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Main Contents

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At the Nexus:

De Rotz's Letters to the Shanghai Procure

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Abstract: Through an analysis of a series of letters written by Marc de Rotz, a missionary from the Paris Foreign Missions Society (MEP) in Nagasaki, to Jean-Baptiste Martinet, the Society's procurator in Shanghai, this study reveals the crucial role of the Shanghai Procure as a central hub in the Catholic missionary network in East Asia during the late nineteenth century. In the circulation system of the MEP's Eurasian routes at the time, Shanghai was a vital gateway connecting Japan with the headquarters in Paris, thus forming a close link between Shanghai and Nagasaki. The letters show that in the face of challenges, De Rotz turned to Shanghai for theological guidance, material support, and assistance with personal needs. He consulted with the Jesuit priest Aloysius Sica in Shanghai, through the procurator Martinet, on how to handle the issue of traditional beliefs in Japan, which were similar to those in China. He requested prints from the Tushanwan Orphanage by Adolphe Vasseur to be replicated and disseminated in Japan. Additionally, with Martinet's help, he was able to withdraw funds he had raised in Europe from his Shanghai bank account to alleviate a famine in Sotome. The friendship between De Rotz and Martinet further facilitated the exchange of information and resources between them. This research emphasizes the lasting impact of the Shanghai Procure as a maritime link in the broader network of East-West exchange.

Keywords: Paris Foreign Missions Society, Shanghai Procure, Nagasaki, Marc de Rotz, Jean-Baptiste Martinet

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Prelude

On 18th March 1865, the day after the discovery of the hidden Christians in Nagasaki[1], Bernard Petitjean (1829-1884), Paris Foreign Missionary (*Missions Étrangères de Paris*, hereafter MEP) in Japan immediately sent news to the MEP Procure in Shanghai. This made the Shanghai Procure the first to be notified, receiving the news several days before the MEP superior in Yokohama was informed (Lettre du 18 mars 1865 de Bernard Petitjean 2024). Moreover, it was again via the Shanghai Procure, that this discovery and its consequence was sent to Paris. On 31st October, Petitjean hastily wrote in a post-script to François-Antoine Albrand (1804-1867), superior of the MEP Seminary in Pairs that: "to speed up the arrival of letters from Paris to Nagasaki by a month or sometimes two, please do not put them in the envelope to Yokohama, but to the Shanghai Procure." (Lettre du 31 octobre 1865 de Bernard Petitjean 2024, p. 141)

This centrally located Procure in Shanghai was a key MEP accounting institution in Asia. Serving as a maritime nexus, it offers a unique case study for examining the Eurasian network in the late nineteenth century. With the discovery of new primary sources stored at the *Archives des Missions Étrangères* (Archives of the Foreign Missions, hereafter AMEP) in Paris, recent studies have noted the close connections between the Shanghai Procure and Japan. It has been found that the AMEP holds numerous Shanghai-related documents, particularly correspondence, within the Japan Mission dossier. Based on a preliminary analysis, Le Roux Kiyono argues that the Shanghai Procure functioned as a vital logistical and financial "Gateway to Japan" for European missionaries (Le Roux Kiyono 2025). Yet, the details of why and how this institution played this role require further, in-depth analysis.

This article will particularly focus on the correspondence between Marc de Rotz (1840-1914), an MEP missionary in Nagasaki, and Jean-Baptiste Martinet (1844-1905), the Society's procurator in Shanghai during 1878-1882, to reveal the pivotal role of the Shanghai Procure as a nexus point providing theological guidance, material support, and personal assistance to the Japan mission, thereby further exploring the international interactions associated with this connection.

[1] In 1865, after the Oura Church in Nagasaki was inaugurated, a group of hidden Christians who had survived more than 250 years of persecution revealed their belief to Petitjean on 17th March. This not only led to the revival and conversion of local Catholics, but also provoked suspicion and hostility from the civil authorities, see Un Jubilé au Japon (1915).

Procure, De Dotz & Martient

Technically, the Shanghai Procure was one of the agencies in the multi-tiered MEP accounting system, functioning as the intermediary between Paris and the missions. Together with the Procures in Hong Kong (since 1847) and Singapore (since 1857), the Shanghai one received money from the European headquarters, decided the allocation according to the commissions from missions it served and sent annual reports of income and expenditure to Paris (Notes sur les Diverses Procures de la Société des Missions-Étrangères 1876). The Shanghai Procure was preliminarily established and operational from 1861. Relative to Japan by then, the Catholic mission in China had more freedom to carry out evangelical activities and build churches under French protection, backed by the treaty system signed with western countries.[2] Based on these conditions, French Jesuits had been well established here since 1842.[3] Despite the predominant Jesuit presence, MEP and other congregations set up their own procures in Shanghai, not only as an account but also as real property, through which different communities maintained in contact.

Hence via Shanghai, requests kept flowing from Japan to Paris, asking for books, objects, personnel and overall support. Vice versa, to fulfil the commissions, equipment and new missionaries arrived at the Procures, including the one in Shanghai, the gateway to the East Asian destinations. Due to the convenience of the maritime route, Shanghai held a privileged position as a logistical link specifically to Nagasaki among the areas of the Japan mission. The regularity of this accessibility is indicated by the standard route depicted in the mission atlas published by the MEP in 1890: "by Messageries Maritimes boats, from Marseille to Shanghai 36 to 40 days; from Shanghai to Nagasaki by Mitsu-Bichi boats, 3 days." (Launay 1890)

In 1865, seeing the increasing need for mission publishing, Petitjean wrote back: "if you think it would be a good idea to buy us a lithographic press, please send us the method for using it or, better still, a colleague who knows how to operate it." (Lettre du 14 octobre 1865 de Bernard Petitjean 2024, p. 137) It was the vacancy of an operator that summoned Marc de Rotz (1840-1914).

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[2] Under the Treaty of Nanjing 南京条约 (1842), five Chinese cities were opened to foreign trade. The Treaty of Whampoa黄埔条约 (1844) legalized the practice of Christianity in China and allowed missionaries to construct mission buildings in treaty ports. The Convention of Peking 北京条约 (1860) stipulated that the religious establishments should be returned to their owners through the French Minister in China.

[3] The Jesuits arrived in 1842, just as Shanghai was opened to foreign trade as a treaty port. In 1856, the Kiang-nan (Jiangnan) Apostolic Vicariate covering Shanghai was established and entrusted to the French Jesuits, see De la Servière (1983, p. 60).

On 15th April 1868, he departed with Petitjean from France. (Congrégation des Missions Étrangères 1868) Though Nagasaki-bound, he did not arrive directly. On 19th June, the Shanghai Procure recorded that: "Mgr. Petitjean and F. de Rotz embark for Nagasaki." (Procure de Shanghai 1861-1877)

It was the first time for De Rotz to land on this soil, where he would return briefly ten years later. Many things happened from 1868 to 1878 for the Japan mission and for him. In Nagasaki, the religious liberty initially granted only to foreigners did not prevent a resurgence of large-scale persecution in 1867, which led to the imprisonment of Christians and the suppression of local Christian villages. MEP missionaries went underground again until the abolition of the ban on Christianity in 1873. During the difficult period of 1868-69, De Rotz still made efforts to publish books and pamphlets using lithographical printing. Having recovered from smallpox (Villion 1923, p. 54), De Rotz was assigned to Yokohama in 1871 where he arrived with 52 cases. He was building the new facilities for the Sisters of the Child Jesus, administrating the services for French engineers at the chapel of the Yokosuka arsenal, as well as continuing the printing work with the help of the paper sent from the Hong Kong Procure (Japon Avant Division 1839-1872). When the ban on Christianity was lifted, De Rotz returned to Nagasaki to take care of the needs for publications, medicals and the seminary construction (Nécrologe 1916, external resources pp. 211-212). But as the number of Christians grew, challenges and divisions also emerged. In a foreign land, missionaries were surrounded by customs totally different from their home countries (De Rotz 1879a). Unable to reach a consensus on how to deal with local customs that clash with Christian doctrine among themselves concerning day-to-day cases, the MEP needed external resources and support.

In 1876, Jean-Baptiste Martinet (1844-1905) was appointed to be the procurator in Shanghai. He was no stranger to the city: upon his arrival for the procure post in Hong Kong, he sojourned in Shanghai for about five months and learned Chinese (Procure de Shanghai 1861-1877). He was not an outsider of the Japan mission either. In July 1877, Bishop Petitjean stopped by Shanghai on his way from Europe back to Japan. Martinet accompanied him to visit the Jesuit mission complex, Xujiahui (Zi-ka-wei) 徐家汇, where they had dinner (Palatre 1878, p. 276). In May 1878, Martinet made a one-month trip to the Apostolic Vicariate of Southern Japan (*Japon Méridional*), i.e. Nagasaki and Fukuoka areas (Procure de Shanghai 1878-1906; Japon Avant Division 1873-1884).

It was very probable that Martinet and De Rotz got along well with each other on that occasion, because soon after Martinet's return, De Rotz not only stopped over Shanghai to pay him a visit, but also started writing a series of letters addressed to him at the Shanghai Procure, precisely:

三德堂Procure des Missions Étrangères
French Bund, above S.S.N. Co. (Shanghai Steam Navigation Company)'s Godowns No.16
Martinet, Rev. J. B. (The North China and Japan Desk Hong List for 1877 1877, p. 21)

In the letters, De Rotz talked about his concerns and needs for the improvement of the Japan mission, and later the Sotome parish where he devoted most of his lifetime. Working at the nexus connecting Nagasaki to anywhere and anyone else, Martinet helped him with getting advice, obtaining supplies, and providing personal considerations. Though long gone, these words and phrases capture the crisscrossed paths and trails in that spatiotemporal moment.

About Advises

On 1st July 1878, Joseph Marie Laucaigne (1838-1885), Auxiliary to Bishop Petitjean, notified the procures in Hong Kong and Shanghai respectively that De Rotz, exhausted, would depart for the Béthanie Sanatorium in Hong Kong and made a stop in Shanghai. Ten days later, De Rotz arrived at the sanatorium where he would stay for about two months (Japon Avant Division 1873-1884). It turned out to be more than a journey for recuperation. His trip to Hong Kong and Saigon (Ho Chi Minh City) was deemed to gather references outside Japan to properly deal with Japanese Christians' superstitions, according to Flourentin Bourelle's (1847-1885) letter to the MEP Paris seminary (Bourelle 1879).

