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Finding Chinese Jesus: Chinese Christians and American missionaries in the Republic of China (1912-1949)

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**FINDING CHINESE JESUS: CHINESE CHRISTIANS AND AMERICAN
MISSIONARIES IN THE REPUBLIC OF CHINA (1912-1949)**

by

Matthew J Douthitt

A Thesis

Submitted to the
Department of History
College of Humanities and Social Sciences
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Master of Arts in History
at
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Thesis Chair: Q. Edward Wang, Ph.D

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Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mom who is always there for me.

Acknowledgments

Developing this thesis has been quite a learning experience for me. I would like to express my deepest thanks to the entire History Department at Rowan University for their warm reception upon my arrival and their constant encouragement throughout my studies. Specifically, I would like to thank Dr. Joy Wiltenburg and Dr. Scott Morschauser for being a part of the thesis committee and offering their advice. Most of all, I would like to thank Dr. Q. Edward Wang, my thesis advisor. His guidance, patience, and encouragement throughout the entire research process were vital to the completion of this thesis. Furthermore, Dr. Wang posed a question in class during my first undergraduate year at Rowan University. The search for the answer to that question spurred on the research that would eventually lead to this thesis. In the future, I hope the search for answers continues to push me to improve my research even further.

Lastly and most importantly, I would like to thank my parents and grandparents. Without their endless love and support, college enrollment would have been out of my reach. This thesis is not only a personal accomplishment but a collective achievement for my entire family. I have been truly blessed.

Abstract

Matthew J Douthitt
FINDING CHINESE JESUS: CHINESE CHRISTIANS AND AMERICAN
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2015-2016
Q. Edward Wang, Ph.D.
Master of Arts in History

This thesis investigates the beliefs and practices of Chinese Christians and their American missionary counterparts in the Republic of China (1912-1949). Between the fall of the Qing Dynasty and the rise of the People's Republic, the Chinese people seriously reexamined politics, religion, and their relationship with the West. Many scholars claim that Chinese people could not completely understand and accept Christianity due to insurmountable cultural differences. I would argue religious misunderstanding did not befall our historical subjects the Chinese Christians; rather misunderstanding has plagued the modern scholar. Misunderstanding did not arise from a centuries old cultural mindset. Instead, Sino-Christianity conformed to the relatively new paradigm of the Republic. This study argues two central things: Sino-Christians, through scholarly pursuits, formed a religion and a Jesus that best suited nationalistic needs. Secondly, American missionaries, either passively or actively, encouraged native Chinese Christians to interpret religion for themselves. Through Sinification, biblical reading blended with the Literary Revolution, the May Fourth Movement redefined Christ's divinity, Confucianism merged with Christian concepts, and Jesus became a KMT revolutionary. Basically, Sino-Christians of the Republic were trying to find a Chinese Jesus.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Since the Chinese defeat in the Opium Wars, an integral component of the Sino-Western relationship included Protestant missionaries. Just as the political system of China shifted in the first decade of the twentieth century, so too did the Protestant-Chinese relationship. Shedding their old dynastic skin, the fledgling Chinese Republic sought to reinvent itself into a new self-determined, modern nation. However, early 20th century Chinese innovators, as well as historians of today, questioned what the face of Chinese national salvation would look like. National salvation refers to China's tumultuous time in the early 20th century. Quite literally, national salvation meant rescuing the country from the political disunity, civil strife, and imperialist exploitation that swiftly followed the collapse of the Qing Dynasty in 1911. The solution to the nation's dilemmas remained ambiguous. Should the nation follow the Western or the Marxist model of government? What role does tradition and religion play in a modernizing republic? Quick to contribute in the national conversation, American Protestant missionaries and Chinese Christians melded salvation through Jesus Christ with the search for political united and modern nationhood.

Most historians agree that Protestant missions played a role in the search for national salvation. By the 1920s, Protestant missions increased their social role in China by expanding and improving education at Christian colleges, organizing women's groups, providing medical care, and organizing social activism through the YMCA. The subsequent rise in Chinese Protestant converts has been dubbed the "golden age" for

American missionaries.¹ Despite this new golden age, most historians admit that the Protestant vision of China ultimately failed. Nonetheless, historians disagree on fundamental issues about Protestant missions. The historical questions about the motives behind Protestant national salvation, the Chinese reception of this vision and the reasons for its ultimate demise have split the scholarly community into three models: the anti-foreign thesis, the Sinicization model, and the Westernization model.

These three models are purely inventions formed by my deductions. Though this essay splits the historiographical trends into three distinct groups, each model is not a coherent historical theory. Marxist, feminist, post-modernist, and other perspectives typically fall into one of these three very broad categories. The scholars discussed certainly would not agree on every aspect of their peers' arguments. Each historical theory will be given a proper investigation. However, all scholars of the same model reach similar, yet very broad, conclusions about the Chinese reception of the American Protestant vision of national salvation. The Westernization model concludes that Protestant missions could potentially have saved China by civilizing and modernizing the Chinese. The Sinification model argues that concepts of Christianity and Westernization blended with indigenous culture to create a new, but native, concept of national salvation. Lastly, the anti-foreign claims that Chinese culture was predisposed to reject Western Christianity and thus predetermined for failure.

To elaborate on the last point, the anti-foreign thesis assumes that Western Christian concepts were too alien for the Chinese. Either unable or unwilling to

¹ Daniel H. Bay, *A New History of Christianity in China*. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley- Blackwell, 2012) 92.

comprehend the missionaries fully, the Chinese distanced themselves from foreign missions. Essentially, these scholars claim missionaries had a negative or zero impact on Chinese society. In turn, the Chinese population could not relate to foreigners due to cultural and/or linguist barriers. This “anti-foreign thesis”, as others scholars will call it, was one of the first real attempts to understand the Christian-Chinese relationship during the Republic.² Historians in the 1960s and early 70s started to seriously investigate American missionary activities in 20s through the 40s in response to the ongoing Cultural Revolution in the People’s Republic. In the late 1960s, these scholars believed that the present state of China simply could not endure and soon the People’s Republic would be forced to rejoin the international community.³ In preparation for that day, historians started to look at the Sino-American relationship with a renewed focus on missionaries. In 1967, Paul Cohen’s landmark text *China and Christianity* was among the first to tackle this issue. Cohen viewed Christianity as a heterodoxy facing hostility from Chinese orthodoxy, namely Confucianism. Though highly praised, this cultural rejection theory would spark criticisms from other scholars.⁴

However other scholars, such as Jonathan Spence, found this approach agreeable. In his books *China Helpers* and *To Change China: Western Advisers in China (1969)*, Spence claims that foreigners were under some delusion that they could change China. Yale Missionary societies’ Yale-in-China attempted to shape the Chinese students into participating international citizens based on a Western model. Spence concludes that

² Xing Jun. *Baptized in the fire of revolution: the American social gospel and the YMCA in China, 1919-1937* (Bethlehem, Pa: Lehigh University Press, 1996) 16

³ Harvard University Press. “China and Christianity The Missionary Movement and the Growth of Chinese Antiforeignism, 1860-1870 by Paul Cohen” About this Book (<http://www.hup.harvard.edu/catalog.php?isbn=9780674283633> Accessed 5/3/16)

⁴ Philip West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western relations, 1916-1952*. (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1976) 10-11

Edward Hume, president of Yale-in-China, returned to America in failure amidst large scale protests by the revolutionary populous and ineffective oversight from the overseas board of trustees.⁵ Spence blames cultural differences that separated Americans from their Chinese counterparts, specifically citing some examples in the medical field.⁶ In the end, Spence claims “the concept of straightness might depend on the angle of vision... [the Chinese] still refused to see Westerners as Westerners saw themselves.”⁷ Of course, this viewpoint drew criticism from some of Spence’s peers. Philip West, a scholar who will also get his own treatment, finds Spence’s remarks about Sinicized missionaries “being swallowed by their own technique” in an attempt to “control China’s destiny” as an unfair assessment of Chinese culture.⁸

Paul Varg also comes to similar conclusions as Spence. In Varg’s article 1974 “Response to the Nationalist Revolution”, Varg argues that foreign missionaries failed to captivate the Chinese people. In the article, some Chinese gawked at the luxurious lives of foreign missionaries. The Chinese saw expensive churches, but no outreach to the poor. Additionally, foreign missionaries grew increasingly close to the unpopular Nationalist regime as an alternative to the communist revolution.⁹ Looking into this concept deeper, the Chinese rejected the pomp of Western individual piety and longed for communal justice. For many, Christianity did not stir revolutionary notions of nationhood. Varg also notes, “The Chinese had no sense of what Christians termed sin or

⁵ Jonathan D. Spence, *To Change China: Western Advisers to China*. (New York: Penguin Books, 1980) 181

⁶ Ibid, 166

⁷ Ibid, 183

⁸ Quoted in: Philip West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western relations, 1916-1952*. (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1976) 4

⁹ Paul A Varg, “The Missionary Response to the Nationalist Revolution” in *The Missionary Enterprise in China and America*. Ed. John King Fairbank. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974) 314-315, 318

the love of God versus the love of self.”¹⁰ In short, Christianity was not what the Chinese wanted. The Chinese needed a different system to fulfill their national and cultural needs.

Progressing into the 1980s, the anti-foreign thesis endured. However, the historiography shifted as historians started to investigate linguistics and language’s relationship with historical development. French sinologist Jacques Gernet provides some important insights. Although Gernet’s work mainly discusses the impact of Jesuit missionaries, Gernet’s insights mention the later Protestant missions and his thesis could be applied to the Republican period. Gernet claims that Christian concepts cannot penetrate Chinese society due to mistranslation from Latin-based languages to Chinese. For example, both Jesuits and Protestant missions inadvertently used words that had Confucian meaning, like heaven in the Confucian sense.¹¹ Thus, words received convoluted or incorrect meanings and softened or misguided the impact missionaries had on the population.

The last and most recent scholar to be discussed in this model is Shuhua Fan. Unlike the cultural concepts in the 1960s, Shuhan Fan switches the perspective that the previous scholars employed. Looking specifically at the HYI board of trustees and its administrators, the 2014 monograph, *The Harvard-Yenching Institute and Cultural Engineering*, contends that the HYI was a secular institution that used the Social Gospel as a stepping stone to promote a modern liberal education.¹² Delving further, Fan never speaks at length about Christian convictions. The HYI was born out of Wilsonian

¹⁰Quoted in: West, *Yenching University*, 8

¹¹ Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985) 48

¹² Fan Shuhua. *The Harvard-Yenching Institute and Cultural Engineering: Remaking the Humanities in China* (London: Lexington Books, 2014) xxii

internationalism, and American paternalistic attitudes that attempted to steer China away from the folly of Japan's industrial and modernizing efforts. Elaborating on the Americans' supposed paternalistic attitudes, Fan points to the fact that leadership was almost exclusively American, and much of the financial resources went towards improving the American-side of the international institute.¹³

Lastly in Fan's view, the crux of the HYI was the establishment of Chinese cultural studies, Chinese history, literature, religion, on both sides of the Pacific. Fan does admit in rare instances this cross-cultural study did mix with Americans desire to spread Christianity to China.¹⁴ The reader may be questioning, why is Fan's work included in the cultural rejection model? The reason is Fan's argument that Christianity was less relevant both in China and with American educators. So a new question arises, why than did the mission fail? Fan concludes that the Chinese perceived the HYI as a vehicle for cultural imperialism by the United States. So when the Communists took power, they uprooted this threat that ran counter to a proper Marxist education.¹⁵ Fan's work centered on the secular aspects of the otherwise religiously dominated discussion. This suggests the author attempts a revisionist history of missionary education. A modern revisionist perspective will undoubtedly reflect some of the secular aspects of the present.

The next historical trend to be discussed is the Sinicization model. To put the theory simply, Chinese and American Protestants were able to make a lasting cultural connection. However, Sinicization was only possible after American Christianity conformed to Chinese expectations. This is probably the most popular scholarly

¹³Ibid, 11,46,50

¹⁴ Ibid,132-133

¹⁵ Ibid,189, 200-1

explanation about the effect of Protestant missions on Chinese society. Despite this, the theme still expresses some major historical problems. Though the most popular explanation, it is perhaps the least coherent. Different scholars look at different aspects of the Sinification process and reach some far reaching conclusions. Everyone from Marxists to intellectual historians contributed their thoughts on the Sinification process. It should be noted that many attributed the success of Protestant missions to the advent of the Social Gospel. Furthermore, if such a cultural connection was made and embraced by the Chinese, why did it ultimately fail and lose to the Communist revolution? This question is probably the most problematic issue for scholars, all of whom reach different conclusions.

One of the first scholars to take on the anti-foreign thesis was Philip West and his 1974 book *Yenching University and Sino-Western Relationship*. West found many of these anti-foreign monographs strongly disagreeable. Instead of focusing on how Christianity failed, West examined Sino-American mutual cooperation at universities, the attitudes of the age, and the creation of exportable Christianity.¹⁶ Looking at some of the liberal tendencies of Yenching staff, West establishes one of the first narratives of cooperation between Westerns and Chinese intellectuals and the merger of Christianity with politics.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Philip West's thesis was created far before his time. The Sinicization model would come to true fruition in the 1990s.

Though analyzing schools and universities continued in historical scholarship, the 1990s saw a shift towards analyzing missionary work through the YMCA. For the first approach, Xing Jun approaches the missionary experience from a Marxist perspective,

¹⁶ West, *Yenching University*, 14-16

¹⁷ West, *Yenching University*, 247

adhering to the Marxist theory of cultural hegemony. He never depicts the Christian missions as a mere facet of the elites. Rather, Xing suggests that the Chinese-Protestant concept of national salvation was just as legitimate as the Communist (Maoist) concepts because both were Sinified concepts of European ideologies. In effect, ideologies were competing for the minds of the lower class and those deemed ineffective for the populace were cast aside. In his own words, Xing explains, “cultural norms...are engaged in a constant struggle with resistance, negotiations, receptions, and rejections.”¹⁸ Xing reassures his audience, “As competing ideologies, the reformist Christian social gospel movement and international communism had equal chances of acceptance”.¹⁹ Though he adheres to the theory of cultural hegemony, Xing does not agree that social Christianity was a futile endeavor.

Xing’s monograph, *Baptized in the Fire of Revolution*, strongly praises some cultural, social, and economic solutions delivered by the YMCA and the Social Gospel. Like in the anti-foreign thesis, Xing acknowledges that some Christian concepts were not desirable to the nationalist struggle. Though, these issues were overcome through Sinicization and social outreach. The YMCA succeeded in everything from social welfare and public health to public lectures. Xing admits that Chinese Christians were “pioneers in many of the same areas that Communist China long claimed as its greatest achievements.”²⁰ However, Chinese scholars viewed the divine aspects of Christianity as mythology and impediments to true modernization. Chinese Christians began to fuse concepts of Christianity with native concepts of Confucianism and Buddhism.

¹⁸ Xing, *Baptized in the Fire of Revolution*, 18

¹⁹ Ibid, 17

²⁰ Ibid, 63

Christianity could not hold a monopoly on all truth without asserting the superiority of Westernized religion. Christianity needed to be less idealistic for Chinese to accept the faith. Additionally, Jesus was regarded simply as a social-reforming human being. According to Xing, the Chinese removed Jesus from his “aristocratic” position as a divine figure.²¹

Keeping in line with the economic contributions of the YMCA, Xing Wenjun (a different individual with the same surname as the previous author) further explores the YMCA and Princeton-in-Peking’s contributions to the Chinese impoverished. Xing Wenjun’s dissertation, *Social gospel, Social Economics, and the YMCA*, follows Sidney Gamble, who used an economic/anthropological approach to help alleviate China’s social woes. The scholar finds Gamble’s contributions to Chinese nationalism particularly praiseworthy and at times calls Gamble’s endeavor a marriage between Protestantism and spirit of the May Fourth Movement.²² According to Xing, the rise of the Republic and its subsequent issues with warlords led to a slow disintegration of traditional, government-run social welfare. Additionally, young Chinese were particularly susceptible to new and radical social ideas in the fledgling Republic. Thanks to the YMCA, young men organized into social and athletic groups. Even in times of famine, the YMCA sent a large supply of sweet potatoes to help alleviate hunger in the ailing Republic.²³ Xing specifically points to Gamble’s anthropologic approach as a reason for his success. By surveying and talking to the lower class Chinese, Gamble assessed the economic situation

²¹ Ibid, 83, 66-74

²² Xing Wenjun. *Social Gospel, Social Economics, and the YMCA : Sidney D. Gamble and Princeton-in-Peking*. (PhD University of Massachusetts, 1992) x

²³ Ibid, 148- 152

to a minute detail, like how much money a Chinese family spent on food.²⁴ Therefore, Xing Wenjun claims the Social Gospel succeeded by catering to Chinese needs with effective information gathering by Gamble.

Probably the most in-depth investigation of Sinicization in the 90s comes from Chu Sin-Jan and his work *Wu Leichuan: A Confucian-Christian in Republican China*. Unlike the other scholar, Chu does not focus on the YMCA. He does not even focus on Yenching or other Christian universities. As the title suggest, he focuses purely on Yenching scholar Wu Leichuan and really delves deep into the particulars of Wu's belief system. As Chu claims, Wu remained a Confucian scholar who simply adapted the concepts of Christianity to his nationalistic goals:

The Way was one; all religions and doctrine led to this Way of Heaven. In other words, Confucianism and Christianity were two ways among religions and doctrines. The function of Christianity was none other than self-cultivation and social reform.²⁵

Chu also finds that the May Fourth Movement and the Anti-Christian Movements were not a wholesale attack on Christianity. The concepts of imperialism, Westernization, and Christianity were strongly debated but still left some small wiggle room for interpretation.²⁶ Wu dodged critics by focusing purely on Jesus' ethical and social teaching and tailoring it to Chinese needs.

As a result of focusing on Wu's ethical pursuits in Christianity, Chu's monograph often reads like a book about Wu Leichuan's quest for the historical Jesus. According to Chu, Wu sought out many parallels in the gospel that related to traditional Chinese religion and the modern needs of the Republic. For example, the Gospel verses "you

²⁴ Ibid, 187

²⁵Chu Sin-Jan. *Wu Leichuan: A Confucian-Christian in Republican China*. (New York: Peter Lang, 1995) 8-9

²⁶ Ibid, 21-26

cannot serve God and mammon” related to Lu Xiangshan’s concepts of righteousness vs profit. Wu reduced the Holy Spirit to the Confucian concept of ren (humanity).²⁷ In turn, Jesus became a sage-like revolutionary that fought against the Romans and the Jewish authorities, similar to how the Chinese sought to remove both foreign influence and ridged traditionalists.²⁸ Wu never perceived Jesus as a divine figure, only a person to be emulated. Chu’s work, rich with parallels in Chinese religious culture, contains some of the most compelling evidence for the Sinicization model.

However, in the most recent scholarship, scholars have started to shy away from the YMCA and universities in favor of looking at independent churches. These churches, like the Jesus Family, the Little Flock, and the True Jesus Church, did not have constant connection with foreign missionaries. Most notably, Daniel Bays may be one of the few scholars who will not claim that Christian movement was a total failure. Bays views Christianity as fluid, shifting with the times. Christians simply changed tactics and approaches under a Communist regime.²⁹ Another notable scholar, Xi Lian exclusively looks at independent churches as the true representation of nationalism and Chinese independence. As a professor of religion, Xi tends to focus more on millenarian theology and indigenous reactions.³⁰ This renewed interest in independent churches seems to stem from China’s reawakening in the global community and a renewal of religion, both foreign and traditional, in the post-Mao China.

²⁷ Ibid, 48-50, 58

²⁸ Ibid, 82

²⁹ Daniel H Bays, “the Growth of independent Christianity in China, 1900-1937” in *Christianity in China : from the Eighteenth Century to the Present*. Ed. Daniel H. Bays. (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 1996) 316, and see: Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*

³⁰ Xi Lian. “The Search for Chinese Christianity in the Republican Period (1912-1949)” *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 38, No. 4 (Oct., 2004 pp. 854-857) <http://www.jstor.org.ezproxy.rowan.edu/stable/3876672>

Before this historiography reaches its final conclusion, we will briefly discuss the third and final theory on National Salvation. Arguably the Westernization approach is the simplest and perhaps the most unpopular. Simply, these scholars view missionaries as the harbingers of modernization. In short, the Chinese wanted or needed some type of Westernization for their national salvation. In one scholarly article, the writer compares American missionaries, who expound the principals of democracy, free thinking, and human equality before God, to the Nationalist Party, who represent autocracy. Accordingly, the Nationalist Party tries to subject and bend Christian schools to their will.³¹ Foreign missionary typically represent the ultimate good in these historical narratives.

Strangely enough, the feminist perspective is typically the approach that uses this model. For the final scholar in this discussion, Mary Keng Mun Chung's *Chinese Women in Christian Ministry* best represents the feminist perspective. Chung explains that traditional Chinese society oppressed women. The Christian movement essentially represents women's emancipation without the ugliness of the communist revolution. Chung explains that Confucius used his ethical code to keep women in low social positions throughout the dynastic periods.³² Conversely, Christian missionaries educated women, made them literate, prohibited foot binding, and put them at a more equal position with men.³³ Essentially, Christian missions modernized Chinese women and saved them from cultural oppression. However, Chung's work tends to be the most obviously bias book discussed. It is a very clear attempt to romanticize both the Christian

³¹ Susan Rigdon, "National Salvation: Teaching Civil Duty in China's Christian Colleges" in *China's Christian Colleges : Cross-cultural connections, 1900-1950*. Eds: Daniel H Bays and Ellen Widmer. (Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 2009) 207-210

³² Mary Keng Mun Chung *Chinese Women in Christian Ministry*. (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005) 50

³³ *Ibid*, 60, 96

missions and women's emancipation. In her defense, Chung is not an unbiased professional historian nor claims to be. As a result, some of her analyses contain some oversights. Nevertheless, Chung's approach most noticeably represents the feminist perspective.

