 The former President of Soviet Union Gorbachev announced his resignation on Dec 25, 1991. His power was taken over by Yeltsin as Russia’s first post-Soviet president, and then Soviet Union as a sovereign state was terminated as well.
42 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.3.
43 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.xi.
but rather retreat back to barbarism. The problem lies in that “we still trusted too much in the modern consciousness”.

In other words, the difficulties of the modern ago which has been shaped by the Enlightenment are caused by the modernity itself. The Enlightenment, which is supposed to be progressive yet becomes regressive, is itself the cause of difficulties.

Both Horkheimer and Adorno have realized that the difficulties caused by the Enlightenment are first of all the self-destruction of enlightenment. During the development of the Enlightenment, it “already contains the seed of the reversal universally apparent today”. None the less both Horkheimer and Adorno emphasize the idea of enlightenment. They suggest, “If enlightenment does not accommodate reflection on this recidivist element, then it seals its own fate.” They expect that through real enlightenment all the difficulties will be exposed and solved. The key to solving difficulties caused by the Enlightenment lies in enlightenment itself.

Retreat into Mythology

According to Dialectic of Enlightenment, the understanding of “the prime cause of the retreat from enlightenment into mythology is not to be sought so much in the nationalist, pagan and other modern mythologies manufactured precisely in order to contrive such a reversal, but in the Enlightenment itself when paralyzed by fear of the truth.” In a word, the cause of the regression of Enlightenment lies not in the factors outside the enlightenment, but rather inside the enlightenment. It is not that mythology pushes enlightenment into reversal, but that enlightenment itself retreats into mythology.

In contrast to what the Enlightenment criticize, namely traditional society which is filled with various myths, both Horkheimer and Adorno criticize that while the Enlightenment resolves the mythical world, it constructs another new mythical world. “In advance, the Enlightenment recognizes as being and occurrence only what can be apprehended in unity (Einheit): its ideal is the system from which all and everything follows.” “Unity” is a keyword of the ideal of the Enlightenment which pursues unification. “System” is another keyword which produces unity. The point is that the spirit of the Enlightenment intends to include everything into a unified system in order to produce unity for the convenience of scientific calculation, experiment and understanding. The unified power of the technical world has created another mythical world which is capable of absorbing everything into its system. The result is that the old mythical world has gone away, but another new mythical world has been built up.

44 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.xi.
45 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.xiii.
46 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.xiii.
The Enlightenment intends to resolve the mythical world, but it shapes a new mythology through technology and constructs a new mythical world. The end is that nature has been dealt with by technology simply as an object just like an object in the laboratory. As a unified object, nature is therefore alienated and estranged from human beings. Finally, everything in the cosmos will be absorbed into the technological system. In the past, the ancient people dealt with nature by witchcraft and everything in the cosmos was absorbed into the mythical system. In the present, the modern people deal with nature by technology and everything in the cosmos is absorbed into another mythical system.

**Mythological Heroes**

The Enlightenment has not only formed a new myth of unification, but also shaped new mythological heroes who conquer the whole world. The scientists are especially the heroes among heroes. With the memory of being persecuted by Nazi regime, both Horkheimer and Adorno write:

Enlightenment behaves toward things as a dictator toward men. He knows them in so far as he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things in so far as he can make them. In this way their potentiality is turned to his own ends (Dadurch wird ihr Ansich für ihn, through this, things are settled down in their own ways for him).

Just like a dictator knows people in so far as he can manipulate them, a scientist knows things in order to use them to manufacture something. The relation between the manufacturer and the manufactured is as far and alienated as the manipulator and the manipulated. A dictator intends to locate every one into a system according to his will, and a scientist intends to locate everything into a system according to the scientific principles. Consequently, a dictator dominates people, and a scientist dominates things. While everything has been absorbed into the technological system, human beings are certainly no exemption.

The Enlightenment has brought into a new spirit of dictatorship. The modern scientists intend to locate everything into a scientific system in a similar way that the antique people intend to locate everything into a mythological system. The modern scientists are even harsher than the traditional dictators in terms that they want to control everything in every way. What they really want is to define everything precisely. In the ancient time, there was alienation of human beings from nature caused by the taboos of a mythical world. Do the modern people escape from living in alienation caused by the new taboos of a new mythical world?