On 2nd August 1878, De Rotz wrote to Martinet that he had left for Saigon with Eugène Lemonnier (1828-1899), the Hong Kong procurator. Having already gathered a few questions, he would like to ask for answers from a certain "P. Sica" in Shanghai (Japon Avant Division 1873-1884). A month later, responses from Sica via Martinet reached De Rotz, which he deemed to be "helpful" (De Rotz 1878a).

This resourceful "P. Sica" was Aloysius Sica薛孔昭 (1814-1895), a Jesuit missionary in Shanghai. During 1876-1878, he was based at the Major Seminary and the St Ignatius Middle School徐汇公学 in Xujiahui, teaching scripting and exhortation, as well as listening to confessions at several Xujiahui establishments (Palatre 1878, p. 283). He had written about consciences and the ways of conducting affairs with Chinese (Sica 1877; Sica 1884). But the most important reason for De Rotz's seeking his expertise was his contributions to *Monita ad Missionarios Provinciae Nankinensis* (Monita ad Missionarios Provinciae Nankinensis 1871): "Did you receive your *Monita ad*

Missionarios from the Jesuit fathers?" (De Rotz 1879c) This was the question he asked Martinet.

Monita was first published in 1871. Commissioned by Adrien Languillat (1808-1878) 郎怀仁, Jesuit Vicar Apostolic of Nanjing, Sica together with some others drafted a detailed guidance of conducts, which for a long time was a necessity for the missionaries (Colombel n.d., p. 206). Drawing upon the theological principles from the Council of Trent (1545-1563), the First Vatican Council (1869-1870) and the Bull on the Chinese rites (1715), *Monita* regulated the issues of the governance of the vicariate, the training of catechumens, the main Chinese superstitions, the administration of the sacraments, virgins and confreres, etc (De la Servière 1914b, p. 187).

Many could be used as references for similar situations in Japan, for example about dealing with Buddhism or about local practices of marriage. In fact, ever since the discovery of hidden Christians, Petitjean had begun consulting the Holy See for proper rules to be adopted on baptism, marriage and superstitions (Japon Avant Division 1839-1872). Attending the First Vatican Council (Perraud 1884, pp. 8-9), Petitjean was very likely to come across Sica there: Languillat selected Sica to accompany him from Shanghai to Rome to be his theologian during the Council (Colombel n.d., p. 216).

Around 1878–1879, the central conflict among the MEP missionaries in Japan revolved around the question of how strictly to police the Japanese converts' traditional customs and "superstitions." As mentioned above, De Rotz carried out an investigation outside Japan. He compiled the cases into a notebook as early as his short stay in Shanghai in July 1878, a process Martinet was well aware of (De Rotz 1879a). This investigation was in fact under the direction of Laucaigne, who intended to use this information to identify and eradicate all perceived "faults" (Ramos 2024). But this purpose of a thorough implementation caused backlash from opposing confreres, thereby bringing the mission's work to a standstill. "So far since January the ministry of the sick only has not been interrupted. The reason for this was superstitions. It has been thought that we were all too ignorant of them to be able to instruct Christians usefully", Bourelle reported in 1879 (Bourelle 1879). Given the circumstances, De Rotz resorted to Sica for advice, although not always satisfactory.

On 30th September 1878, De Rotz asked Martinet: "I beg you to send this little note to Fr. Sica. It is purely a theological matter but since it is a practical case here, it must be kept secret. Besides, in my little note, I tell him and ask for a response." (De Rotz 1878b). In another letter dated 19th October, hoping to get a valid answer from Shanghai instead of waiting for one from Paris for months, De Rotz requested: "Mgr. Laucaigne would like to ask you to present these marriage cases to Fr. Sica without mentioning from which mission these

cases are sent for his consideration. The two bishops, [Amédée] Salmon, and all of us have been so tangled up that…we ask you to seek a solution from Fr. Sica. The solution should be written, of course." (De Rotz 1878c)

Unfortunately, "Fr. Sica's letter did not clarify anything at all. Now, how to untangle this whole question, I do not know." (De Rotz 1878d) De Rotz complained to Martinet a fortnight later. This disappointment did not frustrate him. In April next year, he turned to the wise man again: "Why don't we have the new cases from Fr. Sica to help us? Why have they not yet appeared?" He presented questions including attending non-Christian funerals, weddings and other ceremonies to Martinet "If you could use your nicest pen to ask Fr. Sica for the solutions to the following three cases, you would render us a great service." (De Rotz 1879c)

It was probably beyond De Rotz's ability and authority to solve the difficulty in its entirety. His letters did not disclose the outcomes, especially after being fully engaged with Sotome in 1879. Nevertheless, it was certain that the MEPs continuously looked to Sica for references when in doubt: in May 1879, Petitjean requested Sica's book; in October 1883, Jean-Marie Corre (1850-1911) ordered 30 copies of *Monita*; in November, Corre submitted doubts to Sica concerning the profession of faith of Pius IV, appendix No.2 in *Monita*. All the correspondence was handed back and forth by Martinet. (Japon Avant Division 1873-1884) Whether or not Sica helped, the Shanghai Procure played its role in putting in touch with qualified advisors.

About Supplies

In addition to the main contents of theological difficulties, De Rotz tended to simultaneously attach his needs for supplies at the end of the letters to Martinet. In charge of printing since his arrival, he maintained and developed this work by securing new resources.

According to the study of Nanyan Guo, the "De Rotz Prints", lithographic and woodblock prints of biblical stories, were imitated after the Jesuit Adolphe Vasseur's范式熙 (1828-1899) project carried out in the Tushanwan Orphanage (*L'Orphelinat de T'ou-sè-wè*) 土山湾 (further details below), due to the similarities they bear. (Guo 2023) It was likely that De Rotz had been interested in the effects of images for a long time and joined Vasseur's initiatives. In 1882, Vasseur promoted his idea of religious paintings done by mission workshops adopting local styles in *Les Missions Catholiques*, which mentioned that: "Several mission centres…have their own painting workshops to decorate churches and serve the propagation of the faith. Among others, we will mention those set up by Fr. Vasseur at the Tou-Sei-Wei [Tushanwan] orphanage (Kiang-Nan [Jiangnan]), by Fr. Taïx in Madagascar and by Fr. De Rotz in Yokohama (Japan)." (Vasseur 1882, p. 515) By that time,

De Rotz was no longer stationing in Yokohama. Probably because Vasseur had been away from Shanghai from 1871, he lost the updates of De Rotz's whereabout. Nonetheless, this misinformation indicates that they knew about each other's activities well before 1873.

Returning from the trip in 1878, De Rotz kept discussing sacred images with Martinet. Due to the succinctness in the descriptions, it is difficult to identify whether the pictures referred to belonged to Vasseur's portfolio or not. What could be extracted from the messages is that he had seen a collection of images produced by Tushanwan in Shanghai, and decided to make his own reproductions in Nagasaki: "If I reproduce two or three of the large images from Shanghai on wood, what would they say? Would they want them engraved? We are waiting here impatiently for the images from Sicawei [Zi-ka-wei], which should be in colour." (De Rotz 1878a)

As aforementioned, Vasseur ran his project at the Tushanwan Orphanage, one of the establishments in Xujiahui. Since the completion of the Jesuit residence in 1847, several institutions were added to the complex: St. Ignatius Middle School (1849), St. Ignatius Cathedral (1851), Tushanwan Orphanage (1864), Shengmuyuan (*Seng-Mou-Yeu*, Convent of the Helpers of the Holy Souls, 1868), Xujiahui Museum (1868) and Xujiahui Observatory (1872). By 1868, the Orphanage accommodated over 300 children. In addition to nourishing them with food, it taught them technical skills to "learn a lucrative trade" by opening several workshops. (De la Servière 1914a, p. 225)

The main workshops included the painting studio, printing, woodcraft and goldsmithery. The studio for religious arts and sculpture in Xujiahui had existed since 1852 and moved to Tushanwan in 1868, where boys were taught Chinese and Western painting skills (Anonymous 1996, pp. 2503-2504). Together with other workshops, Tushanwan produced numerous religious images and objects for churches both in China and abroad (Colombel n.d., pp. 240-244).

In 1878, De Rotz requested from Tushanwan the images of the "Stations of the Cross", "two kneeling angels (seen in Saigon)" (De Rotz 1878b), "Sacred Heart", "the Holy Virgin and St. Joseph" (De Rotz 1878d). With the help of Martinet, they reached De Rotz in good condition (De Rotz 1878e). In the next year, he sent his reproductions to Martinet: "from your poor friend a disguised Jesuit copy[4], engraved, printed and coloured at home, and two or three Stations [of the Cross] drawn on stone here and printed here too." He added that "the price would be very moderate", if other missions needed them (De Rotz 1879b).

The transmission of images only accounted for a very small portion of the

[4] It probably means a pirated copy of the images made by the Jesuits.

supplies from the Shanghai Procure. According to the letters, De Rotz had set up his own bank account in Shanghai to receive money from his family and friends in France, for the use in his parish in Nagasaki, which was managed by the procure.

"So here I am, the parish priest of Sotome, with two chapels, one in Shitsu and the other in Kurosaki" (De Rotz 1879d) De Rotz declared to Martinet of his new position in August, 1879. The different nature of work gave rise to new requirements, as he wrote: "I thank you for shipping the objects I asked for my horse which could be called a donkey, and for the pen with which I am writing today." But the challenging part was the resources for construction and relief. He asked Martinet to draw money on his behalf in 1880: "what documents you would need so that you can obtain in my name from the Shanghai bank account (*comptoir d'escompte de Shanghai*)"? He urgently needed the annual pension, inheritance from his father in Normandy, to build a church in Shitsu and two schools without delay (De Rotz 1880).