In conclusion, historians tend to differ over their interpretation of the Protestant missions and their contributions to Chinese National Salvation. This essay divided the scholarship into 3 very broad categories. The anti-foreign thesis simply stated that the Chinese could never fully understand the Western concepts of Christianity because it was so alien. Gernet and Varg took the linguistic approach and claimed certain terms could not be translated nor properly understood in Chinese. Spence believes that missionaries were too naïve about Chinese culture. However, Fan argues that secular education was the true motivation in Christian colleges. The Sinification model argues for a cultural exchange, not some poor futile attempt. Many scholars point directly to the social gospel and social works by the YMCA as a reason for the Christian movement's popularity in the 10s and 20s. As Chu points out, this process conformed Christianity to indigenous philosophies and expectations. Lastly, the Westernization theory claims that missionaries brought modernization to China, particularly for women. We have concluded that most scholarship falls into one of these categories. Truthfully, scholars throughout the years have created a wide array of approaches. This essay sought to clarify some of these historiographical trends. By reading and analyzing all of these texts, one discovers that no approach is perfect. Therefore, historians have covered only the tip of the iceberg when it comes to discussing national salvation and Christian missions.

Despite the diversity in opinions, scholars have left much to be desired. This writing will identify some of the faults with both of the radical scholarly schools. Suggesting that Chinese retained some type of natural animosity towards the Christian faith undermines the intellectual and theological work of Chinese Christians and missionaries alike. However, the utopian vision of Christianity in China seems more idealistic than a historical reality. The purpose of this segment is to provide the reader with the necessary components of the historical narrative before diving into the more abstract components of Chinese Christianity. When studying Chinese Christianity of the Republican Era, the relationship between indigenous Chinese and their foreign missionary counterparts cannot be overlooked. How Chinese Christian adapted and responded to foreign missions provides important historical insight into the culture of the early Chinese Republic. However, Chinese culture and philosophy, as well as the foundations of Christian religion, existed well over two-thousand years before the formation of the Chinese Republic. Before a complex analysis can commence, the origins of the Chinese Republic and their foreign missionaries must be explained.

Throughout the 19th century, China remained in the palm of a foreign dynastic order; the Manchus. The Qing Dynasty attempted to limit foreign influences within their country. Initially, the Qing limited Christian missionaries to the Thirteen Factories systems; a series of small, fairly insignificant, trading posts. However after several failed military clashes with the West, the Qing Dynasty started to lose control over Christian missions. By the end of the Second Opium War in 1860, much to the dismay of the Manchus, foreign missionaries attained almost free rein in China. However, the Qing Dynasty frequently attempted to regain control over their ailing empire with little

success. The most infamous attack against Christians came at the turn of the century by a group of anti-Western rebels known as the Boxers, supported by the Manchus. Despite the Manchus' final embarrassing defeat at the hands of foreigners in that rebellion, missionaries started to rethink their relationship with the Chinese. Perhaps, a new style of evangelization, more in tune with the needs of the people, would not garner such a visceral reaction.

This wave of Christianity, combined with a new wave to evangelical fervor, led to an unprecedented growth of Chinese Christendom. The anti-Christian Boxer Rebellion of 1900 only served to intensify the evangelical zeal of American missionaries. Many of those who died in the rebellion served as martyrs for new arrivals. After the Boxer rebellion, missionary applicants soared.³⁴ The early portion of the 20th century is often known as the Progressive Era. This point in time before the Great Depression spurred on increased interest in internationalism and cosmopolitanism. Among some of the most notable missionaries to China in this new age was the Student Volunteer Movement. The religious call to evangelize the entire world motivated many SVM members to China. However, religion remained only one area of interest. The call to improve the world through education made many make the trip across the Pacific.³⁵ Essentially, these American students acted on a charitable impulse, and many helped Westernize the education system in China. The collective endeavors of foreign missionaries and educators garnered quite an astonishing amount of attention from the Chinese people. In 1889, the number of Chinese Protestants numbered about 37,000. By the height of the

³⁴ Ibid, 93

³⁵ Terril E. Lautz, "The SVM and Transformation of the Protestant Mission to China", *China's Christian Colleges : Cross-cultural connections, 1900-1950*. Eds: Daniel H Bays and Ellen Widmer. (Stanford, Calif. : Stanford University Press, 2009) 4-8

Christian Movement in the 1920s, Chinese Protestant membership peaked to an astonishing 500,000 members with nearly 8,000 foreign missionaries living in the country.³⁶

During the demise and decline of the Qing Dynasty, the transition from an ailing Empire to the new fledgling Republic enabled Christianity to flourish. In 1911, the Chinese people ousted the Manchu dynasty and established a republic. The end of the dynastic system directly challenged Confucianism within the Chinese bureaucracy. In the final years of the Qing Dynasty, the imperial examination system diminished in importance. Thus, ending the centuries' long monopoly Confucianism held over Chinese civil servants and social mobility. Additionally, the new Republic banned the traditional practice of foot binding. Many Chinese long sought to end these seemingly backwards anti-modern practices. American missionaries also strongly advocated for removing old Confucian practices and beliefs.³⁷ Moreover, since the Opium Wars, the Chinese thought of opium as a scourge and blight against the Chinese people. Foreign missionaries also started anti-opium campaigns to curb drug addiction and advocate for sobriety. Lastly, the Qing categorized Chinese Christians as *jiaomin* or 'religious people' as opposed to regular common people. However, the new Republic changed their status to regular citizens. As regular citizens, the Republic granted freedom of religion, separation of church and state, and the right to purchase property and establish churches.³⁸ At least for

³⁶ Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China*. 92-93 and Bays "The Growth of Independent Christianity in China 1900-1937", 308

³⁷ Mary Keng Mun Chung. *Chinese Women in Christian Ministry*. (New York, NY: Peter Lang, 2005) 60, 96

³⁸ Daniel H. Bay, *A New History of Christianity in China*. (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley- Blackwell, 2012) 95

the time being, the Republic, and its foreign missionaries, shared the same objective to modernize a new China.

The intellectual and theological origins of the new missionary enterprise started long before the increased Christian outreach in the Republican Era. Most of the theological origins of foreign missionaries, Americans in particular, can be traced to the Second and the subsequent Third Great Awakening that dominated religious life in the 19th Century. (The occurrence of a Third Awakening remains debatable but typically refers to the rise of Pentecostalism and the early stages of the Social Gospel.) This religious revival hit the United States particularly hard. From the start to the close of the 19th century, American church membership more than quintupled in size. The Great Awakening eroded away many of the old Protestant tents on total depravity and the stain of Original Sin. Instead, a loving and caring God and a humanity inclined towards natural goodness became the center of new American Protestantism. The slowly forming new theology focused its time on empowering the laity, scholarly inquiry, and social service. The later 19th century revivals sowed the seeds of the Social Gospel and the YMCA. Scholars have pointed to these movements as particularly impactful to the foreign missions in China.³⁹

The Social Gospel gained popularity by the early 20th century. In 1859, Charles Darwin's *Origin of Species* posed a serious challenge to Christian theology. Rather than challenge this new science, many liberal clergy in the United States responded by de-emphasizing divinity and reaffirming the social teaching of Jesus found in the Bible.

³⁹ Xing Jun. *Baptized in the fire of revolution: the American social gospel and the YMCA in China, 1919-1937*. (Bethlehem, Pa: Lehigh University Press, 1996) 27-29

These Christians began to look at the Gospels scientifically; developing a strict historical and textual criticism of the Bible.⁴⁰ Like other Christian movements of the time, proponents of the Social Gospel believed in an exclusively loving God and the natural goodness of mankind. However, the Social Gospel cared more about communal salvation, a literal Kingdom of God on Earth, and Christian Socialism. Some scholars claim that the Social Gospel arose out of the unprecedented social woes that came with an industrializing society.⁴¹ Corruption, crime, poverty, homelessness, and racial discrimination became the obstacles that advocates of the Social Gospel needed to surmount if they want to bring a utopian Kingdom to fruition.

To define the term simply, the Social Gospel was a broad liberal Christian movement that used Biblical morality to fight social woes, specifically poverty. The Social Gospel Movement remained mostly unorganized, unconfined to a single denomination, and unconcerned denominational differences and theological teaching. Despite this, these Christians unified on helping the lower social classes, and allied themselves with the growing Progressive Movement and Wilsonian internationalism of the early 20th century. The call to help the poor around the world spurred many Social Gospel missionaries to China. Traditional missionaries focused more on conversion and orthodox teaching than their more liberal counterparts, leading to inevitable conflict. In this essay, the term Social Gospel is applied to Christians who shared liberal values with this broad American movement and attempted to apply them to China. It is important for the reader to know that this movement coexisted with other more traditional missionary

⁴⁰ Xing Jun. *Baptized in the fire of revolution*, 30-31

⁴¹ Xing, Wenjun. *Social Gospel, Social Economics, and the YMCA : Sidney D. Gamble and Princeton-in-Peking*. (PhD University of Massachusetts, 1992) 9-12

work and Chinese independent churches. This essay analyzes a select group of educated Chinese who associated with these liberal Americans through missionary education. Despite their small numbers, the influence on this ideology in China is well attested by other historians.

If the Social Gospel was ideological, then the YMCA realized and materialized much of that ideology. As scholar Xing Jun notes, the YMCA never fully embraced the Social Gospel officially. Many liberal followers of the Social Gospel often clashed with their evangelical counterparts. Despite being an organization geared towards social services, Xing suggests that the YMCA never fully embraced all the tenets of the Social Gospel due to their close relationship with big business. Nevertheless, some of the influences of this movement started to permeate into the YMCA by the start of the twentieth century.⁴² In the United States and United Kingdom, the YMCA created programs to serve young men in the community. The YMCA provided everything from leisure time activities, to Bible studies, to humanitarian services. However, the goal of the organization remained Christian evangelization, though a very vague notion of it. The YMCA sought to avoid sectarian conflict and denominational infighting. As a result, the organization founded interdenominational Christian principles and an apolitical platform. Despite this many scholars agree when the YMCA came to China, the organization became less concerned with evangelization and more concerned with social reform.⁴³

With the end of the old Confucian style examination system and an influx of educated Westerns, missionary schools became a hot bed for Christian instruction and

⁴² Xing Jun. *Baptized in the fire of revolution*, 39-41

⁴³ *Ibid*, 42-43

modern education. Many Christian school in China received backing from prestigious universities in the United States, most notably Yale-in-China, Princeton-in-Peking, and Harvard-Yenching. Since Westernization and modernization became central tenets of the new republic, many young Chinese flocked to Christian schools to receive a liberal education. Many of these colleges and university educators displayed interest in some of the liberal missionary themes previously discussed. As many scholars show in their works, the educators of Christian universities, both foreign and domestic, retained strong connections with both the Social Gospel and the YMCA.⁴⁴ As a result, a host of Christian intellectuals influenced the outcome of China's national salvation.

Among the most famous from the scholarly community remains the Yenching Apologetic Group. This highly influential group in Yenching University contained a host of both foreign and Chinese educators. Lucius Porter, Howard Galt, and the most notable president of Yenching University, John Leighton Stuart ranked among the foreign members of the Apologetic group. All of these men differed from the old style of evangelical missionaries. Using some of the tenets of the Social Gospel, these foreigners claimed that Jesus was a human social reformer. They hoped the new liberal approach would foster cooperation between science and religion, theology and social work, and religious salvation with the concepts of Chinese National Salvation. However, the Americans in this group faced a large amount of criticism from Christians within the United States.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Philip West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western relations, 1916-1952*. (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1976) 22

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 39-44

Equally as controversial were Chinese educators and community leaders. Among the most prominent names in this study include YMCA leadership such as T.Z. Koo and Y.T. Wu. Others include educators particularly from Yenching University such as Wu Leichuan the Chancellor of Yenching, T.T Lew, the Dean of Yenching School of Religion, T.C Chao, a famous Professor of Religion, and William Hung, a Professor of History. Still others include a few prominent Catholic intellectuals such as John C. H Wu, often called the Chinese Chesterton. Still many more comprise this study. The aim of this study is twofold: Firstly, to identify and study the collective voice of these Chinese Christian nationals. Secondly, the intellectual conversation between missionary and native Christians must be assessed. All of the Chinese Christians used in this study had close affiliations with American missionaries. Nearly all of them attended college within the United States or at American missionary universities in China. Union Theological Seminary in New York, Vanderbilt University, and Columbia University remained some of the most prominent schools attended by visiting scholars.⁴⁶ Nearly of them worked with American educators, the YMCA, or even the US government itself. Furthermore, nearly all of them mastered the English language or translated their works into English.

The existence of English texts, written by Chinese Christian intellectuals, already suggests a few things about Chinese scholars. Chinese Christians were not passive recipients of Western dogmas. Rather, they internalized and interpreted the tenets of Christianity. Those things they found distasteful or enjoyable they communicated to Americans through their writing. It was conversation between native theologians and foreign missionaries. This study looks extensively on the English-translated works. The

⁴⁶ T.C Chao, T.T. Lew, P.C. Hsu, et al. *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series*, (London: Student Christian Movement, 1926) Vii-viii

reliance on English translations certainly is the Achilles' heel of this study. However, I feel that these works better bring the Sino-American relationship into perspective. Indeed, Chinese Christians wrote to an American audience. These short works were typically compiled by scholars and published in collaborative volumes. They stated anything from personal opinions about Jesus to the missionary misconduct in universities. They wanted American clergy to know their beliefs. By examining this material, the reader will better understand the impact of the Social Gospel. For Catholic Chinese, who were not impacted by the American Protestant Social Gospel, Catholic social teaching plays an important role. In fact, Catholic social teaching word-wide seemed at its high in the early 20th century amidst prominent social advocates like Dorothy Day and GK Chesterton and in the fervor in the lead up to the Second Vatican Council. Progressive American Catholics also took prestige over other foreign nationalities.

Equally important as foreign influences were the domestic nationalist movements in China. The most important movement impacting Chinese students and teachers was the May Fourth Movement. On May 4, 1919, Chinese students and teachers erupted in nationwide protests against the new Republican government. Though an Allied Power in the First World War, the Republic conceded territory to the Japanese in the Treaty of Versailles.⁴⁷ Students and professors alike protested and distributed nationalist periodicals. Though regarded as patriots by many, many students faced arrest. The population despised the weakness displayed by the Chinese government. To discard this weakness, the people rethought various aspects of cultural life.

⁴⁷ Spence, Jonathan *The Gate of Heavenly Peace: the Chinese and Their Revolution 1895-1980* (New York: Penguin Books, 1981) 154-156

If the 1911 Revolution was anti-imperialist and nationalistic, the May Fourth Movement greatly intensified this fervor. Anti-traditionalist and even Marxist thought bleed through the entire movement. Many blamed Confucianism for being contrary to the fundamental principles of democracy and sought its revision.⁴⁸ Old styles of language, promoted by the old dynastic system, were cast off in the Literary Revolution, an offshoot of the May Fourth Movement, which will be elaborated on in the next chapter. Mao Zedong published one of the most popular essays in *New Youth* around this time. He claimed traditional beliefs of slender pale bodies only promoted weakness among the population. His essay advocated for disregarding traditional practices and an increased interest in physical exercise.⁴⁹ Even the Christians faced criticism in this movement. Like Confucius, many started to revise Jesus and the Gospels to contain less superstitious material.⁵⁰ However, the entire concept of religion was not completely discredited in the May Fourth Movement. In later years however, the anti-religious remarks from the Marxist elements grew louder.

Of course, secular movements acted against this new flood of Christian intellectualism. The most notable and most damaging to the Christian experience in China was the Anti-Christian Movement of 1922. The Anti-Christian Movement sought to limit the outreach the Christian missions. Fueled with the fires of both nationalist sentiment and some Marxist beliefs, advocates of the Anti-Christian Movement claimed that Christianity was a tool of both capitalism and imperialism. The Movement believed that the foreign faith undermined and subjected the true salvation of the new Chinese

⁴⁸ Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*. (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1960) 46-47

⁴⁹ Spence *The Gate of Heavenly Peace*, 168

⁵⁰ Chow, *The May Fourth Movement* 321-322

nation. In 1925, the new KMT government forced missionary schools to restrict and limit religious teachings. Many Anti-Christian protesters accused their Chinese Christians counterparts of being “rice Christians”; people who converted to simply obtain a free meal.⁵¹ Foreign missionaries also came under intense criticism. John Stuart, the President of Yenching, called the movement a “revolt against the white race in China.”⁵² Despite the influx of Christians to China in the republican period, Christian influence remained limited.

However, other movements soon ran counter to the secularizing trends of the May Fourth Movement and the Anti-Christian Movement. Chiang Kai-shek’s personally sponsored New Life Movement in 1934 refuted these Marxist trends. By the 1930s, the Nationalist government became increasingly afraid of communism. Despite this, Chiang could not completely refute anti-superstitious fervor and its impact on nationalism. Rather than reinstate old backwards religions, the KMT created a new revisionist Confucianism and Christianity. Inspired by both Methodism and Confucianism, the New Life Movement looked more at ethical teachings than divinity. The Movement claimed that the Republic was in a moral decline and a new system of morality was need for the nation to progress. Combined with this ethical teaching, Chiang’s government forcibly cracked down on social vices, drug addiction, personal hygiene, improved infrastructure, and military discipline. The movement’s focus on personal cultivation and national strengthening convinced many Christians to ally with the KMT. The NLM still remained

⁵¹ West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western relations*, 93-97

⁵² *Ibid*, 94

within these trends of nationalism and modernity. Also, Chinese Christians were influenced by each of these movements.⁵³

If the reader came away with a very convoluted vision of the intellectual and theological trends in the Chinese Republic, this introduction has been successful. A multitude of factors both foreign and domestic flooded into the newly independent nation. However, one thing is very certain; many Chinese worked within this new wave of Christianity. Therefore, this writing opposes the anti-foreign thesis as a viable approach to the Christian missionary experience. As historians suggested, the Chinese people could not understand the concepts of Christianity, particularly abstract ones like original sin and total depravity. However, there is something paradoxically wrong with the anti-foreign thesis. These scholars would have to suggest that Chinese Christians lived under some veil of ignorance. If Chinese Christians have a different concept of sin, how does one discern that the concept was not Sinicized or a subjective reflection? Certainly, many perceived these modifications as heretical, but modification does not denote misunderstanding. When a person does not understand their present situation, the human mind contorts to make the individual understand. When the Chinese read the Bible or heard a sermon, they interpreted to the best of their ability and adapted the doctrines, either intentionally or unintentionally. Simply put, Christianity was unavoidably interpreted into the early 19th century Chinese paradigm.

⁵³ James C. Jr. Thompson, *While China Faced West: American Reformers in Nationalist China 1928-1937*. (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1969. Google Ebook) 152, 158 and, Fairbanks, John King and Albert Feuerwerker (eds). *The Cambridge History of China*. Vol 13. Republican China 1912-1949, Part 2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986 Google Ebook) 146

I would argue religious misunderstanding did not befall our historical subjects the Chinese Christians; rather misunderstanding has plagued the modern scholar. Historians tend to regard religion almost as a club. People act but actual religious practices and beliefs are not mentioned. Clearly, this is a byproduct of an increasing secular modern world, not a reflection of our historical subjects. This study specifically asks Chinese Christians, what did you believe? This study agrees with the Sinicization model. However, other scholars have left much to be desired. So far, no one has properly looked at beliefs and how they relate to national and international trends. Moreover, Jesus in particular and His characterization remain the central focus. The first chapter examines the impact of the Literary Revolution on Bible reading and interpretation. The second chapter will display how the May Fourth Movement and the Social Gospel impacted the concepts of Christ's divinity. The third explores Confucian ethics merger with Christianity in an effort to Sinicize foreign religion. Lastly, we will tackle the New Life Movement and the formation of a revolutionary Jesus. This study argues two central things: Firstly, Sino-Christians, through scholarly pursuits, formed a Jesus and a religion that best suited nationalistic needs. Secondly, American missionaries, either passively or actively, encouraged native Chinese Christians to interpret religion for themselves.

Chapter 2

The Biblical Revolution

In the 1920s, American missionaries came to China with a genuine enthusiasm to spread the Word of God to the most populous nation in the world. To ensure a successful endeavor, missionaries required the native Chinese to comprehend the tenets of Christianity. Not surprisingly, this objective necessitated accurate translations into the native language and proper education in Christian orthodoxy. Before a Chinese man knew Jesus, he heard sermons, interpreted tracts, or read portions of the Bible. However, Chinese in the Republic did not passively accept the translations from the missionaries on high. Moved by the nationalistic spirit of the May Fourth Movement, Chinese Christians desired inclusion in the publication of Christian literature. Language played an important role in the revolutionary spirit of China. This Literary Revolution encompassed Christian literature. Particularly for the Chinese, language conveyed a strong cultural meaning. Controlling the translation, publication, and interpretation of Christian literature played into the national and cultural ambitions of the Chinese people. Through language studies and translations, Chinese Christians hoped to equal their colonial counterparts, erase remnants of the dynastic order, and strengthen the Chinese education system.

The study of Christian translation into the Chinese language is typically the focus of historians adhering to the anti-foreign thesis. These scholars claim the tenets of Christianity could not be accurately translated into Chinese, or Christian themes remained too alien for native Chinese comprehension. This chapter strongly opposes the deductions of anti-foreign thesis scholars. Nevertheless, missionaries and Chinese Christians struggled with both translation and cross-cultural comprehension. Certainly, Chinese

students found difficulty in some phrases and idioms incorporated into their Christian education. However, Chinese Christians were not passive recipients. In the revolutionary age following the May Fourth Movement and the Anti-Christian Movement, Chinese Christians became pivotal players in the theological conversation. Chinese Christians endeavored to learn multiple foreign languages to become active participants in Christian missions. They translated the Bible in a way that encouraged popular literacy and modernity, while disparaging the old imperial examinations. Rather than miscomprehending Christian themes, the Chinese actively selected translations that best suited the principles of nationalism, democracy, and modernity.