Logic of Dialectical Thinking
Totally speaking, the logic of the critique of Horkheimer and Adorno against the Enlightenment is as follows:

Raised and Swollen Subjectivity
→ Mythical World

Forced Identity into a Unified System
→ Mythical System

Control, Utilization of and Therefore Alienation from Nature
→ Mythical Taboos

First, the raised human subjectivity by the Enlightenment has swollen itself further in a way that mythological heroes dominate the whole world. The result is a retreat into the mythical world before the Enlightenment. Second, technology brought in by the Enlightenment has enforced unification by absorbing everything into a technological system. The result is a retreat into the mythical system before the Enlightenment. Third, the intention to control and utilize everything has alienated human beings from nature. The result is a retreat into the mythical taboos before the Enlightenment.

Solution
According to Kant, “Enlightenment is humankind’s exist from its self-incurred immaturity.” But the problems caused by the Enlightenment have made mankind back into immaturity in terms of submitting to a technological system, being incapable of making use of one’s own reason and lacking resolution and the courage to use reason. While facing the problems caused by the Enlightenment both Horkheimer and Adorno expect that the principle of enlightenment will solve the problems none the less. “It (enlightenment) comes into its own only when it surrenders the last remaining concordance with the latter (enemy of enlightenment) and dares to transcend the false absolute, the principle of blind dominations. The spirit of this kind of unrelenting theory would turn even the mind of relentless progress to its end.”

Both Horkheimer and Adorno expect that the principle of enlightenment should be carried out thoroughly, then human beings will be totally liberated from fear and establish their sovereignty. They contend that we should never give way to the new enslavement by insisting on criticizing the absolutization of technology. Only when the principle of enlightenment has been carried out

49 Horkheimer & Th.W. Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment, p.42.
thoroughly without any compromise, the problems will be solved. This is the heavy dose of medication prescribed by Horkheimer and Adorno who believe that “the spirit of this kind of unrelenting theory would turn even the mind of relentless progress to its end.”

Summary
The regress of the Enlightenment is a terrible development of history, which is supposed to exist from self-incurred immaturity but actually retreats into another self-incurred immaturity. Technology brought in by the Enlightenment is enforcing unification universally through absorbing everything into a technological system. Moreover, while technology cooperates with commercial activities, every person is absorbed into a commercial system. The ideal of the Enlightenment to control and utilize everything has alienated human beings from nature. Moreover, the exploited and polluted nature is fighting back against human beings through poisoning and disasters. It is for sure that enlightenment has an ability of self-destruction, but is it also for sure that it has an ability to discover and solve the problems caused by itself?

Proposed Focus of Sino-Christian Theology
The Philosophers of 18th century are old men dressing in new clothes in the sense that they want to break off the absolute authority of tradition but actually they build up the absolute authority of reason instead. They want to abolish the intolerance by tradition, but they establish the intolerance by reason. Those rational Philosophers become irrational while reconciling the conflict between the objective fact and their belief by declaring that there is no disharmony at all and doing academic works with predetermined conclusions. They would rather reconstruct history in order to adapt to their own belief.

While the Enlightenment which criticizes religion as superstition turns out to be a religion of enlightenment, such an ironical repetition of history reminds us of the limitation of human beings. That those who seek enlightenment become anti-enlighteners shows how slow the human growth in the history is. While considering the context of Sino-Christian theology, which is mixed up with the pre-modern, modern and post-modern contexts, Sino-Christian theology should pay attention to how to be enlightened.

The Philosophers of 18th century look like rational and objective, but they build up their own heavenly city irrationally and subjectively. In its Sino-context of the 21st century Sino-Christian theology should pay attention to whether those which are rational and objective in outlooks are really so. Will we repeat the same mistake like the Philosophers of 18th century? Will we adopt the method of denying any difficulty in the Sino-context of the 21st century as well? So long as the Philosophers of 18th century are medieval old men dressing in new clothes, Sino-Christian theology should be concerned about whether the Sino-intell-
lectuals of the 21st century are feudalistic old men dressing in new clothes as well. Inasmuch as the Philosophers of 18th century do the academic works with predetermined conclusions, Sino-Christian theology should be concerned about whether the Sino-intellectuals of the 21st century take self-image as the ideal image and their own principles as the ideal principles. Since the Philosophers of 18th century prove that history repeats itself, Sino-Christian theology should be concerned about whether the history of 21st century in the Sino-context is another repetition of human history.