In 1882, there was a shortage of food in his parish: "my district is in grinding misery because the harvests have been so bad, that 64000 pounds of [sweet] potatoes are not enough for one month." De Rotz tried all means to borrow money for food purchase: "I want to buy now to avoid having to pay twice as much later on; the price right now is already three times higher than the ordinary price." He asked Martinet to check whether the 1500 francs he had asked for could be lent to him through the bank account in Shanghai. Further on, he jotted: "Today I am writing to my family and friends in France so that they can help me, because starvation will have to be taken in its real sense." (De Rotz 1882) As the usual practice, these supplies for relief would go through his bank account in Shanghai. De Rotz fully entrusted them to Martinet, not merely a colleague, but a dear friend.

About Friendship

"I do not know if I said good evening to you, but what I am certain of is that I did not thank you…So, I beg your pardon for having behaved unwittingly like a rude person. Please accept today all my most friendly and grateful greetings." (De Rotz 1878a) In 1878, back from the trip to Hong Kong and Saigon, De Rotz wrote cordially to Martinet. Though briefly, the reunion in Shanghai was so memorable that by the end of 1880, he still held on to the good memory: "I want to send you my best wishes for 1881 from an old friend who cannot forget your hospitality while in Shanghai." (De Rotz 1880)

It was apparent in the letters that De Rotz was vexed during that time. He shared all the problems and moods honestly with Martinet: "If I haven't responded to your good letter sooner, it is not because I wanted to break off with you, even for a moment." (De Rotz 1878e) Apart from helping him find

solutions, Martinet was concerned about his wellbeing, in view of De Rotz's responses disclosing his health issues just before moving to Sotome: "Yours truly is currently being torn down by illness: the liver, that old problem, the spleen, and the left kidney are all failing. I've been in treatment for two days because I had to leave my post…Forgive me for not writing to you sooner; my situation here was such that I preferred to suffer alone and not speak of it. When I was about to leave for my district, I had so much to do that I couldn't manage it either." (De Rotz 1879d)

The friendship and concerns were reciprocal. On 15th August 1879, the MEP Procure narrowly escaped a disastrous fire breaking out at 5:45 a.m. in the French Concession in Shanghai. According to the news reports from *The North-China Daily News* in Shanghai: "in the extent of its destruction, is unparalleled in the history of the Settlements" (Great Fire in the French Concession 1879), "Literally the whole area of property, except the China Merchants' Company's godowns and the front premises of the Procure des Missions des Étrangères, bounded by the Rue Takou, (opposite the Tientsin Wharf,) on the north, the city Moat on the west and south, and the Bund, or Quai de France, on the west, has been reduced to ruins." (The Fire on the French Concession 1879)

At the critical moment, the Procure was luckily guarded by a fire engine pouring water, based on the account of the district engineer of the French Settlement working at the scene: "The No. 2 engine had charge to protect the Missions Étrangères." This survived house became a temporary safety zone for everyone: "After that terrible struggle every man without exception was exhausted. The Missions Étrangères had their house open…Great credit is due to the Fathers of the Missions for their kindness in providing for and waiting on the people." (Charrier 1879) The comparatively few casualties occurred during the disaster was the only relieving point, "doubtless owing to the ice and cold light drinks that were supplied without stint to the firemen and others engaged in extinguishing the flames." Joining the hotel proprietor who liberally provided the provisions at disposal, "the Rev. J. B. Martinet and the other missionaries at the Strangers' [Foreign] Mission also rendered valuable aid in a similar manner." (The Fire on the French Concession 1879) Moreover, the MEPs offered first aids: "at 9 o'clock the Missions provided an ambulance, for it was at that hour most men fell sick and the first treatment was given by the Fathers." (Charrier 1879)

Martinet might have told De Rotz about the calamity and the aftermaths, after the fire had totally burned out and the extent of the disaster had become clear. On 18th August, De Rotz wrote to him: "Now let me send you my condolences and congratulations on the fire that did nothing, but burn down your kitchens and toilets." (De Rotz 1879d)

There were other common friends of them in Shanghai, to whom De Rotz always asked Martinet to pass his greetings: "My regards to Fr. Bettembourg" (De Rotz 1878a); "I think I can give a good handshake to Fr. Bettembourg. He is not happy either" (De Rotz 1878b); "My regards to Fr. Bettembourg, who is also not happy" (De Rotz 1878d). At the end of year 1878, he wrote: "With this, I wish you a good year as well as Fr. Emery [Aymeri] and Fr. Bettembourg. How I wish I could wish you that in person. I would have so many things to tell you." (De Rotz 1878e)

Fr. Bettembourg and Fr. Aymeri were not MEPs but Lazarist (Congregation of the Mission) procurators. Close to the MEP one, the Lazarist Procure首善堂 was located on Rue Laguerre, French Concession (The North China Desk Hong List 1877, p. 26). It appeared that the two congregations also had frequent communications, in addition to the MEP connections with the Jesuits. Nicolas Bettembourg邓 (1850-1926), French, arrived at the Procure in 1878. He later returned to France in 1881, and served as Visitor to Argentina (Catalogue des Prêtres, Clercs, et Frères de la Congrégation de la Mission qui ont Travaillé en Chine depuis 1697 1911, pp. 20-21; Van den Brandt 1936). Michel-Ange Aymeri高慕理 (1820-1880), Italian, appointed to the Shanghai Procure in 1857 after the post in Beijing, perished in the last stop in 1880 (Catalogue des Prêtres, Clercs, et Frères de la Congrégation de la Mission qui ont Travaillé en Chine depuis 1697 1911, pp. 12-13; Van den Brandt 1936). Overall their time overlapped with De Rotz was short, but in any case, De Rotz cherished the bond.

In 1886, Martinet made a trip to Japan to visit both the Northern and Southern vicarates, with "good impression of the Japan missions" (Procure de Shanghai 1878-1906). A new missionary François Bonne (1855-1912) at the Nagasaki seminary particularly wrote to thank him for his gifts to the seminarians. At the beginning of the following year, Bonne informed Martinet that De Rotz left for Hong Kong (Japon Méridional 1885-1905). Without other records, it could only be inferred that, as was the case in May 1878, Martinet and De Rotz probably met up in Nagasaki, and then on the way to or return from Hong Kong, De Rotz passed by the Shanghai Procure again. In 1891, Martinet was called to Hong Kong as the General Procurator and left Shanghai for good.

Epilogue

On 19th November, 1914, about 10 days after the sudden death of De Rotz, an obituary appeared in *The China Press*, an English periodical in Shanghai:

> *The Nagasaki Press* reports the death of Father de Rotz, a missionary of the Roman Catholic Church, aged 75 years. Death was rather sudden, an attack of illness on

> Friday, the 6th instant, ending fatally next morning at ten o'clock.
>
> Father de Rotz went to Japan in June, 1868, three months earlier than Father Salmon. For the past 35 years he was stationed at Kurosaki-mura, Nagasaki-ken, a village with three thousand Roman Catholics. He was a descendant of a noble family of Normandy, and his father, with memories of the great Revolution to prompt him, insisted that he should learn some useful trade or profession. He therefore became an architect, and as such superintended the erection of the residential building next to the cathedral on Minami-yamate, Nagasaki, forty years ago. The building now being erected to replace that was also designed by him, and during the last twelve months he spent considerable time in Nagasaki superintending the work. His death occurred during a visit to the port. A service was held in the Cathedral, the remains being afterwards removed to Kurosaki-mura for interment at the scene of his lifework (Obituary 1914).

For the last time and in a different way, De Rotz returned to Shanghai. By that time, his old friend Martinet had been deceased for nine years due to incurable disease. The location of the Shanghai Procure had moved from the French Bund to Quai du Yang King Pang. The vicariates in Japan gradually became dioceses, relying less on the externals. Nevertheless, new procurators took over. In 1922, a notice from the Shanghai Procure regarding placing orders with the Jesuit Tushanwan workshops, instructed that all the orders from the MEP missions shall be made through the procure with clear indication of recipient address in accordance with the Chinese postal system (Procure de Shanghai 1922). For a long time already and for some time still, the Procure carried on as the nexus between Japan and the wider world, between MEP and the Catholic communities.

Ultimately, the significance of the correspondence between De Rotz and Martinet is twofold. On one hand, the letters reveal the detailed and comprehensive role the Shanghai Procure played in the Japan mission, demonstrating its wide scope of assistance. On the other hand, they illuminate a new maritime perspective in which sea routes serve as the main mechanism for the movement of people, goods, information, ideas and emotions, shaping the relevant regions. By moving beyond traditional bilateral relationships confined by national boundaries, the Shanghai Procure, as a maritime nexus within this Eurasian network, provides an insight into the intensity of cross-border exchanges in the late nineteenth century.

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"We—For the Sake of Faith": Wang Mingdao's Critique of Modernist Theology and His Theological Controversies

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Abstract: This paper explores Wang Mingdao's 1955 publication *We—For the Sake of Faith*, analyzing his critique of modernist theology and its impact on contemporary theological and ecclesiastical developments within Chinese Christianity. Utilizing literature analysis and comparative theological methods, this study reveals how Wang responded to modernist theology's challenges to core Christian doctrines, especially those concerning Christ's resurrection and second coming. The study further examines Wang's theological affirmations and positions, highlighting how his opposition to the Three-Self Patriotic Movement led to accusations of harboring "counter-revolutionary political motives." By comparing Wang Mingdao's primary arguments with modern theological viewpoints, this paper elucidates the underlying theological divergences and tensions. Finally, it emphasizes that *We—For the Sake of Faith* became a foundational text in the ongoing reception history concerning church-state separation and doctrinal fidelity within the modern Chinese Christian context, significantly influencing religious practice and providing essential theological resources for subsequent movements advocating religious freedom and church autonomy.