The most important intellectual trend to understand how Chinese Christians read the Bible was the Literary Revolution. In 1915, well over 1,000 Chinese students were studying abroad in the United States. In the lead up to May Fourth Movement, Chinese students abroad started to express their hatred for the Japanese and called for action. However, Hu Shih thought that nationalism was better expressed through education not violence.⁵⁴ Though discussion of a literary revolution circled prior to the 1911 Revolution, the Literary Revolution really came into being thanks to Hu Shih. Hu Shih, a soon-to-be famous philosopher, was a Chinese intellectual studying under the American pragmatist John Dewey. Possibly, new American free verse poetry which gripped the United States in the 1910s may have influenced Hu. Nevertheless, Hu started to gather fellow Chinese students in the dormitories of Cornell, and began publishing articles calling for a literary

⁵⁴ Chow Tse-tsung. *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*. (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1960) 26-27

revolution. This revolution upheld written vernacular and free prose rather than the rigid traditional writing style that long dominated dynastic China.⁵⁵

To elaborate, classical Chinese, Wen-yen, had long been a dead language. By 1919, Hu hoped to show that Mandarin dialects in free form could be just as elegant as the classic poetry. Though Hu started his movement in poetry, the Literary Revolution spread to philosophical and scholarly works.⁵⁶ Through linguistics, Hu hoped to liberate the people in a grassroots movement. Hu Shih argued that classical Chinese was a long dead language that only persisted as the national norm to support empires and imperial education.⁵⁷ The spread of the Literary Revolution inevitably targeted the Christian Gospels. Despite his secular pragmatic tendencies, Chinese Christian scholars held Hu Shih in high regard. Sino-Christians and Hu Shih viewed one another as liberal allies and even allowed Hu to publish alongside Christian writings. By neglecting Wen-yen, the Bible longed to join the Literary Revolution that was sweeping the nation in the early 20s.

Drawn by both Hu Shih's educational revolution and American democratic values, students and educators in American mission schools started to join this nationalistic rhetoric. In a 1922 survey, many missionaries found statistics regarding the high employment of educators puzzling. Most Sino-Christians, educated at mission schools, forwent higher paying jobs to return to missionary schools as teachers. More Christian graduates became educators than any other occupation. The surveyors

⁵⁵ Ibid, 28-29

⁵⁶ "Chapter 1: Literary Revolution in China" Hu Shih, *English Writing of Hu Shih*. Chih-Ping Chou (ed) Literature and Society Volume 1. (China Academic Library, 2013. Springer Online Book) 4-5

⁵⁷ Hu Shih, "The Literary Revolution in China", in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes*. (London: Student Christian Movement, 1922) 62

questioned, “(do teachers) as patriots and self-sacrificing servants of the nation, do their utmost to make them (students) feel satisfaction that should come to men and women working thus upon the foundations of a new Chinese civilization?”⁵⁸ Though the missionaries asked this question hypothetically, religious teachers indeed played a role in modern, patriotic education. In a 1926 Chinese publication titled *Intellectual Leadership and Citizenship Training*, T.C. Chao claimed Christian colleges “educated true citizenship men...who become not only true patriots but also international persons.”⁵⁹ The democratic ideals of American missionaries appealed to Sino-Christians in this youngling republic. Much as Japan served as a model of Asian modernity and power, China looked to the United States for a functioning, educated, republican democracy.

Despite this, among one of the most daunting tasks for both Sino-Christian intellectuals and American missionary educators were the issues of illiteracy. Illiteracy remained exceedingly high in the Chinese republic. This uneducated class consisted of the poorest echelons of Chinese society. M. Thomas Tchou, a Chinese leader in the YMCA, presented a report on the situation of the labor and industrial movements in the mid-20s. Tchou remained convinced that the high rate of illiteracy among the working class left the lower classes prey to “Bolshevistic” propaganda.⁶⁰ Not only did illiteracy hinder the modernization of the nation, Bible comprehension remained a major obstacle. As one Sino-Christian intellectual, C.Y. Cheng, reported only 65% of men and 35% of

⁵⁸ Special Committee on Survey and Occupation, China Continuation Committee. *Christian Occupation of China: A General Survey of the Numerical Strength and Geographical Distribution of the Christian Forces in China*. (Shanghai: China Continuation Committee, 1922. Reprinted. San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, Inc. 1979) 405

⁵⁹ T.C. Chao, “*Intellectual Leadership and Citizenship Training*” in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series*, 139

⁶⁰ M. Thomas Tchou, “Present Day Industrial Situation and Labor Movement” in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series*, 19

women in the Chinese church could read the Chinese language.⁶¹ Yet, Cheng expressed hope that this trend could be reversed with a new phonetic alphabet. Together, Chinese Christians and the China Inland Mission created the Phonetic Promotion Committee of China, and started work on a phonetic script to help surmount the difficulties of the Chinese written language. This group lived by the motto “Every Christian a Bible reader, and every Christian a teacher of the illiterate.”⁶²

Surely, both foreigners and Sino-Chinese worked together on the phonetic project to educate the illiterate masses. Early in the project, some foreigners suggested that the new script should be based on Latin characters. Chinese Christians opposed this idea as too Western and instead proposed a system based on Chinese brushstrokes.⁶³ It appears as though most foreigners wavered to the native’s demands. However, according to the *Christian Occupation of China* survey, some organizations did print some phonetic Bibles with Romanized characters. Despite this, the surveyors admit that the Latin-based Bibles failed miserably. Romanized Bibles failed to sell when Chinese script editions were available. For Canton in 1920, Mandarin-style literature sold 1,791 complete Bibles, 12,122 New Testaments, and 129, 929 Bible portions as compared to the 72 complete Bibles, 80 New Testaments, and 1 Bible portion sold in Romanized form. Though, the national phonetic script managed to sell 167,000 Bible portions nationally, and started to rival the Mandarin script Bibles.⁶⁴ Clearly, the phonetic script proved to be fairly popular. Despite the ongoing issue of illiteracy, Chinese Christians still wanted to read a Bible that reflected their culture.

⁶¹ CY Cheng, “The Chinese Church”, in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes*. (London: Student Christian Movement, 1922) 130-131

⁶² Ibid, 131

⁶³ *Christian Occupation of China*, 10

⁶⁴ Ibid, 453

In fact, many Chinese found merit in the Bible simply because many Bible translators neglected to use classical Wen-yen. By the 1920s, many Chinese Christians joined the Literary Revolution. Like Hu Shih, many found this literary form of Chinese to be outdated, and most advocated for an increased use of the vernacular style of Mandarin. Many believed that the classical language, with its increased difficulty to master, added to the illiteracy problem and only benefited the upper class. By switching to vernacular Mandarin, the Bible became accessible to the average person. A Chinese Christian publication by T.T. Lew claimed Wen-yen represented the “high brow, the autocratic, the undemocratic, the antisocial, unfit for citizens of a republic.”⁶⁵ Instead, Lew pointed towards the Bible as a revolutionary example. He claimed, when the Bible first arrived in China, the text used vernacular language to target the poor and lowly.⁶⁶ By simply translating the Bible in the language of the average man, the Gospels could participate in the national revolution.

The sales of Biblical translations further validated the necessity for Mandarin vernacular Christian literature. Though fighting among warlords often artificially decreased the supply of Bible shipped to an area, Bible sales in Chinese still flourished. In one year (presumably 1921 but the surveyor failed to mention), publishers printed in both Wen-yen and easy Wen-yen a total of over 520,000 issues of scripture, including full Bibles, testaments, and small portions of the Bible. While these numbers seem impressive, vernacular Bible far exceeded the classical style. According to the *Christian Occupation* survey, 5,792,047 Mandarin scriptures were in circulation for that year.

⁶⁵ T.T. Lew “Chinese Renaissance”, in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes*. (London: Student Christian Movement, 1922) 46-47

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*,

Undoubtedly, even Sino-Christians disregarded the old imperial literary style for a more vernacular and democratic reading of the Bible. Despite this, almost 97% of vernacular scriptures were mere portions of the Bible: segments smaller than a complete Testament. In comparison to the English language scriptures in China, only 15% of English Biblical literature circulated in the form of small portions. Readers without fluency in English typically did not possess a complete Bible. Chinese readers probably only read a single book or even a single parable rather than the entire authoritative text. Publishing the Bible in the small portions certainly created a more selective method of reading and diminished the Bible's role as a single, sacred, authoritative text. Though Chinese text seemed more liberating, translation and distribution remained a work in progress.⁶⁷

Many Chinese acknowledged the difficulties that came with vernacular translations. Despite this, the Sino-Christians insisted that Mandarin best exemplified and expressed their vision of Christianity. T.T. Lew insisted that the vernacular writing style transformed into a “more perfect”, more elegant language than the classical style, not just a mere “tool of expression”.⁶⁸ Nearly four years later in 1926, Professor T.T. Lew still maintained that Christian colleges were instrumental in the disestablishment of the imperial Wen-yen writing style. However, Lew complained about the students' sloppy writing. He declared the students required more scientific training to perfect the written vernacular.⁶⁹ Translation, writing, and language learning remained difficult tasks.

Though, the Chinese acknowledged this. To them, it remained worthwhile to create a

⁶⁷ *Christian Occupation of China*, 453

⁶⁸ T.T. Lew “Chinese Renaissance”, in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes*. (London: Student Christian Movement, 1922) 48

⁶⁹ Timothy Tingfang Lew “The New Cultural Movement and Christian Education in China” in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series*, 59-60

system of writing that disregarded the oppressive traditions of the past and embraced the new nation.

Despite the obvious problems with newly translated Bibles, Western missionaries with their Chinese associates attempted to work together to help alleviate the issues. Indeed, American missionaries remained close throughout the vernacular translation of the Bible. Francis CM Wei, a Sino-Christian university professor, published in his 1926 article *Synthesis of Cultures of East and West* that “foreigners and Chinese are not only working and thinking together, but are also living together and bearing each other’s burdens.”⁷⁰ Perhaps, Dr. Wei’s quote comes across as a bit too promising. Nevertheless, Dr. Wei maintained that Chinese and foreigners were equals. However, any breach of this friendship or dogmas that Sino-Christians found too oppressive would be rejected by Chinese intellectuals.

This American friendship impacted the way scriptures were read. Specifically, learning English, as well as other languages, had practical purposes. Jonathan L. Stuart, the eventual President of Yenching University, noticed that his students at Nanjing Theological Seminary expressed a desire to learn Greek. With the ability to read Greek, Chinese students could study, analyze, and criticize Greek New Testament papyri for themselves, a talent many in the American Social Gospel Movement perfected. In 1918 after much delay, Stuart published his *Greek-Chinese-English Dictionary of the New Testament*, a tool undoubtedly used in China for decades. However, Stuart acknowledged that Greek and Chinese were too alien from many Chinese students. Many

⁷⁰ Francis CM Wei, “Synthesis of Cultures of East and West” in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series*, 78

students found Greek studies too difficult. Since most of Stuart's students knew English, Stuart incorporated English translations to act as ballast between the two polarizing languages.⁷¹ Thus, missionaries and Chinese worked together towards a more scientific study of the Bible.

Indeed, Stuart's dictionary seemed to encourage students to develop their own scientific textual criticisms. For instance, the Greek word "βαπτίζω" (baptize) stirred controversy among Western denominations. While the word's typically defined as 'immersion', other instances of the word in the New Testament translated closer to 'bathe'. In the West, this translation debate erupted into controversy over the necessity of immersive baptism. To clarify, many Westerners questioned if one's entire body had to be submerged in water for a baptism to be valid. Stuart, the Social Gospel author, used both translations, displayed no preference, and never included any theological commentary on the definition.⁷² His dictionary remained purely a tool for translation and textual criticism, not theological teachings. Most adherers of the Social Gospel did not worry about theological issues. Furthermore, this tool enabled Sino-Christians to join in the search for the historical Jesus.

Upon observing language studies of the period, Chinese Christian intellectuals rejected some of the teachings of their missionaries if they did not respect the Chinese as equals. For instance, T.T. Lew ran an article in January 1922 praising the National Education Association of China's new program to make proficiency in at least two

⁷¹ Jonathan Leighton Stuart, *Greek-Chinese-English Dictionary of the New Testament*. (Shanghai: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1918) viii-xi

⁷² *Ibid*, 37

foreign languages mandatory for Chinese students.⁷³ Language studies advanced the concept of modern education and increased Chinese presence on the international stage. On the other hand, Sino-Christians expected Western missionaries to come to China with advance knowledge of the native language. According to David D.Z. Yui from the YMCA, Chinese students often did not take Christian education seriously if foreigners could not speak the native tongue. Yui remarked:

Suppose that some Chinese missionaries were to try to introduce Confucianism to Great Britain or America. What do you think the results would be, if these missionaries, in addition to a smattering of “Pidgin” English, were to do their work mostly in Chinese and to depend very largely upon interpreters, and if the leaders among the British or American converts were much better educated in Chinese civilization than their own?⁷⁴

Though foreign language studies were important to bring the Chinese Christians into the international fold with their missionary cohorts, Sino-Christians still promoted the Chinese language as the primary communicator to the populace.

As a result, many Sino-Christian intellectuals found some problems with the methods of religious instruction used by foreigners. Certainly, Sino-Christian intellectuals often praised missionary work. However, T.Z. Koo noted that the spiritual life among students in many Christian colleges had started to stagnate in the early 20s. For Koo, the blame rested on poorly performed religious education. Many students were allegedly “rice Christians”, Chinese who faked religious conversion for financial or social gain. Additionally, some foreign teachers apparently proclaimed the superiority of

⁷³ T.T. Lew “Chinese Renaissance”, in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes*. (London: Student Christian Movement, 1922) 50

⁷⁴ David D.Z. Yui, “The Needs of the Christian Movement in China” in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series*, 143

Western culture, and religion classes varied widely based on religious denomination.⁷⁵ Koo asserted that these foreign fallacies demoralized true religious conviction among students and generated unnecessary complications in their educational pursuits. Furthermore, students seemed to misunderstand some Western religious terminology used in class. Terms like the “fellowship of the Holy Spirit”, the “love of God”, and “the living Christ”, students perceived as intangible.⁷⁶ Koo advocated to the school that Christian terms and definitions needed to suit the average lifestyle of Chinese students in order to be accurately comprehended.

In 1926, T.T. Lew agreed with the YMCA leader TZ Koo. To help illustrate some of his criticism, Lew retold a story of two female Chinese classmates reuniting after years of separation. Though one woman was Christian and the other non-Christian, both women received their education at missionary schools, remained proud of their Chinese heritage, and treasured their mutual friendship:

But the non-Christian lady gently confided to the other that while she still loved her as much as she did...she had a growing tendency to dislike the life and environment of the Christian Church in China... she regretted that she had ever studied in a mission-school. She felt the time spent in a mission-school gave her a training which produced a certain “missionary tone” which she found unpleasant and un-Chinese and which required a definite effort to throw off.⁷⁷

Were the agnostic woman’s comments anti-religious? Lew argued that the woman’s criticisms were valid and contained no ill-intentions towards the religious community. Being critical was not anti-religious. For the Yenching Dean of Theology, missionary school must respond to the needs of the Chinese students and the future needs of the

⁷⁵ TZ Koo, “The Spiritual Life of Students in Christian College”, in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series*, 108-109

⁷⁶ *Ibid*, 111

⁷⁷ Timothy Tingfang Lew “The New Cultural Movement and Christian Education in China” in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series*, 68-69

Chinese republic. Educators should focus less on formalities and more on the “principles of science”, “reading knowledge of at least one foreign language”, “the Chinese language, spoken and written”, “grounding in Chinese culture”, and “the functions of democratic citizenship”.⁷⁸ Lew’s article contained a long winded paragraph containing all his demands for missionary schools. Evidently, the Chinese critically studied and examined the Christian religion.

Finally, we now assess how the Sino-Christians read that tool, the all-important Bible. As we have covered, a new wave of liberalism in translation and teaching methods swept the nation. This influence undoubtedly affected interpretation of texts. Probably some of the most compelling evidence of how Bible reading took place in the Republic came from Chinese students. Mr. Tien Han of the Young China Society retold his favorite Gospel story about the Anointing of Christ. For those not familiar with the story, Jesus was approached by a woman with a jar filled with expensive perfume. To the shock of the onlookers, the woman proceeds to pour the entire jar over Jesus. The action is considered a very honorific gesture. Tien Han fully admitted to enjoying the story and its message. However, the student seemed to doubt if the event ever took place. He specifically mentioned not caring if the story is true or simply artistic expression. He simply liked the message.⁷⁹ However, the Anointing of Christ was not an incredible miracle. Nothing supernatural took place in the account. If students tended to shed doubt on more practical events of the Bible, how did students read more extravagant portions of the Bible?

⁷⁸ Ibid, 71

⁷⁹ Hsu Pao-chien “The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ”, in *“The Jesus I Know”*, 14

Evidently, many Sino-Christians read the Bible as a piece of philosophical fiction. It did not matter if these events actually occurred. For many, the Bible was not an authoritative text. In 1930, one Sino-Christian in a Protestant mission school, named Wong Kueisheng, asserted that Western churches committed idolatry by worshipping the Bible as the authoritative Word of God. To him, the Bible remained a useful instrument. Wong recommended Chinese emulate the Apostle Paul. Paul authored many of the New Testament epistles, but he did so prior to the completion of the Gospels.⁸⁰ Essentially, the Bible was not a mandatory instrument. In 1926, one foreign Protestant complained that out of several hundred Chinese students only a handful attended Bible class. T.Z. Koo rebuked his foreign associate's concerns. Cultivating spirituality remained the primary concern for native teachers. "We study the Bible or pray in order to know God", Koo clarified "One does not study or pray to achieve spirituality."⁸¹ For the Chinese, strict adherence to the scriptures was not important. The individual and his/her interpretation and criticism became more paramount.

As we have seen, the Chinese changed reading and learning about scriptures into a nationalist exercise. The Chinese reinvention of Christianity was not based in misunderstanding. Rather, Sino-Christians changed reading comprehension to suit the requirements of a new democracy. Firstly, the Chinese sought out American missionaries. With American missions, Sino-Christian hoped to escape some of the more draconian older colonial powers, and learn the central tenets of a functioning Christian democracy. The Chinese treasured their native language and their culture, and sought to remove any Western impediment to Chinese Christianity. Even translation took a nationalistic shift.

⁸⁰ Wong Kuei-sheng "Jesus on the Chinese Road" in *"The Jesus I Know"*, 29-31

⁸¹ TZ Koo, "The Spiritual Life of Students in Christian College", in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series*, 116

By using phonetic characters, Sino-Christian hoped to reach a wider audience. These same men fought against illiteracy; a scourge against modernity. Just by rejecting old classical styles of writing, Christian literature became revolutionary. Lastly, scriptural interpretation rested on the individual. Sino-Christians read, translated, and interpreted with the national narrative in mind. If reading the Gospel was a start to knowing Jesus, then understanding how Chinese read and learned those Gospels is the start to finding the Chinese Jesus.

Chapter 3

Chinese Arianism

Armed with a method to read and understand the Gospels, the character of Jesus Christ started to become more palatable to Chinese expectations. In a sense, Christianity developed into a Chinese faith. Just like in the previous chapter, Chinese Nationalists shifted Christian themes to fit the revolutionary ideals of the new republic. In the wake of the May Fourth Movement and even the Anti-Christian Movement, mysticism and superstition waned. The new milieu of the Republic disposed of anything that could not be explained with rationalism or the scientific method. This critical analysis of mysticism went beyond the Chinese traditional religions and influenced the Chinese interpretation of Christianity. Indeed, miracles and prophecy filled the New Testament. Basic tenets of Christianity such as the Resurrection, Atonement, the Trinity, Original Sin, and the divine nature of Christ defied all reason and occupied a place purely in the supernatural. How did Sino-Christian manage these themes that seemed to impede the modernization of the new Republic? Though this essay cannot explore every possible avenue, we remain focused on the Sino-Christian intellectuals, mainly serving as university professors, students, and community leaders, who intertwined their theological outlook with their political expectations. These Sino-Christians portrayed Jesus as human rather than divine: a type of Chinese Arianism. By making Jesus a purely ethical or moral figure, Sino-Christians intellectuals advanced scientific reason in a modernizing republic. Snuffing out divinity and Atonement for sins created a Jesus many saw as more democratic and more relatable to the average Chinese.

These deductions stand against the assumption that Sino-Christians simply failed to understand the divine nature of Christianity. Many scholars assume that such ideas could not be adapted to Chinese culture. Once again, these anti-foreign thesis scholars only convey half-truths. Like in the previous chapter, some Sino-Christians found a few themes of the religion slightly perplexing. However, most worked and studied to gain a better comprehension. The anti-foreign thesis fails to put Sino-Christians in their appropriate context. The largest challenge to Christ's divinity did not come from a centuries old cultural mindset, rather the relatively new paradigm of the Republic. Chinese Christians changed the New Testament narrative to suit their needs at the time. They did not walk into these deductions naively. Furthermore, evidence suggests that many progressive American missionaries encouraged this interpretation either actively or passively.