Both Horkheimer and Adorno have pointed out that the Enlightenment intends to get human beings free from fear and make them masters, but on the contrary it brings in the new enslavement of technology. Whenever human beings become the dictators of the world through technology, human beings fall into the state of being dominated by technology. Whenever commerce cooperates with technology, there is no chance for anyone to escape from the fate of being dominated. While facing the problems caused by the Enlightenment, both Horkheimer and Adorno insist that the principle of enlightenment will solve all those problems. But we must ask, whether such an expectation of enlightenment is too optimistic? While the main problem caused by the Enlightenment is the self-destruction of enlightenment, how is it possible for the trouble makers to become the solvers of the trouble? Above all, while human beings have been raised to an extent as absolute subjects, how can human beings get involved into the problems caused by human beings without making a dilemma that the involvement of human beings is itself a way of raising human subjectivity further? It is crucial that Sino-Christian theology should offer a reference which is capable of overcoming such a dilemma.

Therefore, Sino-Christian theology should take the issue of enlightenment as a main focus in order to prevent from a blank of the ground of modern society in the Sino-context. Through our discussion of the irony of enlightenment and the regression of enlightenment we have seen that the problem-solver can be the problem-maker and there has been always a temptation for enlighteners to become anti-enlighteners. The key lies in whether there is a reference to surpass such a paradox. Sino-Christian theology should seek a reference from the perspective of Christianity to reflect upon enlightenment in depth in order to promote enlightenment in a healthy way.

**Examining the Ground of Reason**

From the perspective of theological reflection, when the Philosophers of 18th century rely upon reason and treat religions as superstitions, they neglect that even reason itself needs a ground such as basic belief which is similar to religion. Karl Barth (1886-1968) holds that “there is no philosophy that is not to some
extent also theology”. The reason is that “there is no man who does not have his own god or gods as the object of his highest desire and trust, or as the basis of his deepest loyalty and commitment. There is no one who is not to this extent also a theologian.” Barth’s view can be applied into those who deny the divinity, because they “would in practice merely consist in transferring an identical dignity and function to another object”, no matter it is “nature”, “creativity”, “an unconscious and amorphous will to life”, “reason”, “progress”, or “a redeeming nothingness”, “even such apparently ‘godless’ ideologies are theologies”. In other words, it is impossible to deny something ultimately without claiming some other things ultimately instead.

In a similar way, Paul Tillich (1886-1965) claims that “every creative philosopher is a hidden theologian (sometimes even a declared theologian)”. From the perspective of ultimate concern, every philosopher has his own ultimate pursuit and commitment. In this sense, there is no difference for a philosopher from a theologian. That is to say, in the aspect of ultimate pursuit and commitment, those who claim to be atheists acknowledge the existence of a certain “god”. Accordingly, there are no absolute atheists except those who deny one god or some gods. In the absolute sense, there are no atheists who are ultimately concerned. To the end, reason itself is not ultimate but rather has its own ground. Sino-Christian theology should inquire about what is the ground of reason.

If we want to exit from our self-incurred immaturity, it is necessary to be aware of where reason is standing upon. With this regard H.-G. Gadamer (1900-2002) has done a great contribution to the ground of reason. Gadamer has taken “Prejudice” (Vorurteil, it is better understood as “pre-understanding”) as a starting point of understanding. From this perspective he has shown that the prejudice of Enlightenment is an intention to be opposed against all prejudice by rejecting all authority and cutting off its ties with tradition. But the blindness of Enlightenment lies in its prejudice against all prejudices. Whenever one is aware of its own prejudice, it is not easy to be misguided by its prejudice. But whenever one is unaware of its own prejudice, it is highly possible to be guided by its own prejudice unconsciously.