Keywords: Wang Mingdao, Modernist Theology, Three-Self Patriotic Movement, Counter-revolutionary, Martyrdom

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Introduction

Among the numerous documents in the history of Chinese Christianity, Wang Mingdao (1900-1991, 王明道)'s *We—For the Sake of Faith* undoubtedly occupies a distinctive and prominent position. This text not only served as a crucial historical source for the debates within the Christian community regarding the Three-Self Patriotic Movement in the early 1950s, but it also exerted a long-lasting influence on the church's self-understanding and practical orientation in China. As scholar Ying Fuk-tsang has noted, *We—For the Sake of Faith* represents a monumental work that encapsulates Wang Mingdao's stance and resolve, later becoming a classic manifesto for those opposing the organizational framework of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. (Ying 2010, p.128) He further emphasizes in another article that, even today, *We—For the Sake of Faith* remains a resounding cry and emblem for Chinese house churches that refuse to join the Three-Self organization, resist its interference in matters of faith, and even oppose state intrusion into religious freedom. In his view, the text embodies a spirit of struggle that is willing to pay any price "for the sake of faith," a spirit that has profoundly inspired generations of believers caught in the tensions between church and state in China, establishing a vital paradigm for the ethos of "holy disobedience" in the history of Chinese Christianity. (Ying 2025) In addition, scholar Yuan Hao observes that Wang Mingdao's uncompromising attitude and his spirit of sacrificing everything for the sake of faith continue to resonate today. From the 1980s through the 1990s, his tradition of "holy disobedience" influenced house church leaders such as Yang Xinfan in Xiamen, Yuan Xiangchen in Beijing, Lin Xiangao in Guangzhou, and Wu Weizun in Lanzhou. This legacy has also been inherited by team-based house churches as well as emerging house church movements across China (Yuan 2016, p.95).

However, to fully grasp the historical significance of *We—For the Sake of Faith*, it is insufficient merely to situate it within its concrete historical context; a more nuanced textual analysis is required. Through a close reading of the text and a comparative examination of the intellectual currents it sought to critique, we can more clearly discern how Wang Mingdao employed theological language and argumentative strategies to address the pressing challenges to faith within a complex historical setting. Although previous scholarship, including the works of Leung Ka-lun and Ying Fuk-tsang, has touched upon the historical background of this text (Leung 2001, pp. 125–131; Ying 2010, pp. 97–147; Liu 2012, pp. 244–288; Ni 2025, pp. 271–330; Harvey 2002, chap. 4; Vala 2008, pp. 66–83; Payk 2024, chap. 4), it has yet to provide a thorough textual interpretation, particularly lacking a comparative analysis with the theological trajectories of those whom Wang criticized before and

after the controversy. This paper seeks to fill this research gap by offering a more comprehensive presentation of the text's meaning and theological significance.

From a longer historical perspective, however, the sharp antithesis that Wang drew in 1955 between "fundamentalist" and "modernist" conceptions of the faith did not arise ex nihilo in the early People's Republic. It had already crystallized within the Chinese Protestant community during the 1920s and 1930s. In the Republican period, Chinese "modernist" or "liberal" theologians—figures such as T. C. Chao (趙紫宸), and the network around the YMCA and Yenching and Nanjing seminaries—sought to appropriate higher criticism, evolutionary theory, and the Social Gospel, and to relate Christianity positively to nationalism and cultural reconstruction. By contrast, revivalist and evangelical circles associated with the China Inland Mission, North China Theological Seminary, Christian and Missionary Alliance, Keswick-influenced groups, and urban independent assemblies (including Wang's own Beijing Christian Tabernacle) insisted on biblical inerrancy, premillennial eschatology, and a strict separation from "worldly" culture and politics (Yao 2003; Ni 2022, pp. 187–217). As early as the 1930s Wang had publicly attacked works such as Chao's *The Life of Jesus* and Chinese translations of Harry Fosdick as embodiments of an "unbelieving faction," urging separation from modernist institutions and teachers (Ni 2024, pp. xxiv–xxv). The conflict that erupted around *We—For the Sake of Faith* in 1955 therefore reactivated a pre-existing fault line: the Republican-era struggle between fundamentalist and modernist camps was now re-staged under socialist revolutionary conditions, with many former modernist leaders becoming the theological backbone of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and Wang consciously situating himself within the older fundamentalist tradition.

This study is concerned with the historical and political context in which Wang Mingdao composed *We—For the Sake of Faith*. During the 1950s, Chinese Christianity came under intense political pressure. As a prominent Christian leader, how did Wang speak out on behalf of the Christian community? Why did he, in such a historical context, refuse to remain silent in the face of the Three-Self Movement and its leaders, choosing instead to publicly critique modernist theology and defend the faith? Furthermore, in the broader context of apologetics, on what specific aspects did Wang's critique of modernist theology primarily focus? Under political pressure—and facing accusations of being "reactionary," "counter-revolutionary," or "unpatriotic"—how did Wang use his critique of modernist theology as a means to vindicate his own theological stance? This paper offers a holistic reading and analysis of *We—For the Sake of Faith*, explaining why Wang targeted the thought of figures such as Y. T. Wu (吳耀宗), H. H. Tsui (崔憲詳), K. H. Ting (丁光訓), and Wang

Weifan (汪維藩), while also considering modern theologians' responses to Wang. What significance did this critique hold for the Chinese Christian community of the time? In particular, what principles guided Wang's unwavering position in relation to the organizational framework of the Three-Self Movement? And finally, why was he unwilling to compromise any further?

On the other hand, within the historical development of Chinese Christian thought, Wang Mingdao's *We—For the Sake of Faith* was originally an apologetic work directed against modernist theology, emphasizing an uncompromising commitment to doctrinal purity and truth. Yet when this text was later reappropriated by leaders of China's house church movement or by overseas Chinese Christians, its original theological meaning was transformed into a faith symbol and identity marker—an essential resource for resisting church-state integration and safeguarding ecclesial independence and spiritual sovereignty. Conversely, within circles affiliated with the Three-Self organization, it continued to be interpreted as a "narrow," "closed," and unpatriotic document that undermined unity. This historical shift raises a significant question: when a theological text functions both within its original context and as a tool for interpretation across time, does the faith content and ecclesial meaning it conveys undergo a qualitative transformation? Is Wang Mingdao's writing to be understood primarily as an apologetic treatise, or has it become a historically reconstructed "symbolic discourse"? This constitutes one of the central issues this paper seeks to address.

I. The Background of *We—For the Sake of Faith*

Regarding the nature of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, academic and ecclesial circles have long held divergent views. Some scholars contend that the early-1950s Three-Self Movement was essentially a highly political campaign initiated and directed by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), which, through handpicked church representatives, sought to reshape Christianity so that it operated under comprehensive state control and thus advance the socialist remolding of religion. (Deng 1997, pp. 1–124; Ying and Leung 1996, pp. 1–244; Wickeri 2022, p. 147) By contrast, Wu Yao-tsung—one of the chief architects of the movement—repeatedly stressed in *Tianfeng*, the official church journal, that the Three-Self Movement was a patriotic, unifying, and anti-imperialist initiative launched by Chinese Christians themselves, a necessary historical step toward the church's "de-dependence" and "decolonization." (Wu 1951, pp. 1–3; Wu 1952, pp. 3–7; Wu 1953, pp. 1–3) At the time, Wu publicly denounced certain Chinese Christians as products of imperialism who had long deceived believers and acted unjustly within the

church. (Wu 1954, pp. 5–7) When Wu's statements are situated within the historical context and political dynamics of the time, his rhetorical strategies—and the ways in which he made patriotic declarations under the banner of faith—invite closer examination. In particular, the discourse of *Tianfeng* offers an important textual lens through which to analyze the Three-Self Movement's self-interpretation and its criticisms of those who opposed it.

1. The Controversy Before 1955

The journal *Tianfeng*, founded by Y. T. Wu in 1945, was primarily authored by China's "Modernist" or "radical Christian" writers. These contributors were politically aligned with social revolution, opposed the ruling Kuomintang (Nationalist Government), and tended to sympathize with the Chinese Communist Party. Theologically, they embraced modernist theology. (Wang 2007, pp. 1–12) After the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, *Tianfeng* became the official organ of the Chinese Christian Church, closely tied to the dominant ideological narrative of the new socialist state. The journal urged Chinese Christians to abandon reactionary thinking and "superstitious" attitudes, calling on them to recognize the new era under the Communist government and to accept the reality of the socialist system. During this period, *Tianfeng* frequently addressed the relationship between religion and politics, even attempting to synthesize Marxism with Christian doctrines. It is little wonder that some have remarked that, amid the painful adaptation to a changing political order, *Tianfeng* played the role of "patriotic educator," guiding Chinese Christians toward a path aligned with communism. (Leung 1981, p. 19)

Based on the frequent use of phrases such as "eliminating the ideological toxins of imperialism" in *Tianfeng* during the 1950s, it is clear that one of the central political and religious objectives of the Three-Self Movement was to eradicate perceived imperialist influences. *Tianfeng* served as the primary platform through which the movement, led by figures like Y. T. Wu, articulated and advanced its ideological position both internally and externally. (Wu 1953, p. 2)

However, in the early stages of the movement, Wu and his associates realized that not all Christians across the country were eager to heed the call for "patriotism and anti-imperialism" by joining the movement. Consequently, *Tianfeng* began to explicitly criticize the theological positions of the so-called "spiritual faction." For example, on August 21, 1953, it published an article titled "A Group of Readers' Opinions on 'Holiness Without Blemish'", which accused publications from the Gospel Bookstore of vilifying the socialist New China and using piety as a pretext to oppose the reforms promoted by the Three-Self Movement. In particular, concepts emphasized by the spiritual

faction—such as "do not love the world," "the end of the world," and "do not be yoked together with unbelievers"—were denounced as "apolitical" notions that allegedly spread the ideological poison of imperialism. ("A Group of Readers' Opinions on Holiness Without Blemish " 1953, pp. 16–17)

The Three-Self Movement reframed these spiritual expressions as political offenses, claiming that such doctrines encouraged believers to evade their responsibility in socialist construction and obstructed their solidarity with the broader masses. Y. T. Wu himself went so far as to accuse spiritual leaders—such as Gu Ren'en, Ma Zhaorui, and Jing Dianying of the Jesus Family—in the pages of *Tianfeng* of "willingly serving as tools of imperialism" and of having "lost every moral quality expected of preachers." They were charged with acts such as "insulting women, harming children, spreading rumors, and engaging in subversive activities," even allegedly exploiting the principle of religious freedom to carry out anti-government propaganda. (Wu 1954, pp. 6–7)

The Three-Self organization used *Tianfeng* as a tool to publicly denounce the spiritual faction, seeking to influence the broader Christian community through accusation campaigns—isolating key leaders while persuading ordinary believers to join the "patriotic and anti-imperialist" Three-Self Movement. In reality, the spiritual faction's so-called "apolitical" stance had already been targeted by *Tianfeng* as early as 1952, when Wang Mingdao himself was singled out for criticism. He was accused of lacking patriotism because he had not mobilized believers to contribute to the "Resist America, Aid Korea" campaign ("Report on the Donation Campaign by Christian Groups in Beijing" 1952, p. 10).