In this chapter, the term Chinese Arianism is utilized. The word Arian refers to the somewhat-infamous heretical sect that opposed the Council of Nicaea. Arians believed that Jesus was created by God, rather than being consubstantial with the Father. As a result, Arianism refuted a Triune God and reinterpreted the nature of Christ. Can this 4th century term be used to describe early 20th century Chinese? To some extent, this term is fairly accurate. As we shall see, at least one missionary used the term Arian to describe his more liberal counterparts. However, this depiction was probably more of a literary liberty rather than an accurate description of liberal Chinese Christians. Sino-Christians more strongly resembled Unitarianism. Similarly, some Unitarians denied the Trinity, refuted the divinity of Christ (psilanthropy), and redefined various aspects of human sin. Nevertheless, Chinese Arianism will be used at various parts of this chapter

because theologians of the time used the word, and the term illustrates the division the Social Gospel caused with more traditional missionaries.

To be sure, many American missionaries in the Republican period tended to take a different approach than the missionaries of the previous generation. John Leighton Stuart remained one of the most influential of these maverick theologians. Though an American, Stuart lived and worked most of his life in China. This Social Gospel preacher taught at many key Christian institutions, including Nanking Theology Seminary, ascending to the presidency of Yenching University, and even became the U.S. ambassador to China in his later years. In his teaching years, Stuart noticed that many Chinese Christians disliked themes of Christianity like sin and divinity. As Stuart described in 1928, “Emphasis on sin as inherent clashes against the traditional acceptance of the doctrine that human nature is naturally good...the mystical relation of the soul to God...is in their view a disproportionate absorption with the divine rather than the human aspects of life.”⁸² Now, this quote should not be taken out of its context. Indeed, Stuart seemed to acknowledge some flaw with this theological outlook. However, Stuart never rebuked the claims. In John Stuart’s personal memoirs *Fifty Years in China*, Stuart acknowledged that his religious teachings often put him at odds with some of the more conservative American staff at Nanking Theological Seminary. Stuart delivered a series of lectures at the YMCA on God, Jesus Christ, and the Holy Spirit (the Trinity).

⁸² Jonathan Leighton Stuart. *Christianity and Confucianism*. (New York and London: International Missionary Council, 1928) 21

However, a group of “zealous fundamentalists” obtained a copy of his lecture and published a slanderous article about Stuart’s modern approach.⁸³

In the 1922 edition of the *Princeton Theological Review*, W.H. Griffith Thomas wrote this apparently slanderous article. Stuart was not solely criticized in this article. Thomas called out various other American missionaries and Sino-Christians for their modernist approach, including the prominent Chinese professor T.C. Chao.⁸⁴ Thomas’s primary quarrel was the so-called modernization or liberal interpretation of the Christian religion. He understood that the liberal American agenda allowed for some divine themes. Nevertheless, Thomas remained convinced that this liberal approach had a tendency to “minimize the supernatural” for the sake of logic and risked turning Christianity into “Arianism and Latitudinarianism.”⁸⁵ Thomas lamented that educated Americans (specifically) advanced critical interpretation of the Bible in China. One unnamed American professor apparently compared the Resurrection of Christ in the Gospels to George Washington and the cherry tree in American folklore. He claimed they both were fictional stories designed to teach moral values.⁸⁶ Clearly, American missionaries either passively or actively encouraged a less divine approach to Christianity.

Most Chinese intellectuals, both Christian and non-Christian, agreed that foreign missionaries must take a laissez faire approach. For example, Hu Shih often found himself in a liberal coalition with some Sino-Christian scholars. In the previous chapter,

⁸³ Jonathan Leighton Stuart. *Fifty Years in China: the Memoirs of John Leighton Stuart, Missionary and Ambassador*. (New York: Random House, 1954) 46

⁸⁴ W.H. Griffith Thomas, “Modernism in China”, *Princeton Theological Review* Vol 19 No 4, (1921) 645

⁸⁵ *Ibid*, 632 and 639

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 644

Hu Shih's Literary Revolution merged with Biblical translation. Unmistakably, Hu Shih remained skeptical of Christianity and foreign missionaries to say the least. However, this agnostic scholar claimed that Christianity could be refined. Firstly, the old, dogmatic, strict missionary of the past with his "patronizing air of superior people" must be discarded for a more Chinese approach.⁸⁷ During a speech at a First Baptist Church in Ithaca, New York in 1913, Hu Shih quoted President Eliot (presumably the president of his home institution but he never elaborates): "Your doctrines which are mere traditions. Take the doctrine of Justification by Faith, the Atonement, or the Doctrine of the Trinity. These are not acceptable to Japanese or Chinese minds."⁸⁸ Though Hu Shih used this radical quote, the scholar clarified that Oriental minds should be able to comprehend such dogmas. However, many Chinese scholars simply find such ideas frivolous or absurd. For instance, total depravity and Original Sin remained contrary to the Chinese belief that human nature is inherently benevolent. Hu Shih argued that missionaries must change their approach on these issues if they desired to evangelize China.⁸⁹ Clearly, the Chinese could comprehend Christian divinity, but they desired a theology closer to modern culture.

Actually, many Chinese could recall a so-called divine human figure existing in their lifetime. China's emperors often portrayed themselves as divine mediators. These divine humans existed for centuries and certainly became part of the Sino cultural psyche. One could make the argument that China's Son of Heaven occupied an entirely different paradigm than the Son of God in Christianity. Undoubtedly, Sino-Christians and foreign

⁸⁷ Hu Shih. "The Ideal Missionary" February 2, 1913. In Hu Shih papers at Cornell University, #41-5-2578. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Digitized microfilm <http://hdl.handle.net/1813/36425>, 4-5

⁸⁸ Ibid, 5

⁸⁹ Ibid, 6-7

missionaries viewed Jesus and the Emperor differently. Nevertheless, the presence of a divine human being, in whatever capacity, proves that the concept was not so alien to the Oriental mind. More importantly, many Chinese associated human divinity to traditional autocracy. This call against divinity and monarchy grew stronger after Yuan Shikai's attempt to reestablish a dynastic system in 1915, a few months after he conceded territory to Japan and sparked the beginnings of the May Fourth Movement. Superstition and divinity ran contrary to everything the May Fourth Movement stood for. However, the May Fourth scholars' critique of Jesus did not center on Jesus as person. Rather, miracles and godliness were discarded as aspects of weakness of the past traditions.⁹⁰ Chinese understood supernatural beings, but the concept defied the new democratic outlook of the new republic.

This association between divinity and autocracy seemed particularly prolific at the end of the Warlord period, a period of disunity and factionalism, in the late 20s. Though nearly all Chinese Christians desired the centralization and reunification of the nation, none willingly accepted the reinstatement of a monarchy. In 1928, David ZT Yui, a prominent member of the YMCA, argued that China could only be unified under two types of leadership. The first required extraordinary, charismatic leadership founded on new democratic values. The unfortunate second option ruled "by keeping the people in ignorance and inculcating in them some superstitious belief in the divine right of the emperor or of a dictator."⁹¹ The unwillingness of Chinese Christians to accept a divine figure's leadership certainly permeated into their perceptions of Christ. One student, who

⁹⁰ Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*. (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1960) 321-332

⁹¹ David Y.T. Yui, "The Present Political Outlook in China" in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series* (London: Student Christian Movement, 1926) 3

graduated with his BA from Yenching, voiced a similar opinion when interviewed about his personal relationship with Jesus. The student, Wong Kuei-sheng, specifically called Jesus' Virgin Birth, miracles, Resurrection from the dead, and Ascension into heaven as "religious art", "idolatrous worship" and "tools to the hands of politicians for the governing of ignorant people."⁹² Students, teachers, and community leader shied away from the mystical to avoid an autocratic association with Jesus.

Throughout the 20s and 30s, Christian students and teachers disapproved of any notion of heavenly intervention. For many, Jesus was a uniquely historical man. In a series of 1930 interviews with Christian students, many upheld a more earthy interpretation of Jesus. One Chinese graduate of the Union Theological Seminary in New York and teacher at Yenching University refuted any claim of Jesus' mysticism in favor of a purely psilanthropic interpretation. Mr. Hsu Pao-chien asserted:

My opinion is that if our life contains nothing of the divine... than I am not prepared to call Jesus 'God'. Indeed Jesus' human personality was so sublime, and the term 'god' has so many connections in the history of religion, that I sometimes have a feeling of revulsion against it and doubt whether it is adequate to describe his uniqueness.⁹³

Another faculty member at Yenching University, the renowned professor T.C. Chao, found common ground with his colleague. Chao specifically called for the followers of Christianity to adjust to modern life. In a 1926 article, Chao claimed:

The conception of a personal God is obsolete anthropomorphism; the doctrine of the Trinity is nonsense, such beliefs as virgin birth, miracles, and physical resurrection, such practices as baptism and the Lord's Supper are only survivals of primitive cults.⁹⁴

⁹² Wong Kuei-sheng, "Jesus of the Chinese Road," in *"The Jesus I Know": A Chinese Book Written for Chinese Youth*. English Edition. (Shanghai: Privately Published by Dr. T.Z. Koo, 1930) 29-30

⁹³ Hsu Pao-chien, "The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ," in *"The Jesus I Know"*, 16

⁹⁴ T.C. Chao, "Present Day Religious Thought and Life in China" in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series*, 46

Both Yen-ching professors called for a historical revision of the character of Jesus. The idea of a divine man existed only in superstition. Even Jesus' actions in the Gospel, like the Last Supper, represented something obscene when replicated in modern times. Clearly, these men despised the idea of a superstitious past. The new Republic and the new Christianity required a fresh modern start.

Another interviewee Shen Tzu-chuan, a graduate of Nanking Theological Seminary, shared in this modernistic fervor of the post-May Fourth Republic. Apparently, Shen read the Temptation of Christ, attested in the three Synoptic Gospels, and expressed doubts over its authenticity. According to the Gospels, during a forty day fast in the desert, Jesus was tempted by the devil. The adversary turned stones into bread, advised Jesus to throw himself off a parapet to prove His heavenly power, and offered Him all the kingdoms on Earth in exchange for His allegiance to Satan. According to Shen, this gospel passage retained little historical value. Instead, the story merited some psychological values.⁹⁵ This blatant rejection of the authenticity of the Temptation of Christ warrants another investigation in Christ's divinity. Classically, understanding earthly sin and Christ's dualistic nature allowed a Christian to comprehend Jesus' divine role in the forgiveness of sin. Despite this, Chinese Christian reinvented the concept of both sin and Christian godliness.

To elaborate, we remain on the Gospel story of the Temptation of Christ. Indeed, Satan tempted Jesus. However, many Chinese scholars seemed to ask, could Jesus actually sin? Most Westerners of the time period would have responded negatively. Since Jesus remained wholly God, Jesus remained impeccable and thus unable to sin. Despite

⁹⁵ Shen Tzu-chuan, "What I know of Jesus," in *"The Jesus I Know"*, 52

this, Jesus' impeccability never sat well with Sino-Christians in the Republican Era. Impeccability suggested Jesus retained god-like abilities, greater than a mere human, from his birth. Many Chinese Christians found this concept disagreeable. For them, Earthly merit remained more trustworthy than superstitious jargon and birth rights. In the words of one Chinese Christian, the "pre-eminence of Jesus is entirely in his religious experience and moral character."⁹⁶ Chinese Christians preferred to view Jesus as an extraordinary human being. Hsu Paochien related this new peccable Christ to the Temptation: "the uniqueness of Jesus is not that that he was not able to be tempted, or that he could not sin, but that, being tempted, he did not sin."⁹⁷ Essentially, Chinese Christ's peccability enabled him to be more human, more relatable, and a model for Chinese followers to emulate.

This strong moral character instilled in a purely human Jesus became awe-inspiring for many followers. In a way, this Chinese morality model became a sort of Earthly divinity. To explain, one must return to the comment on the Temptation by student Shen Tzuchuan. In that same 1930 interview, Shen believed that Jesus was born as a mere man. However, Jesus' merits during his lifetime awarded Him divinity. Shen argued that all human beings have the ability to equal Jesus' but we continuously fall short, "divine nature is common to every man, within the capacity of us all; but because we do not strive... divine nature is whirled from us."⁹⁸ Undoubtedly, Shen mediated about these issues. In his interview, he advocated that this philosophy contained "vertical

⁹⁶ Hsu Pao-chien, "The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ," in *"The Jesus I Know"*, 10

⁹⁷ Ibid, 12

⁹⁸ Shen Tzu-chuan, "What I know of Jesus," in *"The Jesus I Know"*, 51

knowledge” and examined Jesus at his roots.⁹⁹ Essentially, he felt he investigated the headwaters of Jesus’ nature. According to Shen, Jonathan Stuart taught Christ’s peccability at Nanking Theological Seminary to students as young as 14.¹⁰⁰ Shen cited Stuart as one of his early influences. Clearly, many foreign missionaries sponsored some psilanthropic beliefs. Therefore, missionary school became bastions for this type of thought.

Supporting these student’s conclusions, T.C. Chao also taught the exceptionality of Christ through a psilanthropic lens. The Yenching professor best exemplified his views in a 1933 speech at Edinburgh entitled “Jesus and the Reality of God”, which was later published in China via the *Life Journal*. In this speech, Chao argued that Westerners focused too much on Jesus as the Son of God and neglected the Jesus as the Son of Man; both New Testament phrases applicable to Jesus. Chao focused on how Jesus slept when tired, drank when thirsty, and ate when hungry like a common man. This man experienced hard work, poverty, and personal suffering like common man.¹⁰¹ However, his great love for humanity generated divine characteristics. Chao stated, “I often wondered why Western Christians did not write or preach on the greatest discovery ever made by a human being, the discovery that true humanity as true divinity.”¹⁰² Since this new Sino-Christian ideology saw divinity as an achievable attribute through earthly merit, the Death and Resurrection of Jesus played a less prominent role in Sino-Christian theology. Take for example this passage from T.C. Chao’s speech:

⁹⁹ Ibid, 50

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 50-51

¹⁰¹ T.C. Chao, “Jesus and the Reality of God”, *The Collected English Writings of Tsu Chen Chao (Works of T.C. Chao, Vol. 5)*. Ed. Xiaochao Wang. (Beijing: Yenching Graduate Institute, 2009) 344

¹⁰² Ibid.,

Whether death is necessary or not is another question, for it seems to me that one can lay down his life by living. Western theology has made a great deal about the death of Jesus, which during recent years, I tried to rethink the reasons given therein, I must say they are all very artificial and mechanical...rather than a true grasp of the significance of life which triumphs over death because of love and friendship. Honestly, I cannot see why Jesus should die at all in order to save the world. . However, Jesus did die, and we have to find its significance. And for me the real significance of the death of Jesus lies in the deathlessness of life and love. For me the crucifixion cannot be understood without the symbol of a true resurrection.¹⁰³

This deduction impacted Sino-Christian mentalities in a number of ways. Divine nature remained common to everyman. Therefore, Jesus sacrifice on the cross cannot retain any spiritual or supernatural significance for the forgiveness of sins. Redemption remained based in personal merit. Moreover, if Jesus' sinless nature transformed to the Chinese meritocratic values, then Jesus' role as the redeemer of sin would shift as well.

Evidently, the Sino-Christian concept of Jesus' sacrifice on the cross took a more earthly, merit-based, and individualistic interpretation. Most Christians around the world believed that Christ died on the cross to atone for the sins of the world. Once again, Shen Tzu-chuan expressed doubt about the validity of atonement. At first, Shen encountered difficulties trying to understand what atonement meant. So, the Christian student studied more diligently and learned atonement theories like the ransom theory, substitutionary theory, political theory, ethical theory, etc. He concluded that none of these theories fit what he believes about Christ, and he endeavored to create this own theory.¹⁰⁴

Additionally, faith in the Christ's sacrifice remained important for salvation in Western Christianity. Particularly, most Protestant dominations believed they were justified *sola fide* or by faith alone. Essentially, putting faith in the saving power of Jesus granted

¹⁰³ Ibid, 348

¹⁰⁴ Shen Tzu-chuan, "What I know of Jesus," in *"The Jesus I Know"*, 55

Christians salvation. Despite this, many Chinese Protestants refuted *sola fide* for a purely merit-based system. In 1930, another Sino-Christian at a missionary university wrote about how Jesus was a regular hard working man. He portrayed Jesus as a hard-working carpenter and a man that toiled in vineyards. He further elaborated that Jesus was a man of reason, who incorporated a primitive form of scientific method, “Salvation through faith’ is a desecration to Jesus’ teaching. He calls us to ‘seek’, to ‘understand’, to ‘see’.”¹⁰⁵

Why the aversion to something as benevolent as divine forgiveness? Of course, divinity and the supernatural in the presence of a human being made many Chinese recall their autocratic past under the imperial system. Even though Western Christianity portrays Jesus’ as both completely divine and completely human, Jesus’ divine nature did not fit the post-May Fourth narrative. Therefore, the Chinese Jesus needed to be a democratic citizen of the republic. By focusing on Jesus’ merit as a human being, Chinese Jesus provided an example for his fellow citizens. Since this Christianity revolved around morals, the dogma became more about individual conduct. In theory, everyone could and should equal Christ’s merits. Additionally, social service, volunteer work, serving one’s country, and loving one another emulated Jesus’ service to his fellow man. In this way, Jesus’ ideology served the new Chinese republic. Anti-superstition played into modernization. However, this focus on ethics, especially in the 1930s, echoed many of the tenets of Chiang Kai-shek’s New Life Movement. The idea that society was in a moral decay and an increased focus on ethical conduct, specifically Christian, stemmed from the NLM. In this way, Jesus did not merely represent modernization via

¹⁰⁵ Hsieh Fu-ya, “The Jesus I know To-day” in “*The Jesus I Know*”, 22

the May Fourth Movement, but the moral conduct expressed by the NLM. Social responsibility contributed to the advancement of the Republic, especially in a democracy with a national socialist tinge.

Despite the assessment thus far, one Sino-Christian group, involved in the scholarly search for Chinese Jesus, seemed to defy Chinese Arianism. Chinese Catholic confirmed both Jesus' humanity and divinity. John C.H Wu, often called the Chinese Chesterton in reference to English Catholic author G.K Chesterton, remained one of the most prolific Sino Catholics of the era. Wu's assessment is particularly important to Chinese Arianism. Before converting to Catholicism by the mid-30s, Wu practiced Methodism with American missionaries. In his religious autobiography *Beyond East and West*, containing more theology than autobiography, Wu quoted from one of his old works from his days as a Methodist, "I am no longer impressed with miracles... Jesus had to stoop to them because he was born a superstitious and sign-seeking generation."¹⁰⁶ Of course Wu recanted this statement upon Catholic conversion. But, many questions are still unanswered. Why did Protestantism generate Arian beliefs?

In a 1949 pamphlet, Wu reflected on some of the flaws he found with his Protestant education. He believed that Protestant education was split between two warring schools, fundamentalists and modernists. He found the Bible reading in these schools to be far too subjective and open to interpretation. He recalled from his Methodist days:

My faith wavered between two extremes. Now I consider Jesus only as a man because He Himself called Himself 'the son of man'. Consequently,

¹⁰⁶ John C.H. Wu, *Beyond East and West*. (New York : Sheed and Ward, 1951) 79

he is not God, only a human hero... Then I considered Him as God, but not a real man. He can put on and cast off humanity like a garment.¹⁰⁷

This quote is particularly noteworthy. Recalling the early discussion in this chapter about John Stuart and his disagreement with other American theologians, we see clearly that there were disagreements between fundamentalists and modernist missionaries in China in Protestant sects. Moreover, American missionaries contributed in some capacity to liberal Chinese beliefs. Both Chinese Protestant Christians and modernist missionaries compromised to create a more Republic-friendly Jesus. So, did Chinese Catholics completely avoid the psilanthropic nature and the ethical sensibilities of the Chinese Jesus?

Equally mindful of republican ideals, Sino Catholics invented other methods to downplay divinity and sin. Nonetheless, Catholics acted differently than their Protestant counterparts. Unlike Catholicism, Protestantism could not be described as a coherent sect. Under the banner of Protestantism, plethora of different denominations existed, all with different ideology and little unity between them collectively. Splinter groups, independent churches, and varied teachings can exist, though sometimes taboo, as broadly Protestant. In comparison, if a Catholic broke from the dogma of the Church, a single cohesive entity, that individual became a schismatic. Once a Catholic split from the Church, he ceases to be Catholic. Therefore, Sino Catholics worked within the ideological framework of the Church. These men pushed at the malleable boundaries of Catholic theology, but never broke away from the Church.

¹⁰⁷ John C.H. Wu, *From Confucianism to Catholicism* (Huntingdon, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press [1949?]) 44-45

Emulating saintly traditions became one of the easiest ways to create a Chinese Jesus for Catholics. Paul Yu Pin, Apostolic Vicar of Nanjing and eventual Archbishop of the same Diocese, remains particularly noteworthy as one of first and most influential indigenous Church leaders from China. The future cardinal revered Jesus as both man and God. Yet, Bishop Yu Pin rarely discussed the concepts in his writing. In the short few proclamations he delivered on sin in the mid-40s, his words echoed the key ideas found in St. Augustine of Hippo's *Confessions*.¹⁰⁸ Writing in the late 4th century AD, Augustine believed people remained restless until fulfilled by the love of God because God created all people: "For Thou madest us for Thyself, and our heart is restless, until it repose in Thee."¹⁰⁹ Curiously, John C.H. Wu advocated for a similar position based on the works of St. Therese of Lisieux. This late 19th century saint asserted that the proper way to God was to live simply, like a child.¹¹⁰ What does this all mean? In a way, Chinese Catholics interpreted Original Sin differently. Using the Augustinian notion that everyone is naturally inclined to moral action and St. Therese's idea of childlike benevolence, Sino-Catholics brought sin closer to the Chinese concept that human nature is naturally good. This interpretation never challenged either the divinity of God or the teachings of the Church. Nevertheless, other Catholics discovered other methods to circumvent the supernatural.