51 Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, p.3.
52 Karl Barth, *Evangelical Theology: An Introduction*, p.3.
Although Gadamer has mainly adopted the neutral meaning of “prejudice” (Vorurteil) as pre-understanding, yet it implies a negative meaning like “bias”. Owing to such a double meaning, sometimes it tends to be ironical as he says, “The overcoming of all prejudices, this global demand of the enlightenment, will itself prove to be a prejudice, and removing it opens the way to an appropriate understanding of the finitude which dominates not only our humanity but also our historical consciousness.”

In a word, the greatest prejudice of the Enlightenment is to be confident of its own ability to get rid of all prejudices. This implies that the bias of the Enlightenment is the unawareness of its own prejudice. Removing such a bias is necessary for soundly developing the ideal of enlightenment.

2. Examining the Limitation of Reason

Contemporary French philosopher Edgar Morin (1921-) contends that there are two characters of reason, “rationalization” and “rationality”: One is the constructive nature, and another is the critical nature. The former is to construct according to rational judgment, and the latter is to destroy according to rational judgment. From such a perspective, the function of reason in the middle ages relies upon religion in terms that the constructing reason builds up what religion needs and allows on the one hand, and the critical reason destructs what is not in accordance with religion on the other hand. The result is that reason functions as a defending mechanism through rationalization by “maintaining the consistency of logic of one’s own system at the expense of paralyzing the critical function and the dialogue with the real world”.

Both “rationalization” and “rationality” come from the same source of reason. But the two show totally different characters. The former excludes all those which are different from one’s own view and the latter adopts a tolerant attitude to those which are incomprehensible. On the one hand, “rationalization” has its predetermined conclusions, so reason is actually following those conclusions. On the other hand, “rationality” allows an open attitude and reason is following rational principles. In fact it is difficult to make a distinction between the both, because it is difficult to discern rational principles from predetermined conclusions. In many cases we may see that the way of rationalization is superior to the way of rationality. This has exposed the weakness of reason.

The problem of the Philosophers of 18th century lies in a confusion of rationality with rationalization. For instance, both Voltaire and Diderot appeal to

---


58 Edgar Morin, *Fasi Ouzhou*, p.49.
reason and tolerance, but they would harshly impugn those which are inexplicable to them as “irrational” in a very negative sense.\(^{59}\) The point is that, “Reason is not only the source of critical thinking, but also the source of producing myth.”\(^{60}\) It is not unusual to see that whenever reason criticizes myth and religion there are myth and religion produced by reason. “Whenever reason regards as the moment of defeating myth and religion, myth and reason parasitize reason itself and occupy it.”\(^{61}\) The moment whenever reason turns to a new myth and religion is always a moment turning from tolerance to intolerance. Therefore, Morin contends that it is necessary to delineate the limitation of reason and to develop dialogues with those who are different from us, including the “irrational”, the “irrationalization” and “myths which are seemingly born to be riddles”.\(^{62}\)

The Philosophers of the 18\(^{th}\) century intend to criticize myth, religion and autocracy and construct a system of examination by reason. But it is ironical that reason itself is exempt from any examination.

The blindness of the enlightenment philosophers lies in regarding myth and religion as falsehood, superstition and deception by excluding all the real and deep connections of myth and religion. It is owing to the blindness against myth reason creates its own myth inside itself such as the myth of rational order. Thus reason identifies itself with the truth. This is a road leads to playing God. The end is that the deification of reason leads to insanity.\(^{63}\)

Whenever reason regards itself as limitless, it is a moment of deifying itself. The Enlightenment demands that reason is the only authority above all. “In general, the Enlightenment tends to accept no authority and to decide everything before the judgment seat of reason.”\(^{64}\) While calling every authority into question, reason regards itself as the highest authority as if it can be separated from historical tradition. But this has reflected an irrational attitude for blindly following the authority of reason which is exempt from any examination.