For instance, the March 22, 1952 issue of *Tianfeng* published an article titled "Summary of the Christian Union in Xi'an's Forum on Denouncing American Imperialists for Waging Germ Warfare". The piece reported that Anglican leader Zhang Kangnian charged Wang with refusing to participate in the donation movement because he had been "infected by the germs of Anglo-American apoliticism." This framing further linked Wang's behavior to political disloyalty ("Summary of the Symposium of the Xi'an Christian Council…" 1952, p. 3). Such rhetoric illustrates how *Tianfeng* consistently tied religious identity to political allegiance, articulating the Three-Self Movement's expectation that Chinese Christianity could no longer maintain an "apolitical" character. Faith and preaching were to be subordinated to the imperatives of patriotism, anti-imperialism, and service to socialist construction.

In essence, this was a struggle over the interpretation of Scripture. *Tianfeng* did not label the Bible itself as harmful; rather, it accused certain individuals—such as Wang Mingdao—of using Scripture and its

interpretation to disseminate "imperialist toxins." This rhetorical strategy aimed to curtail the interpretive autonomy of the spiritual faction, bringing biblical interpretation under state-imposed norms. Thus, the Three-Self Movement carried a pronounced agenda of ideological reformation: through political study and criticism sessions, believers and preachers were expected to prioritize political correctness and subordinate their religious convictions to the prevailing political campaigns. This process effectively sought to erode the church's independence in matters of faith—an expectation that, in Wang Mingdao's view, was utterly unacceptable.

According to Wang Changxin's oral recollections of Wang Mingdao's experiences in the early 1950s, Wang perceived the emerging "accusation and reform campaigns" within the church as part of the Three-Self Movement's effort to reorganize Chinese Christianity, with the ultimate aim of bringing the church fully under a patriotic framework dominated by Modernist leaders. As one of the leading representatives of the Chinese "fundamentalist" camp, Wang felt compelled to uphold the purity of biblical faith. His decision made him one of the most notable cases resisting the Three-Self Movement's attempts at co-optation. Three-Self leaders, under the banners of "patriotism" and "anti-imperialism," demanded that church leaders discard biblical teachings deemed incompatible with socialist construction. Authorities further alleged that some members of the spiritual faction were distorting Scripture and spreading "imperialist ideological toxins" to alienate believers from the government and undermine the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. This campaign effectively forced preachers to ensure that their biblical interpretations aligned with official political positions, under threat of being branded as propagating "imperialist toxins." Yet, despite years of effort, the authorities failed to bring Wang Mingdao and other fundamentalist leaders into the official system. Instead, the implementation of the Three-Self Movement intensified tensions within Chinese Christianity, making the divide between the "spiritual" and "Modernist" factions increasingly pronounced and public (Wang 1997, pp. 52–61).

In response to the deep confusion among believers caused by these developments, Wang Mingdao wrote an article titled "Truth or Poison?" in the winter of 1954, which was published in *Spiritual Food Quarterly* (*Ling Shi Ji Kan*) (Wang 1954, pp. 25–40). The primary target of this piece was the church leaders spearheading the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Although Wang did not name specific individuals, the article was clearly a rebuttal to those in *Tianfeng* who had publicly called for "eliminating the ideological toxins of imperialism."

Wang argued that these leaders, while outwardly claiming to uphold doctrinal purity, were in fact deliberately or inadvertently branding divinely

revealed biblical truths as "poison"—particularly doctrines concerning "the distinction between believers and unbelievers" and the warnings to "beware of false prophets." According to Wang, such labeling would eventually make preachers afraid to proclaim the truth and believers afraid to accept it, leading to the total collapse of the church's faith. Furthermore, he accused the leaders of invoking the slogan of "purging toxins" without ever specifying which doctrines constituted such "toxins." Their real aim, Wang asserted, was to gradually erode the essence of the gospel and the independence of Christian faith, reducing Christianity to an empty shell devoid of spiritual vitality.

Wang's language was strikingly candid and combative. He denounced these leaders as "disciples of Judas Iscariot," "false prophets," and "wolves in sheep's clothing," accusing them of "betraying Jesus with a kiss." His intention was to expose their hypocrisy and self-serving motives. Repeatedly, Wang insisted that these individuals appeared outwardly as Christians but were in fact traitors to the gospel and tools of Satan. The militant tone of his rhetoric revealed his conviction that this was a spiritual battle against Satan himself. He urged believers: "Do not fear, do not compromise," but rather "fight for the truth" with courage, resisting infiltration and ideological reformation from within the church—even at the cost of life itself (Wang 1954, pp. 25–40). Beyond his writings, Wang voiced similar convictions in his sermons, forcefully condemning the practice of labeling biblical words as "poison" in the church's accusation campaigns. His aim was to make believers publicly aware that these very campaigns were the true "poison" threatening the church (Wang 1954).

2. Criticism of Wang Mingdao's "Defense of the Faith"

For its readers, Wang Mingdao's article delivered a powerful and uncompromising message. To those spiritual believers wavering between faith and political realities, Wang's emphatic defense of "truth" served as a rallying cry—an exhortation that inspired courage and strengthened convictions. Some believers even testified directly to Wang that reading his words deeply fortified their hearts (Wang 1955). At the same time, the article caused an uproar among leaders of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. Wang's unyielding denunciation of certain Three-Self leaders for stigmatizing "truth" as "imperialist ideological poison" struck a nerve. His candid and forceful accusations created an acute sense of threat and humiliation within the movement's leadership (Wang 1997, p. 67). As a result, several prominent Three-Self leaders promptly issued rebuttals, which were subsequently published in *Tianfeng*.

These counterattacks primarily unfolded along several lines. First came the response of K. H. Ting, then president of Nanjing Union Theological

Seminary, who delivered a speech at the Third Standing Committee Meeting of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, held in Shanghai from February 26 to March 4, 1955. Although Ting did not explicitly mention Wang Mingdao by name, his remarks unmistakably constituted a sharp critique of Wang's stance and statements. Ting adopted a dual strategy that was both political and pastoral. He linked the international situation to Christian faith, arguing that imperialism was exploiting Christianity for cultural infiltration and ideological control. In light of intensified imperialist aggression against China, Ting asserted, the church had an even greater responsibility to unite and participate in the nation's anti-imperialist struggle. As he put it: "At the very moment when imperialism is intensifying its aggression against us, we find a small number of people creating division." ("Summary of K. H. Ting's Standing Committee Speech" 1955, p. 7)

This statement framed acts of "division" within the church as responses aligned with, and exploited by, imperialist forces to foster internal disunity. On the theological level, Ting argued that differences in understanding the Christian faith were insufficient grounds for division. He stated: "The various denominations have their own distinctive features in terms of faith, practice, and organization, but this only demonstrates the richness of Christianity. How can this ever serve as an excuse for division?" ("Summary of K. H. Ting's Standing Committee Speech" 1955, p. 7) Here, Ting deliberately undermined Wang Mingdao's insistence on "truth" and "doctrinal purity," portraying it as an excuse for refusing unity—a case of fundamentalists using faith as a façade while, in reality, rejecting solidarity. To this end, Ting vehemently condemned the practice of "arbitrarily branding others as unbelievers," describing it as an affront to the essence of faith and a blasphemy against God: "This is nothing less than accusing people before God, cursing them, asking God not to save them, condemning them, and excluding them from the kingdom of heaven. Who are we to presume to bear false witness before God and slander others in this way?" ("Summary of K. H. Ting's Standing Committee Speech" 1955, p. 7)

This rhetoric directly targeted Wang's critique of Three-Self leaders, characterizing it as a theological overreach and a self-righteous assumption of the role of "judge." Ting accused Wang of disregarding theological diversity and masking an imperialist stance under the guise of religion. Through blending the discourse of Christian faith with patriotic rhetoric, Ting reinforced the legitimacy of the Three-Self Movement while portraying Wang Mingdao's criticisms as untimely, divisive, and potentially complicit with imperialist designs.

At the same time, Pastor H. H. Tsui—General Secretary of the National Christian Council and Vice Chairman of the National Committee of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement—joined the ranks of those criticizing Wang Mingdao.

On May 16, Tsui published an article in *Tianfeng* titled "We Must Consolidate and Expand Our Unity," offering a direct rebuttal to Wang's position (Tsui 1955, p. 4).

Tsui rejected Wang's assertion that there were "fundamental differences in faith" within Chinese Christianity. He argued: "Although there are many different theological schools within Christianity, our basic faith remains the same. These differences are nothing more than minor variations within a greater unity—like siblings who may look different yet remain brothers and sisters in essence." This analogy aimed to diminish Wang's emphasis on doctrinal purity by framing diversity within the Three-Self Movement as natural and mutually respectable. Next, Tsui addressed Wang's challenge concerning the vague definition and unclear sources of the so-called "imperialist ideological toxins." Tsui retorted: "Such people have never paid proper attention to the Three-Self Patriotic Movement at all." He claimed that during the "Great Accusation Campaign" and the numerous "study sessions" held nationwide, countless examples of imperialist toxins infiltrating Christian faith had been revealed, with details "continuously exposed in Christian publications." If anyone saw these yet still refused to acknowledge them, Tsui concluded, it could only mean their "hearts are calloused and their ears dull." Tsui then invoked the metaphor of "spiritual health" as the basis of his argument, likening "ideological toxins" to harmful bacteria in the human body—if left untreated, they would damage the integrity of faith. He declared: "To deny the existence of imperialist toxins within the faith and allow them to spread unchecked is also harmful to one's spiritual health." This reasoning worked to legitimize the Three-Self Movement by portraying critics as equivalent to those who deny the presence of disease, thereby casting them as "harmful to spiritual well-being." Finally, Tsui delivered a sharp attack on Wang's accusations that Three-Self leaders lacked doctrinal integrity. He asked pointedly: "What exactly is it that you oppose—the Three-Self Patriotic Movement itself, or this or that individual within the movement? If you believe your faith to be pure, why not join the movement and, by your example, correct the errors of others?" (Tsui 1955, p. 4).