One of the best methods to discover what Catholic Christians thought about Christ's divinity was through art. For this final argument in this chapter, three separate sources of religious paintings will be drawn from. One of the earliest recorders of

¹⁰⁸ Paul Yu-Pin, "The Chinese Catholic Cultural Movement", in *Eyes East : Selected Pronouncements of the Most Reverend Paul Yu-Pin*. (Paterson, N.J. : St. Anthony Guild Press, 1945) 113

¹⁰⁹ St. Augustine of Hippo, *The Confessions of St. Augustine*. Trans. E.B. Pusey. (Project Gutenberg, 2002. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/3296/3296-h/3296-h.htm> Accessed 5/5/16) 1

¹¹⁰ John C.H. Wu, *Beyond East and West*. 43-46

Christian art in the Republic, Daniel Johnston Fleming recorded multiple examples in his 1937 book *Each with his own Brush*. Though most of the art derived from Catholic universities in Peking, this Protestant from Union Theological Seminary encouraged the indigenous Catholics to further their artistic pursuits.¹¹¹ *Life* magazine's December 22, 1941 issue collected our second source of Christian icons. Additionally, the article in the magazine detailed some of the history behind the art. Specifically, in 1928, Archbishop Constantini of Rome visited Catholic universities in the Chinese capital and encouraged additional artistic pursuits in Christianity among the students.¹¹² The final source is a collection of paintings archived and digitized by the Ricci Institute Library and the University of San Francisco. These painters created their work throughout the 30s and 40s.

The beliefs of Sino Catholics bled through these extensive collections of paintings. Christ's divinity, though not denied, was specifically avoided. Keep in mind that over fifty paintings were reviewed to come to this conclusion. Of those fifty, only one depicted Christ's crucifixion.¹¹³ Of those fifty, only one painting showed Jesus resurrected.¹¹⁴ And of those fifty, only one displayed a miracle. The miracle painting, created by an artist named Wang Su-Ta sometime in the 30s, depicted Jesus calming the storm on the Sea of Galilee.¹¹⁵ A few others painted similar supernatural occurrences. Luke Chen, one of most prominent Christian painters from Peking, depicted an angel

¹¹¹ Daniel Johnson Fleming, *Each with his own Brush: Contemporary Christian Art in Asia and Africa*. (New York: Friendship Press, 1938) 13

¹¹² "The Story of Christ in Chinese Art: Scholars at Peking University Make Christmas Portfolio for Life" (*LIFE* magazine, December 22, 1941) 40 Google Ebooks.

¹¹³ Wang Su-ta "Cavalry" in *Each with his own Brush*, 39

¹¹⁴ Hsu Chi Hua "The Resurrection" in *Each with his own Brush*, 28

¹¹⁵ Wang Su-ta "Jesus Calming the Storm" in *Each with his own Brush*, 38. Also in "The Story of Christ in Chinese Art" 48

descending upon Jesus as he prayed in Gethsemane.¹¹⁶ Throughout most of the artwork, Sino Catholics avoided depicting supernatural things.

Instead, Chinese artists preferred to paint Jesus' parables and moral teachings. Though some of Jesus' parable painting will be discussed here, similar paintings that portray more Chinese traditional beliefs will be assessed in the next chapter. Chinese artists often found roundabout ways to discuss the supernatural that often elude Western eyes. For example, two different painters depict the Lukan parable of Lazarus and the rich man, as opposed to the Johannine Lazarus that rose from the dead. In this parable Jesus told, the rich man leads a lavish lifestyle and neglected a beggar, Lazarus, at his gates. When both men die, Lazarus receives eternal reward, but the rich man receives hell fire. The painters used symbolism to depict the supernatural elements of the story. Both paintings depicted a starving Lazarus outside the rich man's home. In one, Lazarus is seated by an old battered tree of earthly life, but a new tree representing heavenly life sprouts behind it.¹¹⁷ In the other, Lazarus is seated by bamboo. As Daniel Fleming described, bamboo symbolized rejuvenation. Despite being a hardwood, bamboo can be bent by heavy snow. However, bamboo will also return to its proper form.¹¹⁸

Though using less symbolism, most painters depicted the adult Jesus as a parable teller or moral teacher. In addition to the Parable of Lazarus, the Parable of the Lost Coin, the Parable of the Ten Virgins, the Parable of the Prodigal Son, and the Parable of the

¹¹⁶ Luke Chen, "Gethsemane" in *Each with his own Brush*, 26

¹¹⁷ Silas Yu, "Dives and Lazarus" in *Each with his own Brush*, 21

¹¹⁸ Chen Lu Chia, "Dives and Lazarus" in *Each with his own Brush*, 35

Good Samaritan also received admiration from Chinese painters in the late 1930s.¹¹⁹ Though an extensive review of each of these parables proves too time consuming at the moment, each of these tales used earthly metaphors to depict eschatological themes. However, most depict adult Jesus as a teacher. One work by Bai Huiqun, presumably in the late 40s, depicted Mary listening to Jesus at his feet.¹²⁰ In another, Jesus teaches from a boat to a large crowd of followers on the shore.¹²¹ Two more paintings from the Life magazine article depicted Jesus washing his disciple's feet and meeting the Samaritan woman at a well.¹²² Chinese Catholic plucked all of these stories directly from the Gospels. These artists depicted the stories quite accurately. However, very few of these stories depict divinity or miracles. Perhaps coming from a Confucian tradition, parables carried more weighty meaning for followers. None of these Peking artists created a masterpiece about the Ascension. The healing of the blind man or the raising of Lazarus remained absent. The Temptation and the Transfiguration were not depicted. Did these painters really believe Jesus to be God?

The answer was undoubtedly yes. All of the previous conversions focused on the adult Jesus. Most curiously, depictions of infant Jesus remained highly supernatural. In fact, most of the artistic depictions of Jesus were infant portrayals. Such a vast majority of these paintings depicted the infant Christ, one cannot assess every single painting in

¹¹⁹ Silas Yu, "Parable of the Lost Coin", Lu Hung Nien "the Good Samaritan", Tai Chen "Return of the Prodigal Son" and Tai En Chuan "The Wise and Foolish Virgins" in *Each with his own Brush*, 20, 33, 14 and 15

¹²⁰ Bai Huiqun "Jesus with Two Women" Icon 10 from "'Celestial Icons'—Christian Scroll Painting from Pre-Revolutionary China" The Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History. University of San Francisco. <http://usf.usfca.edu/ricci/collection/exhibits/celestialicons/images.htm>

¹²¹ Hsu Chi Hua "Teaching by the Seaside" in *Each with his own Brush*, 27

¹²² "The Story of Christ in Chinese Art" 46-47

this essay. Many artists depicted the Virgin Mary and baby Jesus floating in the clouds.¹²³ Angels seemed to be a common occurrence in many of these birth paintings. Chinese Catholics depicted angels at the Annunciation, with the three magi, and a choir of angels at Jesus' birth.¹²⁴ Countless examples from multiple artists in various decades depicted the divine qualities of the child Jesus. The question remains, why did Chinese Catholics depict infant Jesus as divine but avoid the divine nature in the adult? The reader can rule out Gospel material, because most of the Gospels concentrate on Jesus' adulthood. Perhaps Chinese Catholic artists reached similar conclusions to Paul Yu Pin and John C.H. Wu about the natural goodness of man. Depicting a divine baby may play into the theology. Even I, the author, remain unsure. More than likely, Chinese Catholics found a humbleness in the infant Jesus. Surely, an infant does not have the tyrannical tendencies of the emperor. Moreover, in the birth of Jesus, God became an infant. The Almighty became something lowly, innocent, and powerless.

Throughout this chapter, we have come to the conclusion that Sino-Christians downplayed Jesus' divinity to meet the needs of the new Republic. Furthermore, American missionaries contributed either passively or actively in the formation of this Arian Chinese Jesus. Unlike the traditional fundamentalist Christians, these new modernist missionaries recognized that a new interpretation of Jesus was needed for this fledgling Republic. Many Chinese Christians refuted Christ's divinity to avoid the autocratic association that accompanied the son of heaven, the emperor. Many Sino Christians blatantly denied miracles, the Virgin Birth, and the Resurrection. The Chinese

¹²³ Icon 19-23 in "Celestial Icons". Luke Chen, "Star of the Sea" and "Queen of the Heavenly Choir" in *Each with his own Brush* 22,24.

¹²⁴ Icon 1,3, and 4 in "Celestial Icons". "The Story of Christ in Chinese Art" 41-44

Jesus became as fallible as any ordinary man. As a result of this lack of supernatural fervor, Jesus no longer played the role of redeemer of mankind. The new Chinese Jesus based his power on morality and personal merit. This meritocratic ideology renewed ideas of both individuality and service to one's nation. However, the dogmas of the Catholic Church forced Sino Catholics to play by different rules. Using artwork and focusing on saintly tradition, some of these divine themes seemed less threatening. Of course, the divinity of Christ remained a highly contested issue. Kickback from both Catholics and mainline Protestants certainly occurred. Despite this, one cannot doubt that Jesus' divinity was a taboo subject in the Republican era.

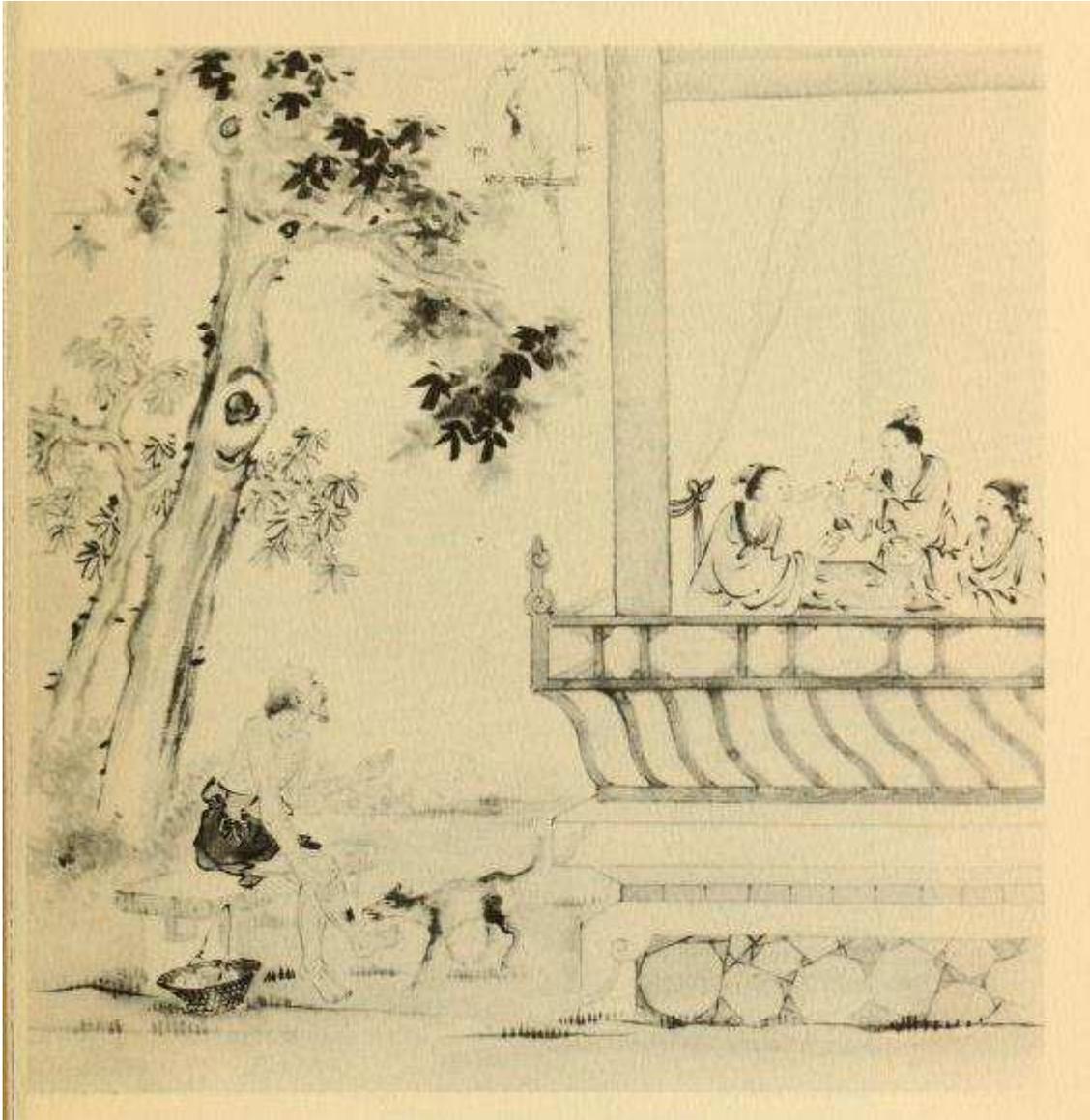


Figure 1. "Dives and Lazarus"- The Poor Lazarus outside the a rich man's home with the old tree of earthly life and the new tree of eternal life behind him. (Silas Yu, "Dives and Lazarus" in Each with his own Brush, 21)



Figure 2. “Jesus with Two Women”- Presumably, Mary sitting and listening at the feet of Jesus with Martha in the background (Bai Huiquan, Icon 10: “Jesus with Two Women” in “Celestial Icons”)



Figure 3. “Jesus stills the Tempest”- (Wang Su-ta, “Jesus stills the Tempest” in “The Story of Christ in Chinese Art” 48)

Chapter 4

Confucian Christ

Throughout the 1920s, China crusaded against religion. Indeed, the effects of the Anti-Christian Movement in 20s changed the religious climate for the next two decades of the Republic's existence. Though this work focuses on Jesus, Confucius bore the brunt of the anti-religious onslaught. Most thinkers at the time attacked Chinese traditional religions as an obstacle against modernity. Despite this, many non-Marxist scholars never called for the total eradication of native religion. Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Buddha, like the character of Jesus, faced redefining after the May Fourth Movement. Even notable May Fourth intellectual Hu Shih quoted from Confucian scholars like Mencius.¹²⁵ Though outlooks changed and downplayed the impact of religion, the major philosophical movements of the past still shaped Chinese identity and tradition. What does this movement have to do with the Christianity, missionaries, and the shifting image of Jesus? Evidently, Jesus started to merge with the sages of ancient China. Instead of usurping traditional religions, Jesus existed alongside Confucius, Lao Tzu, and Buddha. Sino-Christians viewed Christianity as a method to correct some of the fallacies of traditional beliefs. According to these theologians, the benevolent doctrines of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism reached true fulfillment under Christianity.

The New Life Movement perhaps best explained the merger of Christianity with traditional dogmas. As previously stated, the NLM focused almost exclusively on ethical conduct. Pulling these dogmas from a modified form of Confucianism and Methodism,

¹²⁵ Hu Shih. "The Ideal Missionary" February 2, 1913. In Hu Shih papers at Cornell University, #41-5-2578. Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections, Cornell University Library. Digitized microfilm <http://hdl.handle.net/1813/36425>, 4

Chiang started a movement of personal cultivation and self-discipline. By the late 1930s, both foreign missionaries and Sino-Christians tended to support the movement, believing it to be a social progressive movement unassociated with atheistic Communism. Not only did the movement advance both Christian morality and Chinese identity, these Social Gospel advocates saw an opportunity to serve the community. By combating social ills (i.e. opium rehabilitation, rural reconstruction), they could simultaneously aid the individual spirit for the Kingdom of God and rid the Chinese Republic of damaging weaknesses. However, Sino-Christians started to merge traditional religions and Christianity prior to the 1930s. Clearly, Chiang Kai-shek echoed some of these tenets and intensified them after 1934 to gain Christian support. Additionally, the NFM and especially the May Fourth Movement all expressed anti-imperialism. Domination by a foreign power could only be perceived as a sign of national weakness. Jesus started to become more like traditional sages to make him appear less foreign and less intrusive.¹²⁶

Moreover, to truly understand Chinese tradition, one must understand the family. The 5 relationships remained one of the central tenets of Confucianism: ruler and subject, husband and wife, father and son, elder sibling to young sibling, and friends. Each of these relationships had a hierarchical order. However, as the May Fourth Movement reached its high in 1919, these relations came under serious scrutiny. The relationship between minister and subject already diminished after the 1911 Revolution. Many May Fourth scholars saw these relationships as oppressive towards women, anti-

¹²⁶ Oi Ki Ling, "Changing Role of Missionaries in China", in *The Changing Role of British Protestant Missionaries in China 1945-1952*. (Cranbury, NJ. Associated University Presses, 1999. Google Ebook.) 43-35

modern, and anti-progressive.¹²⁷ Though Christian literature echoed some of these themes, their criticism remained mild. Christian scholars found the family to be an important factor of everyday life. However, a large traditional family was inherently oppressive. A large family needed hierarchical power! Big families cared more about family affairs and less about the progress of a nation, and suppressed the younger children and women for the betterment of the older males.¹²⁸ Therefore, a small family was a national ambition for Chinese Christians. This new revised Confucianism remains important to understand the Chinese relationship with Jesus the Son and God the Father.

Additionally, foreign missionaries seemed to encourage sympathy to old Confucian order. When Sino-Christians and missionaries merged the Christian conversation with some traditional elements, it helped Christianity appear more Chinese. T.Z Koo noted that Chinese Christianity should be fed with “rice”, not “bread and butter.”¹²⁹ Essentially, Chinese Christianity required more sympathy to Chinese culture and disregarded Western interpretations of the faith. Sympathy towards Chinese culture certainly aided the evangelization process. In 1928, American Social Gospel preacher John Stuart even claimed that ancestral worship, typically a Confucian rite, was not idolatrous. Though Stuart found the practice blurred the line between minor spirits and the Almighty, the scholar praised the practice’s commitment to the traditional family.¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China*. (Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press, 1960) 302-203

¹²⁸ T.T. Lew, “The Family” in *As it Looks to Young China: Chapters by a Group of Christian Chinese*. Hung, William (ed.) (New York: Friendship Press, 1932) 21, 23-27

¹²⁹ TZ Koo, “The Spiritual Life of Students in Christian Colleges” in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series*. (London: Student Christian Movement, 1926) 141

¹³⁰ Jonathan Leighton Stuart, *Christianity and Confucianism*. (New York and London: International Missionary Council, 1928) 19-20

The Confucian rites controversy that plagued missionaries in the 17th and 18th centuries no longer had any relevance in the 20th century.

Throughout the history of Western missionaries in China, Confucianism and Christianity had a tumultuous relationship. Even in the 18th century, the first Catholic missionaries from the West noticed the obstacle Confucianism caused for Christian converts. On one hand, Confucianism was a religion devoid of a god which included pagan-like devotions to the deceased. However, Confucian ideals remained a pervasive philosophical outlook on life that most Chinese people adhered to. Missionaries in the both the 18th and 20th centuries were forced to merge some Confucian ideals with Christianity to convert the population. Many missionaries started to view Confucianism as less of a religion and more of an earthly philosophy. Indeed, many of the ethical codes of Confucius matched the teachings found in the Bible. The Golden Rule and honoring thy mother and father, to name the most obvious, certainly found commonalities with Confucian teachings. However, missionaries' lax approach to Confucianism often caused problems with their more conservative contemporaries. The Jesuits in the early 18th century permitted ancestor worship, a practice common in all of China's traditional religions/philosophies, claiming they were secular rites. However, the Papacy disagreed and banned the practice. Traditional Protestant missionaries in the 20th century were equally distrustful of the pagan-like traditions of China. Nevertheless, Protestants inspired by the Social Gospel and Catholics on the eve of the Second Vatican Council were far more eager to embrace Chinese traditions and make them Christian.

Catholic missionaries, who bore the brunt of the controversy surrounding ancestral worship in the 17th century, joined with Protestant missionaries in enabling the

practice to continue. In September 1924, a Catholic priest named Robert Cairns witnessed a parade for Confucius' birthday performed by Chinese Christian students in Fachow (probably a misspelling of Foochow/Fuzhou). The students marched with paper lanterns and banging drum in celebration of the sage. Cairns, a new arrival to China, interpreted the celebration as pagan. Upon hearing Cairns' comments, his fellow missionaries rebuked him and informed him that all scholars celebrate the birth of the sage.¹³¹ Essentially, both native Chinese and foreign missionary recognized the importance of remembering Confucius. The Catholic Church would continue to liberalize its relationship with Confucianism. In December 1939, the Sacred Congregation of Propaganda officially permitted Chinese Catholic to attend Confucian celebrations where a tablet or image of Confucius was displayed. Many Chinese greeted this decision with enthusiasm. Most notably, Bishop Paul Yu-Pin thought the decision was a step into creating a more indigenous Church.¹³² The controversy of the past melted away during the Republican Era.

Controversy diminished by reconciling the differences between the Confucian tradition and Christian spirituality, resulting in a few unorthodox interpretations. Equating the Abrahamic monotheistic God to Chinese traditions proved a difficult comparison. For native Chinese in the early 20th century, Professor Y.Y Tsu hashed out the inconsistencies. YY Tsu taught at St. John's in Shanghai and was recognized as one of the leading native theologians of his day. In 1922, Tsu published an elaborate article entitled "the Confucian God-Idea." In the article, Tsu asked the question, do the Chinese

¹³¹ Robert Cairns, Letter. September 1924. Fachow, China. In *Maryknoll Mission Letters, China; Extracts from the Letters and Diaries of the Pioneer Missioners of the Catholic Foreign Mission Society of America*. Vol.2. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1927) 356

¹³² Paul Yu-Pin, "Recall to the Tradition of the Missions" in *Eyes East : Selected Pronouncements of the Most Reverend Paul Yu-Pin*. (Paterson, N.J. : St. Anthony Guild Press, 1945) 142

believe in God? To answer, Tsu analyzed some leading scholars, all with different ideas, on whether or not a Chinese man had the ability to believe in a monotheistic God like in Christianity.¹³³ According to Tsu, the Chinese people had a natural inclination to accept a monotheistic God. He believed Chinese culture was rooted in a monotheistic history.