In fact, reason itself is not limitless at all because it is rooted in the temporal and spatial situation. In Gadamer’s words, “the idea of an absolute reason is not a possibility for historical humanity,”\(^{65}\) The real human beings exist only in the temporal and spatial contexts of history, so is reason of human beings not beyond them. “Reason exists for us only in concrete, historical terms.”\(^{66}\) In this sense, reason is not self-sufficient at all, and “it is not its own master but remains

\(^{59}\) Edgar Morin, *Fasi Ouzhou*, pp.51-52.
\(^{60}\) Edgar Morin, *Fasi Ouzhou*, p.55.
\(^{61}\) Edgar Morin, *Fasi Ouzhou*, pp.54-55.
\(^{63}\) Edgar Morin, *Fasi Ouzhou*, p.51.
constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates.”

Reason is not its own master in terms that it is shaped in the historical context. It is impossible for reason to interrogate the historical tradition as if it is standing on a position beyond the historical tradition. Sino-Christian theology should examine the authority and limitation of reason from the perspective of presupposition and pre-understanding with religion as a reference.

**Examining the Limitation of the Agent of Reason**

In addition to examining the validity of reason, Sino-Christian theology should examine the agent of reason as well, because the agent of reason is connected to reason itself and the way to use reason. Since Kant would say that dare to know in order to be mature, it might cause a misperception that while making rational judgments the agent of reason is independent of history and exempt from any examination. With regard to this, Gadamer says, “In fact history does not belong to us; we belong to it.”

History is not something belongs to human beings, but rather, it is presented by all human beings. In this sense, human beings live in history and therefore belong to history rather than go beyond it. “Real historical thinking must take account of its own historicity.”

Human beings are those who live in history and think about history. But we must notice that even the action of thinking about history itself happens in history.

Jürgen Habermas is dissatisfied with Gadamer’s position that reason “is not its own master but remains constantly dependent on the given circumstances in which it operates”. For Habermas, the stand of Gadamer has not been carried out thoroughly enough, because reason has been founded upon a narrow and close ego only operates in the given circumstances. Habermas contends that reason has been shaped during the process of communication in the changing context. That is to say, the agent of reason has been put into a living context of communication. He criticizes that Gadamer does not realize the power of reflection in the process of understanding which should not be overshadowed by the phantom of autonomy and separated from its changing context.

For Habermas, the agent of reason is not an idealistic ego, but rather shaped in the changing context and it can be realized only by the power of reflection. He believes that whenever such a reflection is applied, it will not be confined by any form of dogmatism.

Both Gadamer and Habermas are against the radical enlighteners who have absolutized reason. Gadamer emphasizes that reason is not self-sufficient but rather dependent upon the given contexts. But Habermas places emphasis on the influence of changing contexts upon the agent of reason, because he has sensed

---

a certain residue of Idealism in Gadamer. Both thinkers have been aware of the limitation of human beings. While facing the position of Enlightenment of putting everything before the judgment seat of reason, Gadamer emphasizes the possibility of recognizing the authority of tradition through rational judgment. This is owing to a limitation of human beings, for tradition is prior to the existence of human beings in many ways. Habermas implicitly criticizes Gadamer’s respect for tradition as a form of dogmatism and contends for a continuous critique against tradition in a changing world. This is due to another limitation of human beings, for tradition as constructed by human beings is always imperfect. Sino-Christian theology should inquire about the limitation of the agent of reason who is under the influence of tradition and constructing the imperfect tradition simultaneously. Above all, it is the agent of reason who is located in the given context and changing context.

Epilogue: Are we really enlightened?
Sino-Christian theology should ask continuously: are we really enlightened? The target of the question of Sino-Christian theology should not be other than those who are doing Sino-Christian theology. Those who think themselves have been enlightened could be those who are not enlightened at all. Only when the rational critique can be applied into self rather than others, it is time to be on the way to be enlightened.

Are we really enlightened? If we are not enlightened at all, we are surely incapable of dealing with the problems brought in by enlightenment. How can human beings in problems solve the human problems? Above all, human beings in problems are the real human problems. Pursuing the ideal of enlightenment is to solve these problems.

Can human beings enlighten human beings? Can human beings be enlightened by human beings? How can the word of human beings really enlighten human beings, unless it is the word of the Creator of human beings? This should be an important starting point of Sino-Christian theology.