Tsui contended that Wang's criticisms amounted to "using personal attacks as a means to undermine the movement." In his view, Wang's public objections constituted actions that "destroy unity and mislead believers," warranting condemnation on both theological and political grounds. [1]

1 From a theological perspective, the position represented by H. H. Tsui in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement—that of "minor differences within fundamental unity" and "mutual respect for faith"—appears on the surface to align with certain early traditions of the Church of Christ in China (CCC). However, in essence, it reveals significant tension and transformation. Since its founding in the 1920s, the CCC had

Subsequently, Wang Weifan, a theological student at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, also took up his pen to respond to Wang Mingdao's statements. On May 12, *Tianfeng* published his article, "Though Many, We Are Still One Body," in which Wang Weifan recounted his personal experiences as a counterpoint to Wang Mingdao's critique of so-called "unbelievers" (Wang Weifan May 12, 1955 p. 5, p.9).

Wang Weifan candidly admitted that in his earlier years, he too had been influenced by the idea of "pure faith," which led him to mistakenly view brothers and sisters in the church with different backgrounds or practices as "unbelievers." He even believed that an inevitable "struggle over faith" would arise in the future. However, through years of fellowship, collaboration, and study in various churches and at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, Wang testified that those he had once labeled as "unbelievers" were, in fact, equally devoted to the Lord—pious and sincere in their faith, without any essential theological differences. On this basis, he emphasized: "All who bear the name of Christ are redeemed by the blood of the Lord." For him, the differences within the church were merely "minor variations within a great unity," which should never serve as grounds for division. Rather than hindering unity, these differences could enrich the spiritual life of the church. Regarding Wang Mingdao's notion of "unbelievers," Wang Weifan considered it a judgmental and harmful assertion. He further posed the question: "If someone whose faith was previously lacking has now repented and bears witness to the risen Christ,

indeed emphasized the spirit of denominational unity and fundamental agreement in faith. At that time, the CCC functioned as a union church, integrating denominations such as the Presbyterian, Congregational, and Methodist traditions, adopting principles like "minor differences within major agreement" and "unity without uniformity." In this sense, Tsui's metaphor— "though ears, eyes, mouth, and nose differ, all are brothers and sisters"—bears formal and linguistic similarity to the CCC's emphasis on unity. Nevertheless, the CCC's original spirit of unity was not built upon political ideology but upon the supreme authority of Scripture, the centrality of Jesus Christ, and an emphasis on individual freedom of conscience. Therefore, even amid differences in liturgy or church governance, there remained a consistent insistence on core tenets of faith, such as the divinity of Christ, the uniqueness of salvation, and the authority of the Bible. While Tsui's viewpoint seemingly echoes the CCC's tradition of unity, it is, in reality, embedded within a framework of political loyalty and ideological filtering. This represents a historical addition that departs from the CCC's early pursuit of "biblical centrality and freedom of faith." The "unity" advocated by Tsui is one that conforms to the prevailing political climate, marginalizing critics by labeling them "unpatriotic" or "sowers of discord"—a stance far removed from the CCC's original gospel-centered position. For further study on the history of the Church of Christ in China, see (Chan 2013).

should we not welcome his return instead of continuing to attack him?" He argued that Wang Mingdao's remarks contradicted the love of Christ and amounted to something close to "malicious slander" (Wang Weifan May 12, 1955, p. 5, p. 9).

This response served both as a rebuttal to Wang Mingdao's "theology of division" and as a defense of the Three-Self Movement. In Wang Weifan's view, the movement had actually helped believers rediscover their fraternal bonds, leading the church toward a healthier and more spiritually enriched future (Wang Weifan May 12, 1955, p. 9).

At this point, Wang Weifan, unlike the two previously mentioned figures, held neither significant ecclesiastical authority nor notable social influence. He was not among the elite of the Three-Self establishment, and his statements—whether theological or political—carried comparatively limited weight. Nevertheless, *Tianfeng*'s decision to publish the views of a young student from Nanjing Union Theological Seminary reflected the perspectives and sentiments of ordinary Christians outside the leadership circle. It demonstrated both the diversity within the Three-Self community and certain noteworthy points of consensus. Common to the arguments of all three respondents were two main themes. First, they advocated for unity in faith and opposed drawing rigid doctrinal boundaries. Differences within the Chinese church, they contended, were merely "minor variations" within a "greater unity"; therefore, Wang Mingdao's act of labeling certain Christians as "unbelievers" was deemed unjust and divisive. Second, they framed participation in the Three-Self Movement as a righteous act—an expression of Chinese Christians' patriotic commitment in the context of the new society of the People's Republic. In their view, such involvement was closely tied to the fate of the nation, and any opposition to the movement was interpreted as harboring politically subversive motives and resisting the tide of history. Consequently, they all invoked the principle of "freedom of faith and mutual respect" within the Three-Self framework, asserting that the movement did not require altering the substance of one's beliefs while respecting church traditions and distinctive doctrines. From this standpoint, they rejected the legitimacy of Wang Mingdao's claim to be "defending the faith," portraying it as neither necessary nor justified.

3. The Escalating Pressure on Wang Mingdao's Faith

As the written exchanges intensified with *Tianfeng*'s continued responses, Wang Mingdao came to be regarded by the Three-Self faction as an obstinate figure. His statements were condemned as "opposing national unity," "serving imperialist interests," and "undermining church unity." During this period, additional figures—such as Bao Zheqing (鲍哲庆), Zhang Guangxu (张

光旭), Chen Jianzhen (陈见真), and Sun Pengxi (孙鹏翕)—joined the chorus of criticism, contributing to an overwhelming wave of denunciations in *Tianfeng* that turned Wang into the prime target of attack within China's religious community (Wang 1997, p. 72).

On the other side, Wang Mingdao's reaction after reading the excerpts of statements by Chen Jianzhen, Sun Pengxi, and others in *Tianfeng* was visceral. He bluntly described these individuals as "despicable and treacherous," expressing deep indignation and revulsion. Undoubtedly, what Wang perceived in these polemics was no longer a mere theological disagreement but a deliberate attempt at defamation and character assassination. This sense of hostility further heightened his concern over the spiritual condition of the church under these circumstances and strengthened his resolve to bear testimony to the faith (Wang April 8, 1955).

By early 1955, Wang Mingdao's sermons at the Beijing Christian Tabernacle increasingly focused on themes of "spiritual warfare" and the preservation of "doctrinal purity." For instance, on January 15, in a message to young believers, he explicitly warned that "godless ideologies and anti-Christian movements both within and outside the church" were advancing on all fronts (Wang January 15, 1955). On February 6, he delivered a sermon sharply criticizing the "corruption and deterioration" of the church, underscoring his deep anxiety over its present condition (Wang February 6, 1955). Two days later, on February 8, during a meeting of the Mary Group at the Tabernacle, Wang preached on "The Martyrdom of Stephen," exhorting believers to stand firm with courage. These examples demonstrate that Wang perceived the growing hostility as an ever more tangible reality—one that weighed heavily upon his sense of responsibility, compelling him to speak with increased urgency and boldness (Wang February 8, 1955).

Beginning in March, Wang Mingdao faced not only mounting conflicts within the church but also direct pressure from state and political authorities. His refusal to sign the "Anti-Atomic Bomb War Declaration" triggered fierce attacks from multiple fronts. The local neighborhood committee seized on this refusal to demand that Wang publicly demonstrate support for government decisions, making his non-cooperation a focal point of scrutiny within his congregation as well (Wang March 28, 1955). Wang's sermons at the Beijing Christian Tabernacle increasingly touched on politically sensitive boundaries. On April 14, for example, he declared that "the second coming of Christ stands in absolute contradiction to the so-called communist society"—a statement that unmistakably drew a clear line between core Christian doctrines and the atheistic ideology of the ruling party (Wang April 14, 1955). Despite being surrounded by unrelenting pressure, Wang felt compelled to remain steadfast in proclaiming the fundamentals of the faith. Each Sunday, the Tabernacle was

filled to capacity, with many believers eagerly embracing his teaching, while others exhibited fear, confusion, or even withdrew altogether. On March 13, he preached a sermon titled "The One Hated by the World," a clear exhortation urging Christians not to waver under duress (Wang March 13, 1955).

Throughout the first half of 1955, Wang repeatedly emphasized themes such as "Do not fear those who kill the body," "Do not be afraid of human threats," "If anyone serves Me, he must follow Me," and "Who can thwart the will of God?"—all intended to cultivate in believers a spirit of unshakable faith and courage. At the time, some church members even suggested that his sermons were becoming "too heavily focused on spiritual warfare" and needed moderation. Meanwhile, government authorities were closely monitoring his militant tone, fearing that his words could incite resistance and ultimately invite severe consequences (Wang March 10, 1955).

On the other hand, between March and June, churches in various regions—such as those in Changchun and Hohhot—began withdrawing from the Three-Self Movement under Wang Mingdao's influence. These incidents not only became prime targets for denunciation by Three-Self proponents but also made it clear to Wang that this spiritual battle could no longer be handled quietly (Wang February 16, February 24, and March 2, 1955). By this point, Wang had emerged as the most visible representative of a path outside the Three-Self organizational framework within Chinese Christianity. Although his position remained that of a minority, his public stand increasingly shaped an alternative ecclesial paradigm for others who refused to align with the structures established by the movement.