This deduction led to many questions. In traditional faiths like Confucianism, followers acknowledged the workings of the Universe. The Way remained non-sentient and obscure, unlike the God of Abraham. However, Tsu argued that the modern perceptions of Confucianism, traditional religion, and the supernatural had perverted overtime. To validate his argument, the scholar looked at Shangdi and Tien, typically translated as heaven or the universe, in the ancient texts the Book of History and the Book of Poetry. In these classic texts, Tsu claimed to find evidence of a personal, loving, sentient god just like the Christian God. The classical texts stated this god was “awe-inspiring”, “to be feared”, and a “virtuous king”.¹³⁴ He “gives birth to the people”, “gives blessings to the good and woe to the evil”, “sends down rain”, “can be honored and served”, and can hear prayers.¹³⁵ To Tsu, this clearly explained the belief in a virtuous monotheistic god in China. By following this new adaptation of the Christian God, Chinese Christians took part in their pure ancient culture. Despite these mentions of a god-like character in the classics, the *Analects* and other later Confucian works contain nothing of this god.

According to YY Tsu, Confucius and his later followers perverted previous traditions. In the *Analects*, Confucius told his disciples not to study spirits because they

¹³³ YY Tsu “The Confucian God-Idea” in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes*. (London: Student Christian Movement, 1922) 68

¹³⁴ Ibid, 72-73

¹³⁵ Ibid.

exist in the realm of the unknown. Tsu blamed Confucius' animosity towards spirits on his public life. Confucius may have believed in the supernatural privately, but as a public teacher he remained a moralist, an agnostic, and a materialist.¹³⁶ Under Confucius, "T'ien became no more than an impersonal moral principal or law of the universe."¹³⁷ However, Tsu saved his harshest criticism for later Song Confucians like Zhu Xi. The modern theologian argued that Zhu Xi principles of li and qi, two dualistic forces that comprise all of reality, left no vacancy for a Creator. YY Tsu argued Zhu Xi's "universe was...moving equilibrium, and subject to successive evolution and dissolution. This theory...is almost Spencerian."¹³⁸ Tsu lamented that even many Confucians and secular scholars of the Republic followed in the fallacies of Zhu Xi:

Their Confucian education has pre-disposed them to agnosticism and unbelief. They accept certain views of well-known men, like Huxley and Spencer, as their own... They have thrown overboard the idea of a personal God as being incompatible with the teachings of modern science.¹³⁹

Tsu's work remained particularly noteworthy not only for its author's scholarly prestige but for its ingenious rhetoric. As stated previously, Tsu's argument firmly implanted the concept of a personal God in ancient Chinese culture. Simultaneously, the Protestant theologian attacked some of the faculties of Confucianism; a popular move in the post-May Fourth climate. Furthermore, Tsu also attacked Marxists and secularists. At this time, Social Darwinian works took modern China by storm. By attaching popular thinkers Spencer and Huxley to the old Confucian order, YY Tsu branded secular

¹³⁶ Ibid., 74

¹³⁷ Ibid., 76-77

¹³⁸ Ibid., 77

¹³⁹ Ibid., 81

thinkers as anti-modern. This Confucian-Christian rhetoric prompted other Chinese Christians to rally against the threat of atheism.

This theory on the Confucian-Christian Heavenly Father directly impacted the Chinese Jesus as well. In 1930, Shen Tzu-chuan found some difficulty applying Chinese values to the Christian Gospels. Shen puzzled over Jesus words, “Let the dead bury the dead.”¹⁴⁰ In the gospels, Jesus approached a man and asked him to follow him. The man argued that he could follow Jesus as soon as he buried his father. After, Jesus spoke the previous quote. Shen became appalled that Jesus would recommend an action that ran contrary to filial piety and against one’s duty to the family. Shen analyzed this quote looking for another possible meaning. Perhaps, Jesus spoke an ancient Jewish proverb with a lost meaning. Perhaps, the man’s father was not yet deceased and Jesus refused to wait. Finally, Shen concluded that Jesus meant to display the differences between greater filial piety and lesser filial piety. He claimed people in China worried too much about their parents after death (lesser piety). Chinese people often organized grand funerals and worshipped at ancestral gravesites. Shen argued the Chinese should remain focused on the parents while they are still alive (greater piety).¹⁴¹ A Christian outside of the Confucian sphere of influence would not have the same interpretation. However, this Confucian-Christian merger dominated many of the Sino-Christian conversations in the Republic.

Though a Catholic theologian, John C.H Wu also shared many of Protestant YY Tsu’s central ideas. During the final year of the Republic, Wu praised Confucius as a

¹⁴⁰ Shen Tzu-chuan, “What I Know of Jesus” in *“The Jesus I Know”*: A Chinese Book Written for Chinese Youth. Wu, Y.T., T.Z. Koo, and E.R. Hughes (eds) English Edition. (Shanghai: Privately Published by Dr. T.Z. Koo, 1930) 59-60

¹⁴¹ Ibid

great teacher. Like Tsu, Wu acknowledged that Confucius never spoke about the supernatural. Wu stated:

Confucius admitted that since we know little about ourselves, we can know little about the spirit. This does not mean denial but rather the inadequacy of human reason. Confucius thus left open another knowledge than rational, which he did not know, namely supernatural.¹⁴²

Though less critical than Tsu, Wu envisioned Confucius as an earthy philosopher that did not contradict the basic tenets of Christianity. Indeed, philosophical Hellenistic schools prior to Jesus' birth often impacted Western Christianity. Wu saw Confucius as a potential philosophical lens to view Christianity. Therefore, Wu compared Confucius to Aristotle. Just as pagan Aristotelian realism enabled St. Thomas Aquinas's Christian scholasticism, pagan Confucianism could create an environment where new Chinese Christians thinkers could emerge.¹⁴³ In many ways, Catholic thinkers embraced Confucianism more than their counterparts.

Similar to how Tsu drew literary comparisons, John C.H. Wu also drew many parallels from Confucian literature to the Gospels. Wu believed that Confucian tradition actually displayed total obedience to a Supreme Being. Christians typically referred to God as the Father. Wu saw this language as evidence of filial piety in Christianity. Wu quoted from the Book of Rites, "the man of true humanity serves heaven as his parents", as evidence that Confucian piety can merge with Christian spirituality.¹⁴⁴ This was not the only parallel found between Confucian texts and the Gospels. In 1940 in *Tien Hsia Monthly*, Wu published his most famous work the *Science of Love* in which he described

¹⁴² John C.H Wu, *From Confucianism to Catholicism* (Huntingdon, IN: Our Sunday Visitor Press, [1949?]) 4-5

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*,5

¹⁴⁴ John C.H. Wu, *Beyond East and West*. (New York : Sheed and Ward, 1951) 153-155

God's love to a Chinese audience through various relationships. To show the vastness of Jesus' love, he described Jesus, not only as the Father, but as "our Friend, our Brother, our Sister, our Spouse, our Lord, our Minister, our All!"¹⁴⁵ Jesus fulfilled all of the Five Relationships prescribed by Confucius. Still wanting to magnify the gravity of Jesus' love, Wu acknowledged the most important loving relationship in China as the love and dedication to one's spouse. He explained Saints referred to their relationship with Jesus as the same relationship between a bridegroom and bride.¹⁴⁶ Using familiar loving relationships from tradition, Wu hoped to coax more Chinese to Christianity.

Furthermore, Wu viewed saintly morality as similar to a child's bliss. As stated in previous chapters, Wu developed a fondness for St. Therese's simplistic approach to morality. In the 18th chapter of Matthew's Gospel, Jesus stated "Unless you are converted and become like a child, you will not enter the kingdom of heaven."¹⁴⁷ Wu found Jesus' word very comparable to the words of Mencius. Wu quoted Mencius as saying, "the great man is one who has not lost the heart he had as a child."¹⁴⁸ In this way, Confucianism and Christianity seemed less opposed to one another. Confucianism not only provided similarities for Sino-Christians, it provided a truly Chinese lens to read the Gospels.

Sinicizing the Gospel through Confucius proved an effective tool for garnering Chinese sympathy. Many foreign missionaries found it absolutely necessary to use Confucius as a humanist philosophy. In the 20s, John Stuart remained adamant about bringing Confucianism into Biblical interpretation. Stuart argued that failing to bring

¹⁴⁵ John C.H. Wu, "The Science of Love" in *Chinese Humanism and Christian Spirituality: Essays of John C.H. Wu*. Ed. Paul K.T. Sih. (Jamaica, NY: St. John's University Press, 1965) 205

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 206

¹⁴⁷ Mt 18:3 NAB

¹⁴⁸ Wu, *Beyond East and West*, 48

Christianity into a more Confucian interpretation risked future generations of Chinese Christians.¹⁴⁹ Without being in tune with Chinese ancient culture, Stuart feared Chinese youth would lose interest. Stuart wrote, “to mediate the Gospel of Christ to the people of China...ought to result in...fulfilling the noblest aspirations of Confucian teachings and supplementing these with its own unique and essential features.”¹⁵⁰ In short, Confucianism brought a new depth to Christianity that many felt desirable. Jesus supported Confucius, not usurped him. Essentially, Jesus fulfilled the moral principles of traditional beliefs in the modern age. Jesus joined the ranks of the greatest Chinese sages Confucius, Buddha, and Lao Tzu in the minds of the Sino-Christians.

The teachings of these other sages informed some of Stuart’s students as well. Certainly, John Stuart found Confucius a sympathetic figure. However, he was not the greatest philosopher China had to offer. Stuart recommended students read Mo Tzu. Mo Tzu’s teachings, often obscured by the more famous schools like Confucianism, Taoism, and Legalism, advocated for universal love and a single Supreme Being according to Stuart.¹⁵¹ Wong Kuei-sheng, a graduate from Yenching University where Stuart served as president, agreed that aspects of traditional religion must be preserved. Wong complained that Christianity lacked the peace and tranquility offered by Buddhist teaching. Despite this, Wong disagreed with many Buddhist practices that he believed were part of the superstitious occult. Therefore, this student argued that Jesus was a rational figure.

¹⁴⁹ Stuart, *Christianity and Confucianism*, 8-9

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 9

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 17

Consequently, Jesus could act as a regulator to negate unsavory qualities about Buddhism.¹⁵²

Outside of the high-minded theology, sermons, and tracts, Jesus' merger with Chinese tradition took a more practical level in the realm of music. There is a very complex history of Chinese-Christian hymnology. Despite this, this study will remain brief and try to stay focused on the creation of the Chinese Jesus.¹⁵³ Prior to the 1920s, missionaries often forced converts to learn Western style music with crudely translated Chinese lyrics. Traditional missionaries typically limited Chinese instruments and original hymns in fear of uncivilized ideas infiltrating church services.¹⁵⁴ However, this tide turned by the late 20s. One of the earliest proponents of Chinese hymns was YMCA leader TZ Koo. In the late 20s, TZ Koo started to compile a great deal of Chinese folk songs and chants, some of which only existed orally prior to Koo transcribing them. Other than curious inquiry, Koo admitted having some ulterior motives when compiling of his *Songs of the People*. In the book, he adapted a Christian hymn to a traditional Buddhist chant titled "A Love Song." Koo expressed hope that his adaption of a traditional song will lead to the creation of more authentic Chinese music in churches.¹⁵⁵

Indeed, Koo's wish seemed to come true by the 1930s. Unsurprisingly, the music department at Yenching University was at the epicenter of the indigenous hymnal movement. The most notable Westerner in Yenching's Music Department, Bliss Wiant eagerly reached out to notable Sino-Christians intellectuals at Yenching, like William

¹⁵² Wong Kuei-sheng, "Jesus of the Chinese Road," in *"The Jesus I Know"* 32-33

¹⁵³ For more information on the history of hymnals see: Leung Naap-kei Andrew, "The Emergence of a National Hymnody: The Making of Hymns of Universal Praise (1936)," (MA thesis, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007. CUHK Electronic Theses & Dissertation Collection)

¹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 65

¹⁵⁵ TZ Koo, *Songs of the People*. Compiled by TZ Koo. [1928?] (second page of preface, unnumbered)

Hung and T.C Chao, to craft indigenous hymns. Wiant recalled meeting Professor Hung, “I was interested to know that the Chinese Christian movement had not produced any hymns of an indigenous nature. I told William of my hope to become a part of such a movement. I’ll never forget his enthusiastic response.”¹⁵⁶ As a result, Chao and Wiant worked closely on crafting indigenous hymns using Koo’s work as a springboard.¹⁵⁷ Many of these hymns would be published in Professor T.T. Lew’s *Hymns of Universal Praise* in 1936 (this work will be covered more extensively in chapter 5). So how did indigenizing hymns impact the Chinese Jesus?

Among the most specific mentions of Jesus, one finds both original pieces and Christianized folk and Confucian songs. For example, T.T. Lew and Wiant fashioned the hymn “The Saving Body for All Men is Broken” with lines from Mt. 26:26-28 and 27:32-35 (explicit mentions of the Last Supper and the Crucifixion respectively) and utilized original instrumental parts from a Yenching graduate.¹⁵⁸ T.C Chao wrote typical songs like “Jesus Loved Each Little Child” to Chinese folk melodies and chants.¹⁵⁹ Though every hymn had a theological message, these hymns had their greatest impact on the ears of listeners in the congregation. Listeners no longer associated the name Jesus in song with the musical style of a distant land. The instruments, language, and music writers were authentically Chinese. Perhaps the most interesting, Chao and Wiant wrote the

¹⁵⁶ Leung, “The Emergence of a National Hymnody: The Making of Hymns of Universal Praise (1936),” 82 footnotes

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 81-83

¹⁵⁸ *Eleven Original Chinese Hymns Selected from Hymns of Universal Praise*. Translated by Dr. & Mrs. Bliss Wiant, Rev. Chou Ting-chieh, and Dr. AT Roy. (Hong Kong: The Council on Christian Literature for Overseas Chinese, [1964?]) http://divinity-adhoc.library.yale.edu/HKBU/CLSC/0454_eochs.pdf) Hymn No. 197

¹⁵⁹ *Chinese Christian Hymns: By Chinese Writers, to Chinese Tunes: Selected from the Chinese Hymn Book: Hymns of Universal Praise*. Translated by Frank W. Price. (Richmond, VA: Scatterwhite Press, 1953. <https://archive.org/stream/ChineseChristianHymns/chinese#page/n0/mode/2up>) Hymn No. 22.

hymn “Faith, Hope, and Love” to the tune of the traditional song “Yangtze Boatmen’s Chantry.” This chantry remained a fairly recognizable song: sung by boatmen in unison whilst loading barges. The hymn “Faith, Hope, and Love” denoted Jesus’ death on the cross: “Deeply I believe God’s own lamb was slain; He on the cross bled as lover o’er-came his pain.”¹⁶⁰ As one commentator noted, by associating death on a cross with a labor song, Chinese congregations recognized Jesus as a man of action, duty, and love that should be emulated or at least admired.¹⁶¹ Indeed, these Yenching hymns of all varieties gained great popularity among Protestant denominations.

This Christian trend of sifting through old Chinese philosophies and merging them with the Christian God continued through the decades and across denominational lines. John C.H. Wu’s revision of Buddhism in the 30s and 40s mirrored Wong and Stuarts in the 20s and 30s. Wu also believed that Christ acted as a regulator to traditional beliefs: “pass all the pagan ideas through a sieve in order to discover the grains of gold and to purify them from every alloy.”¹⁶² Buddha played a particular role in Wu’s life as a child. Wu claimed his parents practiced Buddhism. This Sino-Catholic recalled the last words his mother spoke to his father before her death, “I came to your house to pay my debt. Having given you three children, my debt is paid.”¹⁶³ According to Wu, this phrase came from the Buddhist tradition. His mother fulfilled her earthly duties and expected good karma and a better reincarnation as a result. As a converted Christian, Wu still maintained the importance of his mother’s dying words. Though pagan, the moral teaching of indebtedness remained sound. Wu argued that every man should behave as

¹⁶⁰ *Eleven Original Chinese Hymns Selected from Hymns of Universal Praise*, Hymn No. 270

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*,

¹⁶² Wu, *From Confucianism to Catholicism*, 32-33

¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, 32

though they are indebted to God. Since every man dies, one must perform his duty and act morally. A Christian was accountable to God as the only creditor of one's life.¹⁶⁴

In addition to his fondness of Buddha, Wu also found Lao Tzu to be a great speaker of mystical truth. Once again, Wu up holds St. Therese of Linieux as the greatest of all Catholic saints. Her simplicity and child-like approach captivated the Chinese theologian. St. Therese advocated that one totally detach themselves from prayer and social service. Performing God's work without a sense of self ensured that one acted unselfishly. Additionally, St. Therese encouraged the faithful to act as "a baby who is an old man".¹⁶⁵ Wu quickly made the obvious connections to Lao Tzu's philosophy on non-action and detachment. Wu made many brief references to Lao Tzu in his works, but recorded the connection between St. Therese and Lao Tzu in his *Science of Love*. However, he only really elaborated on the connection between the two after the Republican period sometime in the mid-50s. His *St. Therese and Lao Tzu: a Study in Comparative Mysticism* is slightly outside the time frame of this study. However, since Wu makes brief mentions of both St. Therese and Lao Tzu during the Republic's existence, a brief analysis is necessary. Probably the most shocking, Wu compared the mystical qualities of Jesus in the Eucharist to Taoist philosophy:

For our sake, Christ, the Son of God, is still hidden in the Eucharist!
Glorious God keeping himself humble and little! Sitting at the right hand
of his Father, He yet continues to immolate at every sacrifice of the Holy
Mass! Is this not the supreme exemplar of Tao Tzu's ideal of 'knowing the
glorious but keeping lowly?'¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 33

¹⁶⁵ Wu, "The Science of Love" in *Chinese Humanism and Christian Spirituality*, 220

¹⁶⁶ Wu, "St. Therese and Lao Tzu: a Study in Comparative Mysticism" in *Chinese Humanism and Christian Spirituality*, 117

Not only does this passage display reconciliation between Taoism and a Catholic practice, Sino-Catholics placed Chinese Jesus as part of Chinese tradition.

Of course, other Sino-Catholics flocked to John C.H. Wu's theories. All denominations shared the desire to make Jesus more Chinese. Protestant Chinese may have been more outspoken on issues of divinity, but Sino-Catholic were probably more persistent with merging Jesus with traditional philosophy. Wu once wrote that China must present the "gold of Confucianism, the musk of Taoism, and the frankincense of Buddhism" before the infant Jesus so their beliefs can be purified.¹⁶⁷ This Chinese Chesterton's words were highly poetical. However, other artists took note of these themes and they literally effected Chinese artistic interpretation of the Biblical Magi. In three separate paintings, the Magi, based on their dress, represented the Confucian literati class of dynastic China.¹⁶⁸ One of the painters took this representation a step further. According to Westerner Daniel Fleming, the one Magus shaved his head, representing Buddhism, another Magus grew a long beard, similar to Lao Tzu's, and last Magus displayed appropriate demeanor, symbolizing Confucianism.¹⁶⁹ In this way, tradition and Jesus had a reciprocating relationship in the Republican Era.

In fact, iconographers fancied painting baby Jesus actively participating in Chinese culture. Obviously, the iconographers painted Jesus as ethnically Chinese.

Though, physical looks alone did not qualify the character as Chinese. For many of these

¹⁶⁷ Wu, *Beyond East and West*, 149

¹⁶⁸ Hua Xiaoxian, "The Adoration of the Magic". Icon 6 in 'Celestial Icons'—Christian Scroll Painting from Pre-Revolutionary China" The Ricci Institute for Chinese-Western Cultural History. University of San Francisco. <http://usf.usfca.edu/ricci/collection/exhibits/celestialicons/images.htm>. **And** "The Story of Christ in Chinese Art: Scholars at Peking University Make Christmas Portfolio for Life" (LIFE magazine, December 22, 1941 Google Ebooks) 44

¹⁶⁹ Hsu San Chun, "Visit of the Magi" in Daniel Johnson Fleming *Each with his own Brush: Contemporary Christian Art in Asia and Africa*. (New York: Friendship Press, 1938) 18

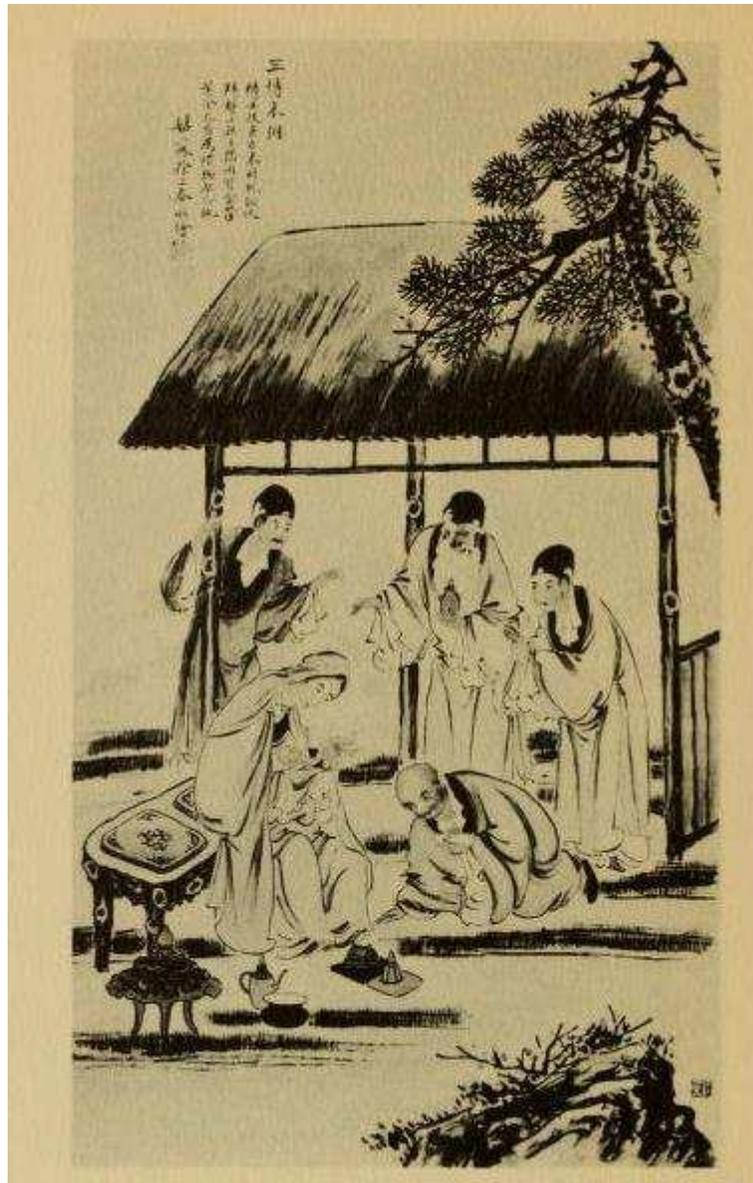
representations, artists fabricated ideas from outside the Gospels. The Gospel did not contain an adequate amount of information of Jesus childhood, so artists filled in the blanks. In one depiction, Jesus and the Virgin Mary attend a lantern festival during Chinese New Year.¹⁷⁰ Artists Bai Huiqun and Gao Tihan were particular fond of Jesus child painting in the late 40s. They painted Jesus reading books whilst Mary spins silk, Jesus practicing writing with Mary, Mary and Martha embroidering a phoenix on a sheet of silk, and Jesus reciting his lessons from memory.¹⁷¹ These activities were not for a Jewish boy nor an American child, but traditional activities for Chinese child. The child Jesus became Chinese.

To become more Chinese, Jesus merged with the sages of the ancient China, which was particularly surprising after the May Fourth Movement. Though many Sino-Christians agreed with some of tenets of the movements, this group of Christian scholars despised the cultural void caused by Marxist atheism. Christians instead reassessed the role of Buddhism, Confucianism, and Taoism in Chinese culture. Avoiding the supernatural, they focused on the philosophical and interpreted for 20th century needs. In turn, this philosophy could be applied to Jesus and Christianity, making Jesus akin to Chinese traditional beliefs. The Confucian rites controversy of the 17th and 18th centuries melted away in the climate of liberalism in the 20th. Chinese scholars and foreign missionaries searched for parallels to Confucius' Five Relationships and filial piety in the Gospels and Christian tradition. The ancient definition of T'ien readjusted to a more monotheistic term. Even the tranquility advocated by Buddha's Middle Way and the

¹⁷⁰ Lu Hung Nien "The Lantern Festival" in Fleming, *Each with his own Brush*. (unnumbered) 4th page after cover

¹⁷¹ Bai Huiqun and Gao Tihan, Icons 13-17. In 'Celestial Icons'.

natural ambitions of Lao Tzu's non-action found a place within Christianity and Jesus' teaching. During the Republic, Jesus sat among the ancient philosophers of China as an advocate for modernity. If Jesus' were not receptive to Chinese culture, scholars worked to correct the Chinese Jesus.



*Figure 4. "Visit of the Magi"- Mary, Joseph and infant Jesus are visited by the Magi. The kneeling man with the shaved head represents Buddhism. The man the furthest right represents Confucianism with his proper demeanor. The beard man clutching a bottle of water symbolizes Taoism. (Hsu San Chun, "Visit of the Magi" in Daniel Johnson Fleming *Each with his own Brush: Contemporary Christian Art in Asia and Africa*. New York: Friendship Press, 1938, p.18)*



Figure 5. “Our Lady at the Spinning Wheel with the Child Jesus” - (Bai Huiquan, Icon 13: “Our Lady at the Spinning Wheel with the Child Jesus” in “Celestial Icons”)



Figure 6. “Our Lady and Jesus Writing Characters 1”- (Bai Huiquan, Icon 15: “Our Lady and Jesus Writing Characters 1 in “Celestial Icons”)

Chapter 5

The Kingdom and the Republic

The Revolution of 1911 truly transformed China. For the first time in Chinese history, the dynastic monarchy ceased to exist. At least in theory, the Chinese people and a representative democracy guided the nation's future. China's destiny appeared wide open; fertile ground for new ideologies and revolutionary activities. Sun Yat-sen, a Chinese Christian, political revolutionary, and father of the Republic, helped shape the future of this new China. His Three People's Principles, upholding nationalism, democracy, and the welfare of the people, became the ideological cornerstone for the Kuomintang and equally revered by Chinese Marxists. Even the May Fourth Movement, which garnered the most sympathy from Communist students, found support among secular liberals and Chinese Christians for some aspects of their revolutionary ideology. A majority of Chinese agreed that the nation, ignoring its totalitarian past, must advance the nationalist spirit of the 1911 Revolution. In a country plagued by civil strife and foreign imperialism, how could a nationalist movement strive? How could Christians, part of a foreign religion, possibly play a part in this movement? Chinese Christians created a revolutionary Jesus. However, "revolutionary" may be a loaded word. Chinese Christians certainly used the term, but not in a Maoist sense. This revolutionary Jesus stood between the two extremes of totalitarian monarchy and oppressive Communism. This Jesus interpretation upheld the Three People's Principles and allied itself with the Chiang Kai-shek's Kuomintang Party.

American missionaries did not find this KMT-minded Jesus disagreeable. As the threat of communism started to take hold in the west after the Russian Revolution,

Americans avoided social issues such as labor unions and workers' rights. Though they attempted to maintain equilibrium between conservative and liberal ideologies, both Chinese and American Christians leaned towards rightwing ideologies.¹⁷² Therefore, both the American government and American missionaries developed sympathies for Chiang Kai-shek's KMT. However, this "right turn", as another historian calls it, never completely omitted social responsibility.¹⁷³ Though sympathetic to the Kuomintang party, many American missionaries adhered to the social criticism found in the Social Gospel Movement.

The Social Gospel Movement in the United States attempted to solve social injustices through Christian ethics found in the Gospels. These American missionaries believed that the Kingdom of God can be brought to earth through social reform, targeting the poorest members of society. As stated prior, John Stuart and other American missionaries in China had been influenced by this liberal progressive movement at the time of the 1911 Revolution. Furthermore, Chinese Christians found merit in many of the basic tenets of the Social Gospel Movement. Many Social Gospel missionaries claimed the Lord's Prayer, the prayer specifically issued by Jesus in the Gospels, advocated for social service, and many Chinese agreed. Wu Leichuan, Chancellor of Yenching University and member of the Christian Apologetic Group, believed that the Lord's Prayer was about self-cultivation. The goal of the prayer was to reform society through

¹⁷² Peng Xiaoyu, "Right Turn, Left Turn: Rethinking Chinese Christianity from 1945 to 1945 in the Spirit of the Second Vatican Council", *Chinese Studies in History* Vol. 46, No. 2 Catholicism and China (Winter 2012-13) 91

¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, 88, 94-95

individuals.¹⁷⁴ In this way, American missionaries and Sino-Christian established a new found connection during the Republic.

Undoubtedly, the tenets of the American Social Gospel found sympathy with the Sino Christians, but how does this involve the right-leaning Kuomintang Party? This new political interpretation of Jesus found many commonalities with Chiang Kai-shek's New Life Movement in 1934. It is somewhat unfair to simply label the KMT as the conservative party, because the party remained unsatisfied with the status quo in China. Rather than reinstitute the old monarchy, Chiang's KMT wanted to reinforce the Three People's Principles under a fascist-styled regime. Chiang believed that the new China lacked discipline and morality. Instead of looking purely at the past, Chiang Kai-shek believed that Western reforms were appropriate for national progress. However, he supplemented this idea with a mixture of Confucian and Christian ethics combined with military discipline. Using this hybridization, the party hoped to forcibly clean up the vices of the Chinese people. He began to combat every societal ill from opium addiction to personal hygiene to military drills. This movement stood at equilibrium. The NLM was anti-imperial yet pro-western, Christian yet traditional, and rightwing but concerned with top-down social development. This quasi-Christian movement's forced social reform, though deeply criticized, garnered some support from both the YMCA and American Missionaries.¹⁷⁵

¹⁷⁴ Wu Leichuan, "Jesus as I Know him", in *"The Jesus I Know": A Chinese Book Written for Chinese Youth*. English Edition. (Shanghai: Privately Published by Dr. T.Z. Koo, 1930) 4-5

¹⁷⁵ James C. Jr. Thompson, *While China Faced West: American Reformers in Nationalist China 1928-1937*. (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1969. Google Ebook) 152, 158 and, Fairbanks, John King and Albert Feuerwerker (eds). *The Cambridge History of China*. Vol 13. Republican China 1912-1949, Part 2. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986 Google Ebook) 146

In fact, Sino-Christians developed similar social reforms prior to the official enactment of the New Life Movement in 1934. The social reforms carried out by the KMT perhaps emulated some of the pre-existing sentiment towards social vice by Social Gospel Christians both American and Chinese. In the late 20s, *The Life Journal*, the publication from the Christian Apologetic Group based at Yenching University, thought that the social reforms enacted by foreign Christians, such as combating opium addiction and introducing Western medicine, advanced the nation.¹⁷⁶ Specifically, Western powers used opium as a method for establishing colonial power. After the Treaty of Nanking at the end of the First Opium War, the British forced the Chinese to accept the immoral opium trade. Therefore, Sino-Christians viewed social service as the highest expression of true Christian faith and a way to unbind colonial restraints. So how did this reform ideology affect the Sino-Christian interpretation of Jesus and Christian theology?

Firstly, Sino-Christians interpreted Christian reform prescribed by Jesus as a vital part of the modernization of the Republic and the true spirit of nationalist revolution. In the wake of the Anti-Christian Movement, Christianity faced fierce criticism from leftist elements in China. YMCA leader YT Wu noted many Chinese, ignorant of the gospel, falsely accused Christianity of being a “tool of imperialism”, a “cultural invasion”, a “superstition”, “an opiate”, and a “running dog of the capitalist”.¹⁷⁷ These fierce criticisms lead Wu and other Christian leaders to publish a collection of articles and interviews about Chinese personal relationships with Jesus. However, their apologetic counter-attack never discredited Marxist thought in its entirety. Rather, Christians inserted Jesus into a new revolutionary narrative. As published in 1930:

¹⁷⁶ *Life Journal* in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes*. (London: Student Christian Movement, 1922) 44

¹⁷⁷ YT Wu “Introduction to the Original Version” in “*The Jesus I Know*”, 1

[The revolution in China] brought about a cult of the spirit of “fen tou” (struggle). To this call youth everywhere responded with enthusiasm; and many have proved their sincerity by a willingness to lay down their lives. On the other hand, the revolution has continued long enough for it to be clear that to struggle and die may be less intrinsically difficult than to struggle and live, to go on day to day fighting overwhelming odds...this later temper is as indispensable for the rebirth of the nation as the former... The authors of this book, themselves indissociably a part of the revolution, have plainly found this knowledge and experience the source of a new light on the Jesus they knew. He has become something more than he was...¹⁷⁸

Obviously, Sino-Christian presented Jesus as a progressive and an alternative to Marxism, not a figure rooted in outdated traditions.

Moreover, Jesus could not be perceived as a traditionalist figure because Jesus denied earthy kingship. For both the Kuomintang and Chinese communists, monarchy represented a fallacy of the past. After the birth of the Republic, the Chinese people reviled monarchy. The 1911 Revolution ended with the abdication of the last Manchu Emperor Puyi. Even in 1915, President Yuan Shikai attempted to establish a new monarchy. Though, his endeavor ultimately failed amidst widespread public backlash. At a glance, Jesus also seemed to represent monarchy. Lord Jesus promised the coming of the Kingdom of God. However, Sino-Christians in the 20s and 30s focused on Jesus’ denial of earthly kingship found in the gospels. Specifically, Jesus refused all the kingdoms on earth when tempted by the devil, and denied an earthly kingdom when confronted by Pontius Pilate. One former student at Nanking Theological Seminary noted Jesus’ refusal to accept the kingdoms of earth in the Temptation and associated it with Jesus’ benevolent nature. He wrote, “whether the autocracy of Rome or the republicanism of Plato, one where class distinctions exist, if only for a day, there equity and justice

¹⁷⁸ “Preface to the English Edition” in *“The Jesus I Know”*, ii

cannot exist.”¹⁷⁹ Clearly, Sino-Christians retained some socialist sympathies. However, they clearly stated that the Christian revolution, the Kingdom of God, was a new way between communism and traditional monarchy.

T.C Chao, professor of religion at Yenching University, also believed that the Republic would reach its full potential through social service. Both the nation and Chinese Christianity could reach their full potential by embracing Western reform and adjusting to the attitude of the nationalist revolution. He firmly believed that the Kingdom of God in China must be founded on Christian love. This love was not romantic love or superficial niceties. Chao believed that friendship, community building, and service to one’s neighbor should be the cornerstone of the Republic and a central component for God’s plan on earth.¹⁸⁰ For Chao, the ideology of Republic should be something completely new. He remarked, “Communists want society to be communistic; the working men want society to be the working men’s society; anti-Christians and half-baked scientists want society to be one of atheism and rationalism.”¹⁸¹ Jesus’ revolution stood contrary to all these things.

Though Chao’s statement suggests China was divided nation, Sino-Christians wanted nothing more than a patriotic, united, and independent China. Among the most humble and practical examples of national Christian unity were in hymns and songs. Though we briefly discussed how hymns became indigenious in the previous chapter, these same hymnals displayed great patriotic fervor. In Koo’s *Songs of the People* (1928), T.Z Koo rewrote some lyrics of traditional songs. Though they retained traditional

¹⁷⁹ Shen Tzu-chen “What I Know of Jesus”, in “*The Jesus I Know*”, 54

¹⁸⁰ TC Chao, “Present Day Religious Thought and Life in China”, in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes: Second Series*, (London: Student Christian Movement, 1926) 46-47

¹⁸¹ *Ibid*, 48-49

melodies and instruments, Koo rewrote and retitled them such as “Song of May Fourth”, “A Great People”, “O! Beautiful China”, and “China, My Country.” Koo hoped to create a body of popular patriotic songs for all occasions.¹⁸² Of course, Koo’s work aided the writing and publication of *Hymns of Universal Praise* (1936). The impact of this song book on national identity cannot be underestimated. It was a unified attempt by 6 different Protestant denominations to create a national hymnal. 6 months after it was published, the hymnal sold nearly 160,000 copies and even remains popular today. Only the Bible was able to surpass the hymnal in Christian literature sales in the Republic.¹⁸³ Despite this, the hymns avoided most political arguments. Only one hymn gives us a brief glimpse about nationalist Christians. TT Lew wrote the hymn “New Jerusalem”, also subtitled “New China”, using the 21st chapter of the Book of Revelations. Unlike Revelations, Lew explicitly mentioned the removal of “tyrants” and despots in Jesus’ New Kingdom.¹⁸⁴ Christians remained anti-Marxist, but still strived for patriotism and national unity.

Sino-Christians found validation for their middle-way in the gospel narrative of Jesus. Christian intellectuals looked at the historical context and the stories of the gospels and found parallels with China of the time. Three Biblical groups resonated with Chinese thinkers; the Pharisees, the Romans, and the Zealots. Firstly, Jesus’ struggle against the

¹⁸² TZ Koo, *Songs of the People*. Compiled by TZ Koo. [1928?] (second page of preface and index, unnumbered)

¹⁸³ Leung Naap-kei Andrew, “The Emergence of a National Hymnody: The Making of Hymns of Universal Praise (1936),” (MA thesis, The Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2007. CUHK Electronic Theses & Dissertation Collection) 1-2

¹⁸⁴ *Eleven Original Chinese Hymns Selected from Hymns of Universal Praise*. Translated by Dr. & Mrs. Bliss Wiant, Rev. Chou Ting-chieh, and Dr. AT Roy. (Hong Kong: The Council on Christian Literature for Overseas Chinese, [1964?] http://divinity-adhoc.library.yale.edu/HKBU/CLSC/0454_eochs.pdf) Hymn No. 245. And *Chinese Christian Hymns: By Chinese Writers, to Chinese Tunes: Selected from the Chinese Hymn Book: Hymns of Universal Praise*. Translated by Frank W. Price. (Richmond, VA: Scatterwhite Press, 1953. <https://archive.org/stream/ChineseChristianHymns/chinese#page/n0/mode/2up>) Hymn No. 9.

Jewish Pharisees reminded the Sino-intellectuals of their own fight against outdated traditions. These scholars perceived Jesus as a reformer fighting against the outdated superstition that held Israel back. Prior to his conversion from Methodism to Catholicism in the early 30s, John C. H. Wu proclaimed, “His life [Jesus] is an endless struggle against the strait jackets of legalistic formalism of the Pharisees...And what is the Holy Ghost but the never-dying spirit of revolt against the specters of tradition?”¹⁸⁵ The soon-to-be Catholic intellectual was not alone in his critique of Chinese society through the gospel. Christian philosopher Hsieh Fu-ya (Xie Fuya) elaborated on Wu’s point:

Jesus did not only submit to the power of the conservative traditionalists, neither did he throw this lot with fashionable radicals. At the time was a party called Zealots, young hotheads, who wanted to raise revolt against Roman imperialism...but the movement was unprepared, not properly thought out.¹⁸⁶

Obviously, the Zealots and Romans played a more immediate role in Chinese politics. The Roman domination of Israel represented Western imperialism over China. The description of the fiery Zealots emulated the Communist student post-May Fourth Movement more than the revolutionary element in ancient Israel.

This idea of the Roman imperial oppressor allowed some Sino-Christians to actually criticize foreign missionaries. In publications in the 1920s, Chinese Christian started to insist that Jesus was an anti-imperialist and that Western Christianity actually deviated from Jesus’ aspirations. One Chinese Christian could not understand why Western Christians talked about “righteousness, love, and friendship” but “suck the blood

¹⁸⁵ John C.H. Wu, *Beyond East and West*. (New York : Sheed and Ward, 1951) 80

¹⁸⁶ Hsieh Fu-ya “The Jesus I Know To-day”, in *“The Jesus I Know”*, 20

and fat of the Chinese people” for monetary gain.¹⁸⁷ Fueled by the antiimperialist sentiment of the time, some Chinese Christian even called for China’s isolation from the Western world entirely. One article advocated that China should join an anti-Western alliance with India. The author felt that India and China could unite under the ethical code delivered at the Sermon on the Mount.¹⁸⁸

William Hung, Professor of History at Yenching University, also joined in this revisionist, yet revolutionary, interpretation. Nevertheless, Hung and other historians from Yenching looked to Hong Xiuquan for political and religious inspiration. In 1850, Hong led an indigenous Christian revolt called the Taiping Rebellion, establishing the Celestial Kingdom. The rebel believed he had been inspired by God the Father and Jesus, his older brother, in a dream to overthrow the Manchu dynasty. William Hung upheld Hong Xiuquan as a revolutionary hero and social progressive. This Taiping leader redistributed private property, emancipated women, and outlawed opium.¹⁸⁹ Professors at Yenching refused to blame Western missionaries as the cause of the Taiping Rebellions failure. William Hung blamed conservative Han Chinese like Zeng Guofan for betraying the revolution and reestablishing the Manchu dynasty. Yenching historians used Hong Xiuquan and the Taiping Rebellion as a cautionary tale: The conservative elements in China could easily rise again and steal away the revolution and the Republic.¹⁹⁰

Though in the late 20s and early 30s Chinese Christians reinterpreted Jesus and Christian doctrine as vital parts of the nationalist revolution and an alternative to both

¹⁸⁷ “The Impression of Christianity Made Upon the Chinese People Through Contact with the Christian Missions of the West” in *The Jesus I Know*, 115-116

¹⁸⁸ Hsu Pao-chien, “The Uniqueness of Jesus Christ,” in *The Jesus I Know*, 15

¹⁸⁹ William Hung “Setting Confucius Aside”, in *As it Looks to Young China: Chapters by a Group of Christian Chinese* (New York: Friendship Press, 1932) 3

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 16

monarchy and Marxism, how did this ideology practically apply to the political climate of the time? After the 1911 revolution, China fragmented into multiple warlord factions. In 1931, J.F. Li, professor of religion at Yenching University, claimed that China was in a moral decline. The country remained rampant with warlords and bandits, among the most heinous included the communists. For Li, communists attempted to destroy everything and start anew. Li feared all foreigners, intellectuals, educators, and religious clergy would be purged from the nation.¹⁹¹ Though far from the perfect Christian leader, Li expressed hope that Chiang Kai-shek, a leader who successfully combated both warlords and communists, could bring about a unified and moral China. Despite his many flaws, Chiang understood the Three People's Principles and acknowledged that welfare for the people was neither communistic nor capitalistic.¹⁹² Many other Sino-Christians passively accepted Chiang Kai-shek as the true leader of the Republic. What has been stated thus far about Sino-Christians happened prior to the official announcement of the New Life Movement in 1934. Nevertheless, even prior to 1934, Christian intellectual trends were prepped to merge with the rightwing Kuomintang's political ideology.