By the summer of 1955, amid intense public criticism and escalating spiritual conflict, Wang Mingdao began writing what would become his seminal work, *We—For the Sake of Faith*.[2] This text served both as his response to the sharp attacks from the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and as a formal declaration of his theological stance. According to his diary, Wang started conceptualizing the piece and consulting related literature on May 27, and on June 3, he began drafting the essay titled *We—For the Sake of Faith*. He recorded that upon waking in the early hours of that day, he "thought about the matter of the title" and, after prayer, felt a strong sense of affirmation: "I perceive this to be very good; I should harbor no fear in my heart." Although he fully

2 The present study cites *We—For the Sake of Faith* according to its independently published book edition released by Wang Mingdao in 1955. The text was first published in Spiritual Food Quarterly. Wang, Mingdao. 1955. "We—For the Sake of Faith" *Spiritual Food Quarterly* 114 (Summer 1955): 25–34. [王明道〈我們是爲了信仰〉《靈食季刊》冊 114（1955 年夏）：25-34。] But the book version is followed throughout this article.

understood that this act would be "like placing the handle of the knife into others' hands," Wang nevertheless expressed no hesitation. This detail vividly illustrates the courage with which he faced an increasingly perilous situation (Wang May 27 and June 3, 1955).

Initially, Wang Mingdao had no intention of referencing Wang Weifan's article, but he ultimately concluded that its content was closely related to his theme and decided to include it as one of the objects of response. By June 9, he completed the manuscript—a lengthy piece of approximately 25,000–26,000 characters—which was later published in the June issue of *Spiritual Food Quarterly*. One week after completing the work, on the evening of June 16, Wang publicly read the article for the first time during a training session. He noted that its content was impassioned and its tone earnest, leaving attendees deeply moved. Wang regarded the text with great importance, presenting and explaining it multiple times in subsequent sessions. Shortly after its publication, the article garnered widespread attention and elicited strong reactions. Within just a few months, Christians in many regions had read and circulated the text, prompting renewed reflection on matters of faith and causing a profound stir within the Chinese Christian community. Wang received numerous letters in response—for example, one from Li Gongcheng in Shanghai expressed deep emotion after reading *We—For the Sake of Faith* and recommended publishing it as a standalone volume for wider distribution. That same day, another letter from Lin Xiangao in Guangzhou echoed the suggestion. After discussing the proposal with members of the Beijing Christian Tabernacle, the congregation unanimously recognized the urgent necessity of the work and resolved to publish it as a separate volume, printing an initial run of 5,000 copies (Wang June 9, June 16, June 23, June 27, and June 28, 1955; Wang Mingdao 1955). The book quickly circulated across the country, becoming an essential resource for Chinese Christians seeking to understand why Wang refused to join the Three-Self Movement. Its influence and significance were both immediate and unmistakable, leaving an enduring impact on the church in China.

II. Wang Mingdao's Critique of Modernist Christianity

Wang Mingdao's composition of *We—For the Sake of Faith* in 1955 was by no means an impulsive reaction or an abstract theoretical exercise. Rather, it was the culmination of prolonged psychological strain, profound challenges, and what he perceived as an unrelenting "spiritual battle." The entire process—from conceptualization and preparatory reading to drafting, public reading, and, finally, the responses from believers that led to its printing—reveals Wang's deep sense of spiritual resolve and pastoral responsibility "in the midst of a storm." Therefore, *We—For the Sake of Faith* s11hould not be

understood merely as an apologetic text; it also offers a critical lens into the distinctive faith identity of churches that chose to remain outside the framework of the Three-Self Movement.

1. The Faith Divide Between Fundamentalists and Modernist Christianity

In *We—For the Sake of Faith*, Wang Mingdao declares his central thesis from the outset: this is a battle over the very essence of faith—one that admits no compromise, and which, in his view, had already been fought in the Chinese church for more than thirty years. He frames the controversy within the sharp antithesis between the "Fundamentalist" and "Modernist" conceptions of faith, asserting that this conflict is not unique to China but is a global phenomenon. As Wang states: "For more than thirty years, the Chinese church has likewise faced the irreconcilable conflict between the fundamentalist interpretation of faith and the modernist interpretation. This is not merely a matter of differing interpretations; it is a fundamental opposition between belief and unbelief." (Wang 1955, pp. 25-34) By locating the debate within this wider historical and global framework, Wang presents his position not as a private opinion but as part of a worldwide ecclesial struggle to defend the faith, transforming a seemingly local dispute into a universal apologetic battle for the preservation of Christian truth.

Wang Mingdao's forthright, dichotomous opening reflects a deliberate presupposition and a calculated rhetorical strategy. He asserts that the issue at hand is not an academic debate or a dialogue in the spirit of pluralism, but rather a "conflict of faith." In doing so, he establishes the tone of the discussion and clearly delineates the theological positions of the two opposing camps. Wang underscores that the "Fundamentalist" side upholds the divine inspiration of Scripture and the authenticity of the essential truths of the faith, whereas the "Modernist" side, under the guise of moderation and inclusivity, blurs the very essence of faith and, in essence, betrays it. By articulating his own stance, Wang makes it clear that this is not a neutral comparison of theological perspectives; it is an impassioned argument with a pronounced bias. For this reason, he avoids terms like "differences" or "divergent views" and instead employs words such as "conflict" and "overthrow," portraying the Modernist position as inherently threatening. This rhetorical move heightens the reader's sense of crisis, rendering "watchfulness" and "resistance" as legitimate and necessary responses (Wang 1955, pp. 25-26). By framing the issue as a "struggle between two camps," asserting a binary "either-or" standard of faith, and deploying a call to "oppose the enemy," Wang sets the stage for an atmosphere of militancy—a call to arms to "fight for the truth" that permeates the entire text.

To illustrate the theological position of the modernist, Wang Mingdao

proceeds to dismantle it through a critique of Y. T. Wu's views as articulated in his 1949 essay collection *Darkness and Light*. Wang begins by extensively quoting Wu's description of the five major points of divergence between the fundamentalist and modernist camps. [3] Regarding the view of Scripture, Wang Mingdao notes that Wu's view is:

> "The fundamentalists believe that every word and phrase of the Bible is divinely inspired by God and, therefore, contains no error whatsoever. The Modernist, however, employing the methods of Higher Criticism, hold that although the writing of the Bible was prompted by divine revelation, it cannot be interpreted according to its literal wording." (Wang 1955, pp. 26-27)

Wang seizes upon what he perceives as a semantic contradiction in this statement, using it as the starting point for his rebuttal. He asks pointedly: "What kind of reasoning is this? If one claims that the writing of the Bible was due to God's revelation, yet insists that it cannot be interpreted literally, then on what basis should it be interpreted?" (Wang 1955, p. 28)

The crux of Wang's critique is this: if the words of Scripture are divinely inspired, yet are deemed unfit for literal interpretation, does this not imply that God's revelation is unclear or unreliable? Such a contradiction, Wang argues, undermines not only the objectivity of Scripture but also its authority as the foundation of faith. By highlighting this inconsistency, Wang exposes what he considers a fundamental breach in the logical coherence of modernist theology.

On another front, Wang Mingdao issued a strong rebuttal against the modernist acceptance of materialism and their denial of the biblical account of human origins in Genesis. When Y. T. Wu asserted that "the fundamentalists believe that humanity is the result of God's supernatural creation, whereas the modernist accept the theory of evolution, holding that humans developed through natural processes and may even have evolved from apes" (Wang 1955, p. 25). Wang responded with sharp criticism: "Such a statement, in effect, completely overturns the opening chapters of the Bible." He further argued that if Scripture is truly God's revelation, then its account of human origins must carry both authority and factual reliability; otherwise, it does not deserve to be called divine revelation. Wang wrote: "If the first chapters of the Bible are absurd and fictitious—unworthy even of a smile—then how much of the

3 Wu Y. T., *Darkness and Light*. This book, consisting of more than 200,000 characters, primarily discusses Wu's views on contemporary Chinese politics, society, and international relations, as well as his understanding of Chinese Christianity and theological thought. It was Wu's perspectives on Christian theology in this work that prompted Wang Mingdao's response. (Wu 1949)

rest of the Bible is not absurd and fictitious, unworthy of a smile? It becomes nearly impossible to decide." (Wang 1955, p. 29) Employing a form of slippery-slope reasoning, Wang contended that denying the historical authenticity of Genesis destabilizes the entire foundation of biblical faith. This critique underscores Wang's unwavering commitment to the inerrancy of Scripture and reveals his fundamental distrust of modernist interpretive methods.

Wang Mingdao's second point of contention concerned the incarnation of Jesus, specifically the doctrine of the virgin birth. Quoting Y. T. Wu, Wang noted: "The Modernist regard the story of Jesus' virgin birth as nothing more than a parable." (Wang 1955, p. 29) This statement provoked an even sharper rebuttal from Wang. From both historical and textual perspectives, he argued that the virgin birth of Jesus is clearly recorded as a historical event in the Gospels of Matthew and Luke. To treat it as a parable, he contended, is to deny the authenticity of these biblical texts altogether. Wang pressed the point rhetorically:

> "The virgin birth of Jesus is an indisputable fact, yet the Modernist say we should regard it as a parable. Does this not imply that Jesus never existed at all—that ancient writers merely invented a parable for people to admire?" (Wang 1955, p. 29)

Here, Wang employs a strategy of semantic escalation, amplifying the logical implications of the modernist position to render it absurd and untenable, even equating it with the fabrication of fictional religious myths.

Going further, Wang Mingdao advanced a theological argument that underscored the intrinsic connection between the virgin birth and the doctrine of the Incarnation. He wrote: "We believe that the relationship between these two matters is extremely close and absolutely necessary. If He is the 'word made flesh,' then He must have been born of a virgin. We are not the 'Word made flesh,' because we are born of a father and a mother." (Wang 1955, p. 29) Here, Wang invokes a Christological principle rooted in the early ecumenical councils: that only through virgin birth could Jesus, in assuming human flesh, retain His divine nature. Since His origin did not involve human sexual union but was solely an act of God, the virgin birth guaranteed His uniqueness as God incarnate. To deny this event, Wang contended, is to deny the very mode of Christ's divine entry into the world—thus stripping the doctrine of the Incarnation of its uniqueness and dismantling the theological foundation of soteriology. As he argued: "If the 'Word made flesh' must still be born of a father and a mother, then every person in the world could claim to be the 'Word made flesh.' In that case, why believe exclusively that Jesus is the 'Word

made flesh'?" (Wang 1955, p. 29) In Wang's exposition, this is more than a theological assertion; it is also a rhetorical strategy aimed at exposing the perceived absurdity of the modernist interpretive approach.