With the official start of the New Life Movement in 1934, the Chinese interpretation of Jesus became intrinsically linked with the will of Kuomintang. Just as Jesus symbolized nationalist revolution, Christianity also validated Chiang Kai-shek's policies. In 1931, Japanese forces launched an invasion of the Chinese territory of Manchuria. To the dismay of many Chinese, Chiang's force withdrew from the territory. Not wanting to become embroiled in war against foreigners, the Nationalists allowed the Japanese to annex Manchuria. The New Life Movement's focus on moral conduct and

¹⁹¹ J.F. Li "The Nation" in *As it Looks to Young China*, 105

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, 111-114

social progress enabled party leaders to utilize the Christian God in their apologetic rhetoric. In a 1934 speech, Mayling Soong Chiang (Madame Chiang Kai-shek), also a Chinese Christian, claimed she was outraged when the Japanese started to make advances towards Manchuria. Allegedly, Madame Chiang consulted her dying mother, the source of her Christian faith, and petitioned her to pray to God so He may send a natural disaster to destroy Japan. Her ill mother rebuked her, claiming such an action was unworthy of both God and any mortal on Earth.¹⁹³ Instead, Madame Chiang thought God wanted the Chinese to pray for the Japanese. She believed that the average Japanese suffered due to military involvement in China, and the Chinese should pity them.¹⁹⁴

Mayling Soong Chiang's religion centered on personal discernment; finding purpose in God's divine plan. Specifically, God wanted people to serve their country. Rather than wage a war against Japan, Chiang Kai-shek focused his efforts against communist rebels, warlords, and bandits. Mayling Soong Chiang believed that her and her husband's purpose was to unify China. She viewed China as filled with social disorder and plagued by natural disasters and famine. God planned to rehabilitate China of its ills and restore order to the country through the KMT.¹⁹⁵ Clearly, Kuomintang party leaders joined the reinterpretation of the Christian God started by Sino-Christian intellectuals. Using this model, the KMT rationalized some of its more controversial political moves using Christian ethics. Moreover, some of the themes of nation building and social rehabilitation certainly echoed some of concerns expressed by Christian scholars.

¹⁹³ Mayling Soong Chiang "What Religion Means to Me" in *Selected Speeches on Religion*. ([Taipei?]: Office of the Government Spokesman: 1952) 16-17

¹⁹⁴ Ibid.,

¹⁹⁵ Ibid., 17, 20-21

Probably the best evidence of Sino-Christians collaboration with the New Life Movement came on the eve of Easter in 1938. In a radio broadcast, President Chiang Kai-shek elaborated on his personal belief in Jesus Christ. Though previously a Buddhist, Chiang's wife convinced him to convert by the 1930s. Generalissimo identified three reasons why he believed in Jesus. Firstly, like Sino-Christian scholars, he acknowledged Jesus as a leader of a nationalist revolution:

At the time of Jesus' birth the Jewish people were steadily weakening under the heavy oppression of Rome...the Jews were treated like slaves and animals at the hands of their enemies. The Romans had the power of life and death over them. The Jews not only failed to resist the aggressors, but they had even lost the will to resist. Then a people's revolutionist was born in the person of Jesus, who courageously took upon Himself the heavy task of regenerating the nation.¹⁹⁶

Throughout the broadcast, the Kuomintang general invoked the spirit of 1911 Revolution. He claimed his party true followed the Three People Principles and the ideology of Sun Yat-sen. In fact, Chiang attempted to compare the revolutionary nature of Jesus to Dr. Sun. Since Sun Yat-sen was a Christian, Generalissimo easily compared the two:

National life degenerated under the Manchu domination, we find it very similar to that occurring among the Jews under the rule of Rome. Our late leader, Dr. Sun Yat-sen, with...his profound understanding of Jesus' revolutionary spirit of love and sacrifice, carried on his revolutionary work.¹⁹⁷

Evidently, the Kuomintang and Sino-Christians reached similar conclusions about the revolutionary nature of Jesus and his effect on China during the New Life Movement. Also, Chiang found two more reasons why Jesus was a superb role model. Secondly, Jesus led a social revolution. He recognized that society was corrupt and immoral and

¹⁹⁶ Chiang Kai-shek "My Religious Faith" (Originally a radio broadcast titled "Why I Believe in Jesus") April 16, 1938. In *Selected Speeches on Religion*, 1-2

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 2-3

sought to correct it. In this regard, Jesus followed closely to the New Life Movement which sought the discipline and moral regeneration of China. Thirdly, Jesus led a religious revolution. Specifically, Chiang believed that Jesus reformed and disposed of the old superstitious elements of the Jewish religion.¹⁹⁸ Once again, this definition of Jesus strongly resembled Sino-Christians in the late 20s and early 30s. Jesus' rejection of superstition related to the anti-superstitious rhetoric of the May Fourth Movement covered elsewhere in this essay. Moreover, the New Life Movement did not reinstate superstition. Rather, Chiang looked to Jesus for purely moral guidance. Lastly the most compelling piece of evidence for the Chinese Jesus' intersection with the New Life Movement came at the close of the 1938 broadcast. Generalissimo claimed he also resembled some of Jesus' revolutionary action. He explicitly mentioned the New Life Movement as a Christian revolution.¹⁹⁹ Sino-Christians and the KMT merged their ideology. However, this was not one sided. Sino-intellectuals and KMT politicians had a long running conversation and mutual influence throughout the Republic.

Advancing into 40s, Sino-Christians explicitly mentioned the KMT as the proper Christian party of China. Kuomintang loyalty went beyond denominational lines. Furthermore, Sino-Christians maintained their position between oppressive monarchy and Marxist and applied it to Kuomintang politics. For instance, Catholic Bishop Paul Yu Pin argued that a mixed government, with elements of both monarchy and democracy, worked best for China. To Christianize his argument, the Bishop provided readings from St. Thomas Aquinas' *Summa Theologica*. Yu Pin claimed that the scholastic saint

¹⁹⁸ Ibid.,

¹⁹⁹ Ibid., 4

advocated for mixed monarchies as a proper Christian system.²⁰⁰ In 1945, the Chinese Catholic leadership continued to advocate for this middle way started by Social Gospel oriented Protestants from the 20s. In economics, they compared Papal edicts to the Chinese constitution. Specifically, Catholics conformed Catholic social teaching, an economic theory called distributionism, and the socialist aspects of the constitution. For example, Article 121 stated that the government must “regulate private wealth” when private ownership became “detrimental to balanced development”.²⁰¹ This article coincided with landmark Papal Edicts of distributionism, such as Pope Pius XI call to have wealth “distributed among various individuals” for the “common good” or Pope Leo XIII pronouncement that “labor and capital” must be mutually cooperative.²⁰² In this way, Sino-Christians stood between communism and unfettered capitalism, and validated their theories through Catholic traditions. But who could run a system halfway between monarchy and democracy and partway between Marxism and capitalism?

Chiang Kai-shek’s anti-communist military dictatorship filled this niche for many Christians. Undoubtedly, Christians drew closer to the Kuomintang after the attempted social reforms of the New Life Movement. Bishop Yu Pin claimed that popular sovereignty formed the basis of both a true functioning democracy and Christian dignity.²⁰³ According to the Bishop, popular sovereignty did not exclude benevolent monarchy. In fact, China had a long tradition of democracy with the emperor and the Mandate of Heaven. The Mandate of Heaven did not simply give the ruler the right to govern, Bishop Yu Pin argued, the concept insured that a leader must be benevolent to

²⁰⁰ Paul Yu-Pin “China’s Democratic tradition” in *Eyes East : Selected Pronouncements of the Most Reverend Paul Yu-Pin*. (Paterson, N.J. : St. Anthony Guild Press, 1945) 39

²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 46

²⁰² *Ibid.*,

²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 40

the people and listen to their cries. Thus, the Mandate of Heaven was actually a primitive form of freedom of speech.²⁰⁴ The Catholic bishop concluded that only one leader would listen to the criticism of the people and guarantee a new heavenly mandate: Chiang Kai-shek.²⁰⁵

However, there is one component of the political Chinese Jesus that arose independent of the NLM. Though anti-imperialism remained rampant, many educated Chinese continued to hold pacifist views well into the Second World War. TZ Koo, a devote pacifist, found China embroiled in a war with the Japanese when he published a Bible study pamphlet in 1940. Jesus frequently uses the word “peace” in the Bible. In world devoid of peace, Koo elaborated on some Chinese translations for the word. The pastor identified 3 separate characters that mean peace in Chinese (和, 安, and 平). For the first (和), Koo explained the character was created by two separate signs, one meaning rice and the other meaning mouth. Referring to imperial ambitions of the Japanese, Koo further explained “when one group within a nation is abnormally rich, and the masses have no rice in their mouths, the economic basis of national peace is lacking.”²⁰⁶ For 安, the two symbols together represented a woman under a roof. This character represented security: “when conditions within nation produce unemployment, poverty, class inequalities, that nation lacks the social condition for peace.”²⁰⁷ Finally 平 symbolized two level hearts: “when one heart is holding a grudge... against another heart... when one nation harbors ill will against another nation... they are not at peace.”²⁰⁸

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 41

²⁰⁵ Ibid., 41-43

²⁰⁶ T.Z. Koo, *For the Healing of the Nations*. (New York City: American Bible Society, 1940) 8

²⁰⁷ Ibid, 9

²⁰⁸ Ibid,

Koo referred to each of these characters as representative of the love of Christ. Koo's social critique advocated for increased social service towards the poor and the denunciation of war. In the hands of the Chinese, the Gospel message became an important tool.

Chiang Kai-shek and the Kuomintang, and the Sino-Christian's interpretation of Jesus merged in the Republic period. In the 20s, Chinese Christians wanted a Jesus that upheld the nationalist revolution. However, they created a moderate Jesus. Rebuking the Pharisees, Chinese Jesus and Sino-Christians discarded old outdated traditions and embraced modernity. Like the Romans, Sino-Christians denied Western imperialism. Though they refused to accept a system as intrusive as Marxism, Sino-Christians and Social Gospel missionaries wanted to socially reform China. Chiang Kai-shek and his New Life Movement embraced all these central tenets and appealed specially to Chinese Christians. As Sino-Christians and the Kuomintang merged together, the Chinese Jesus also defended Kuomintang political policies. Though out the 20s, 30s, and much of the 40s, Chiang's rightwing dictatorship appealed to reform minded Christians. Despite this, Sino-Christian ideologies association with the KMT would eventually be the undoing for the nationalist Christian movement.

Chapter 6

Conclusion

This research set out to explore the changing attitudes of Chinese Christians in the Republican Era. After the 1911 revolution, Chinese society sought to reinvent itself. Moreover, a multitude of opinions and ideologies arose. This plethora of ideological movements all impacted the Chinese attitudes and how Christians interpreted their religion. The foreign American Social Gospel, drawing its influence from progressive liberalism, attempted to reform society based on the gospels and cared very little about the theological message. The more Marxist-oriented May Fourth Movement sought to erase the flawed and backwards traditional legacy of China. The Literary Revolution, started by liberal intellectuals, popularized the written vernacular and increased translations into the Chinese language. The rightwing New Life Movement attempted to restore an ethical code and discipline to the Chinese Republic. Despite this, aspects of each of these movements garnered sympathy with other groups. In the case of this study, Christian intellectuals and community leaders utilized aspects of each of these movements. Each ideological school endeavored to advance the spirit of the 1911 revolution. Sino-Christians too sought to bring Christianity into the nationalist attitudes of the time.

Unlike other scholars who have discussed this topic, this study focused purely on beliefs of the Sino-Christian intellectuals. Those who adhered to the anti-foreign thesis believe that Chinese culture was incompatible with Christian ideology. Despite their thesis, Sino-Christians were not ignorant about Christianity. These intellectuals endeavored to transform Christianity, specifically the character of Jesus Christ, and

conformed it to the climate of the time. This was not a misunderstanding based on an ingrained centuries old culture, but a product of the modern China at that particular point in time. Even other scholars who agree with this thesis have failed to look deeply into the belief system of the age. The hope of this study was to give voice to those many Sino-Christian intellectuals and discover what they believed. Essentially, educated Chinese Christians engaged in an academic search for a Chinese nationalist Jesus.

Firstly, like Christians throughout the world, Chinese Christians interpreted the gospels. The Literary Revolution led by Hu Shih undoubtedly influenced educated Sino-Christians. Like the more secular Hu Shih, Chinese Christians abandoned classical written Chinese for a vernacular script. In fact, Mandarin Bibles outsold any other format in the Republic. Additionally, Christian scholars developed methods to make the Bible more accessible to the less educated. Phonetic script and new punctuation increased readability. Making a vernacular and readable Bible placed Christian intellectuals within the Literary Revolution. This Bible for the masses helped dismantle classical literary Chinese, an outdated written language that sought only to maintain dynastic elites. Mandarin translations were accessible and thus more democratic. Moreover, Biblical literacy remained a primary goal for American missionaries and native Christians. However, the Chinese Christians, and to some degree American missionaries, did not view the Bible as an authoritarian text. In the Republic, the Gospels required both increased readership and increased criticism to join the democratic spirit.

Secondly, during the Republic, Chinese Christians downplayed Christ's divinity and redemptive abilities. The Social Gospel that American missionaries peddled cared very little about divinity. Likewise, scholars and students after the May Fourth Movement

found religious superstition as backwards and counterrevolutionary, and sought to erase it. The Chinese Jesus founded by Sino-Christian students and staff looked very different from the Jesus found in Western Christianity. These thinkers refuted the Trinity, the dual nature of Christ, and the Resurrection. A divine human being conjured up ideas of autocracy, monarchy, and divine kingship for the Chinese. Instead, a purely human Jesus found more sympathy among scholars. The Chinese focused on Jesus' upbringing, his daily activities, and his hardship. He was like any other man. His extraordinary attributes came not from divine providence but personal merit and virtue.

Therefore, Jesus became purely an ethical figure. This ethical Jesus coincided with Chiang Kai-shek's New Life Movement. The New Life Movement utilized the ethical code of both Confucianism and Christianity to reform society. In fact, many of the ancient Chinese sages were reexamined during the Republic and compared to the character of Jesus and Christianity. By combining Christianity with traditional religions, Jesus seemed less foreign. Chinese scholars claimed the monotheistic God of Abraham was akin to T'ien in the Chinese classical text. Confucian filial piety and Chinese family values became applicable to the Gospel message. Even Buddha's Middle Way and Lao Tzu's principle of non-action resonated with Jesus and the saint's child-like love. Lastly, artists depicted Jesus and other Biblical figures participating in traditional Chinese activities like practicing calligraphy. In this way, Jesus became an Chinese sage, not an intrusive foreign religious leader.

Lastly, Chinese Christians emulated Jesus as a revolutionary figure. However, this was not a Marxist interpretation. Jesus emulated the Three People Principles. His dogmas stood between oppressive monarchy and Marxism. Sino-Christians used Biblical groups

to help represent the climate of the time. Biblical Romans represented imperialism, the zealots symbolized uncontrolled Marxism, and the Pharisees denoted superstitious traditionalists and conservatives. This balanced Jesus evidently gravitated towards the Kuomintang and the New Life Movement. Chiang Kai-shek attempted social reform based on ethics and his regime's middle stance between capitalism and communism appealed to Christian reforms both foreign and domestic. In short, the Chinese Jesus was accessible to everyone. He refuted superstition and the dynastic system. Jesus represented the true democratic, meritocratic revolution.

If Christians both foreign and native tailored the Chinese Jesus and Sino-Christianity to the fervor of the 1911 revolution and major post-revolution movements, why did the Christian Movement ultimately fail? To answer this question, we return to Xing Jun's deductions about the Christian Movement. He concludes that the Christian Movement was a viable option for liberated Chinese people among many other ideological schools. However, the movement failed to appeal to the proletariat and the masses simply selected a system they felt worked best.²⁰⁹ If we take these deductions seriously then Sino-Christians failed to appeal to the masses. Why could the Christian Movement not garner the same support the Maoist revolution did?

Firstly, the foreign nature of Christianity always posed a significant problem. In fact, the main reason this scholarly search for a Chinese Jesus occurred was to help disprove Christianity was a vestige of imperialism during the Anti-Christian Movement. By engaging in apologetics, the Christian Movements was already on the defensive by

²⁰⁹ Xing Jun. *Baptized in the fire of revolution: the American social gospel and the YMCA in China, 1919-1937* (Bethlehem, Pa: Lehigh University Press, 1996) 18

the 1920s. Throughout the movement, a large portion of the financial and logistical support came from American missionaries. As many noted, tens of millions of American dollars were used to support the Chinese church. Furthermore, many Americans were reluctant to remove their financial support in fear that their churches, schools, and hospitals would be underfunded and mismanaged.²¹⁰ Progressing into the 30s and 40s, this financial support started to dry up. A global depression and world-wide conflict discouraged many missionaries from coming to China.

Though banditry and warlords certainly impeded missionary movement in the 20s, Japanese invasion in the 1930s proved the most problematic for missionaries. While Maryknoll letters in the 20s combined to form a multivolume set, letter compilations in the 40s were pitiful collections. Maryknoll missionaries had to apologize for their lack of Chinese content, blaming it on war, and supplemented their book with letters from Latin American missions just to form a single volume.²¹¹ The few short letters from missionaries in China typically involved being captured by Japanese, evading capture, or remaining fearful of capture. Like other communist movements, Mao and his followers thrived during war and poor economic conditions. Furthermore, Mao proved his Sinicized version of Marxism could continue with or without Russian advisers.

This almost exclusively scholarly Christian movement, aided by Americans, disenfranchised a large number of the rural poor. The Christian movement focused on colleges, universities, and community organizations, structures not found in rural China. Additionally, a large portion of the population did not have the educational knowhow or

²¹⁰ CY Cheng "The Chinese Church" in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes*. (London: Student Christian Movement, 1922) 125

²¹¹ Catholic Foreign Mission Society of American. *Maryknoll Mission Letters*. Vol. 1. (New York: Field Afar Press, 1943) v

the financial means to attend college and become participating members in the Christian movement. In the church, nearly 35% of Chinese men and 65% of Chinese women remained illiterate in the 20s.²¹² Furthermore, education in wartime became a difficult challenge. Many Christian colleges were forced to move or close under Japanese occupation.²¹³ Additionally, Christians comprised an unbelievably small fraction of a percent of the population. The Christian Movement contained a very small population of educated urban elites. Therefore, appealing to the rural proletariat proved difficult. Maoist on the other hand emulated the peasant class, a majority of the population, as the true building blocks of the nationalist revolution.

Lastly and most importantly, Christian association with the KMT proved to be a disastrous alliance for both foreign missionaries and native Christians. Obviously, Chiang Kai-shek lost the war and was forced to retreat, but that deduction is too simplistic. Looking closely, Chiang Kai-shek seemed to be the only option for Christians. Both foreign missionaries and Sino-Christians feared the return of the dynastic system and the destructive secular power of communism. The KMT was the only alternative. Though Christians enjoyed many of the founding principles of the party, Chiang's dictatorship received some light criticisms from intellectuals in the 20s and 30s. However, after the Second World War, the KMT swiftly started to lose support from liberal students. Many Chinese viewed Chiang's dictatorship as a corrupt fascist regime. In March 1947, John Stuart reported to the US government that KMT forces rounded up between 2,000-3,000

²¹² CY Cheng "The Chinese Church" in *China To-Day Through Chinese Eyes* 130

²¹³ Philip West, *Yenching University and Sino-Western relations, 1916-1952*. (Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 1976) 247

people in the capital.²¹⁴ The government claimed these criminals were opium-smokers, squatters, and armed rebels. However, many liberal-minded students went mysteriously missing during this Peking round up. As a result, thirteen prominent Peking professors protested the KMT government. Despite, the most famous Hu Shih failed to respond, leading many students and professor to revile both scholarly liberalism and the KMT government.²¹⁵

Clearly, Sino-Christianity founded in universities and KMT government became unhinged. Even foreign missionaries started to have reservations about the regime. Many missionaries feared their Christian message would be associated with autocratic fascism. John Stuart in particular started to doubt US support for the regime. As ambassador to China, Stuart reported:

[Many Chinese charge] we are entrenching a fascist regime in return for its being a tool for our own purposes, which it deems to be imperialistic domination... We are under resentment and suspicion... It is a role that denotes a loss of moral prestige. It ranges from disillusionment to open anti-Americanism. And it should not be ignored or underestimated.²¹⁶

Despite this, Stuart's warning was ignored. In truth, the Christian movement was never able to garner popular support or shake off imperialist connotations. Both American missionaries and Sino-Christian fled China after the communist takeover. The few who remained sought to conform Jesus to the Maoist regime in the communist-led Three-Self Patriotic Movement in the 50s. Despite this, nearly every Christian leader during the Republican Era was incarcerated by the 1960s. The nationalist Jesus of the first republic effectively disappeared after the Communist takeover. However, the

²¹⁴ John Stuart, March 3, 1947. in *The Forgotten Ambassador: the Reports of John Leighton Stuart, 1946-1949*. Kenneth C Rea and John C Brewer (eds) (Boulder, CO : Westview Press, 1981) 66-67

²¹⁵ Ibid.,

²¹⁶ Stuart, Document 16: Stuart to Secretary of State. Nanjing, October 17 1946 in *The Forgotten Ambassador*, 30-31

nationalist Jesus discussed in the paper opens an interesting perspective of the time. American missionaries after the 1911 revolution did not impede Chinese interpretation but encouraged it. Chinese Christians effectively made a religion that conformed to the attitude of the time. Christianity became democratic, anti-communist, anti-superstitious, and fully Chinese. Despite its failure, this untold religious movement tells historians a lot about Chinese attitudes. Though the CCP continues to hold power in China today, the new found openness of the regime has enabled traditional figures, like Confucius, to make a comeback. Therefore, it is not farfetched to predict that the Chinese relationship with nationalism and Christianity is far from over.

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