Wang Mingdao next addressed Y. T. Wu's third and fourth points of divergence, which concerned the doctrines of atonement and resurrection. Wu argued that fundamentalists believe Jesus' death on the cross was an expiatory sacrifice that turned away God's wrath and secured forgiveness for humanity—a belief he characterized as "a basic tenet of the seventeenth-century religious revolution." In contrast, the modernist position regarded the cross primarily as a manifestation of God's love, intended to draw people into union with Him, without requiring belief in divine wrath or a substitutionary atonement (Wang 1955, pp. 29-30). In response, Wang underscored what he considered the core biblical doctrine: that human sin results in separation from God, and that only through the atoning death of Jesus Christ can sinners receive forgiveness, justification, sanctification, regeneration, and eternal life. He declared that if the modernist interpretation were true, then: "The gospel of Christ could no longer be called good news at all, but nothing more than a deceitful lie." (Wang 1955, p. 30)

Wang Mingdao then turned to Scripture to demonstrate that Jesus' death was indeed an act of atonement. He cited passages such as Matthew 20:28: "The Son of Man came not to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many," and Matthew 26:27–28, where Jesus declares: "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." Through these texts, Wang emphasized that Christ's death was not merely an expression of divine love, but a concrete redemptive act. To deny this truth, he argued, would be tantamount to: "Overturning the Old Testament, overturning the New Testament, and overturning the entire gospel."(Wang 1955, p. 30) Wang further asserted that the modernist Christianity advocacy of the "social gospel" arose precisely because of its rejection of Jesus' redemptive work. In his view, without the belief in Christ's substitutionary atonement, the core of Christianity is hollowed out, reducing the faith to nothing more than a system of ethics or a mere social movement (Wang 1955, p. 30).

On the question of the resurrection, Y. T. Wu argued that the Apostles' Creed affirms, "I believe in the resurrection of the body," but claimed that this reflected the views of third-century Christians who, "much like the Egyptians," thought that without bodily resurrection, spiritual resurrection would be impossible. According to Wu, fundamentalists insist on the necessity of Jesus' bodily resurrection—without which He could not have conquered death—whereas Modernist contend that the resurrection need not be physical, asserting that "even Paul himself believed only in a spiritual resurrection"

(Wang 1955, p. 30). Wang Mingdao launched a vigorous rebuttal against these claims.

He criticized the modernist for failing to ground their discussion of the resurrection in Scripture, choosing instead to focus on the *Apostles' Creed* and the beliefs of third-century Christians—going so far as to draw comparisons with Egyptian culture. Wang argued that such an approach obscures biblical truth, shifting the foundation of faith from divine revelation to human historical opinion. Wang emphasized that Scripture clearly testifies to Jesus' bodily resurrection, not merely a spiritual one. He cited John 20:4–8, which describes how Jesus' body left the tomb, leaving behind the head cloth and linen wrappings. He also referenced Acts 1:3, which states that after His resurrection Jesus presented Himself alive "with many convincing proofs" and spent forty days with His disciples. In addition, he pointed to Luke 24:41–43, where the risen Jesus ate broiled fish in the presence of His disciples—evidence, Wang insisted, that He was no mere spiritual being (Wang 1955, pp. 30-31).

In response to the claim that "Paul himself believed only in a spiritual resurrection," Wang Mingdao directly cited 1 Corinthians 15:1–8, where Paul clearly affirms the bodily resurrection of Christ and lists eyewitnesses who saw Him after He rose: Cephas, the Twelve, more than five hundred brothers, James, and finally Paul himself. Wang questioned how the modernist could possibly conclude from Scripture that Paul denied bodily resurrection, branding such an interpretation as nothing less than "fabricating lies and bearing false witness" (Wang 1955, pp. 31-32). Wang then turned to 1 Corinthians 15:12–28, stressing that to deny bodily resurrection is to dismantle the entire Christian faith. He highlighted verse 17 in particular: "If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins." This, Wang argued, demonstrates that bodily resurrection is the cornerstone of the Christian faith. To reject it is to render the entire structure of belief meaningless. Consequently, he characterized the modernist Christianity view as "shocking and appalling" and openly questioned whether those who held such a position could still rightly be called Christians (Wang 1955, pp. 32-33).

Finally, Wang Mingdao addressed Y. T. Wu's explanation of the divergence between fundamentalists and modernist regarding the doctrine of Christ's second coming. Wu stated: "The final point of contention between the two camps concerns the return of Jesus. Like Paul and the early Christians, the fundamentalists believe that Jesus will soon descend again in the flesh, coming with the clouds. The modernist, however, regard the notion of Christ's return as merely a poetic symbol—representing the triumph of justice over evil. They believe that the progress of the world results from gradual evolution, not from a dramatic upheaval such as the eschatological expectation found in the

Hebrew messianic view of history." (Wang 1955, p. 33) In this description, Wu contrasts the fundamentalist conviction that Christ's return is an imminent, concrete event with the modernist interpretation of it as a symbolic concept signifying the eventual triumph of righteousness over sin. This latter view carries implicit overtones of historical evolutionism, suggesting that Christian faith must keep pace with the modern spirit of progress rather than remain bound to traditional, supernatural hopes.

Wang Mingdao responded pointedly: "Since the modernist Christianity themselves acknowledge that 'like Paul and the early Christians, the fundamentalists believe Jesus will soon return in the flesh, coming with the clouds,' it is evident that they are fully aware this is a central doctrine held in common by true Christians from the apostles to the present day. Yet they choose to deny this precious faith." (Wang 1955, p. 33) Wang's emphasis here is that belief in Christ's second coming is not a peculiar notion belonging to a specific era or group of Christians; rather, it is an enduring tenet of the faith, transmitted from the apostolic age to the present. Thus, he argues, the modernist position is not merely an alternative theological opinion but fundamentally opposed to the historic faith of Christianity. Moreover, Wang underscores that the promise of Christ's return permeates the entire scope of Scripture—from the prophetic writings of the Old Testament, to the words of Jesus Himself, and to the apostolic epistles. In other words, to reject the doctrine of Christ's return is to reject the authority of the whole Bible, thereby undermining the very foundation of Christian belief (Wang 1955, p. 33).

In addition, Wang Mingdao appealed to the lived experience and historical testimony of Christians to underscore the significance of belief in Christ's second coming. He wrote: "This is the hope and glory of Christians; it is their comfort and joy. It is this promise that enabled the apostles to fear neither imprisonment, nor beatings, nor death, but to proclaim the gospel with courage. It is this promise that led the saints of old to walk to the execution grounds singing hymns of praise—meeting death heroically and without fear." (Wang 1955, pp. 33-34) Here, Wang links the doctrine of Christ's return with the spirit of martyrdom, arguing that this hope empowered generations of Christians to remain unshaken in the face of persecution and death. For Wang, Christ's return is not merely a poetic symbol of "justice triumphing over evil," as modernist claim, but a concrete and certain future event—a decisive moment securing the ultimate victory of believers (Wang 1955, p. 34).

After affirming the reality of Christ's return, Wang Mingdao issued a severe denunciation of the modern Christianity position. He wrote: "Such an essential truth is dismissed by the modern Christianity with the phrase 'a poetic symbol.' This is yet another appalling and outrageous lie! Can you still acknowledge such people as Christians?" Through this statement, Wang

expressed his indignation at reducing the second coming of Christ to mere symbolism—something he regarded as tantamount to a total denial of the doctrine. Employing a series of rhetorical questions—"What do they have left?"—he conveyed his unrestrained opposition, concluding that modern Christianity had completely deviated from the core of the Christian faith (Wang 1955, p. 34).

Wang Mingdao continued his critique of Y. T. Wu by highlighting the practical influence of modernist theology within the Chinese church. He explicitly named works such as Chao Tzu Ch'en's(趙紫宸) *The Life of Jesus*,[4]

4 T. C. Chao completed *The Life of Jesus* in 1935, the first biography of Jesus written by a Chinese author. The book is elegantly written, with a grand design, employing a great deal of imagination and subjective interpretation. Through his unique understanding and creative approach, Chao reconstructs the image of Jesus found in the Gospels. Based on what he called "an understanding of Jesus through the heart," Chao uses methods of empathy and intuition to synthesize the accounts in the Gospels, presenting an image of Jesus as a person of clear character, lofty ideals, and relevance to the needs of the times. In Chao's portrayal, Jesus is no longer the Christ of theological tradition—both fully divine and fully human—but rather a patriotic youth with a spirit of sacrifice and universal love, a saint in suffering, and a revolutionary leader, echoing China's deep yearning for national salvation and moral renewal. *The Life of Jesus* is not only a work with profound theological background but also an attempt of significant literary value and historical meaning. Chao presents Jesus in a culturally adapted manner, depicting his character in language and thought accessible to Chinese readers, aiming to realize the contemporary ideal of "saving China through Christianity." However, Chao was deeply influenced by modernist theology in his early years, adopting symbolic or rationalized interpretations of biblical accounts of miracles, the virgin birth, and the resurrection—sometimes entirely removing divine attributes and interpreting Jesus' life purely from a human perspective. This humanistic interpretive approach, though widely praised in intellectual circles and successful in attracting the attention of non-Christian readers, was seen by fundamentalists as a deconstruction and betrayal of the authority of biblical revelation. For this reason, Wang Mingdao could not accept such modernist works. He regarded *The Life of Jesus* as essentially a literary fabrication, reducing Jesus from the only begotten Son of God to a national moral exemplar, contradicting the Bible's clear revelation of Christ's divinity, atonement, and second coming. Therefore, in *We—For the Sake of Faith*, Wang sharply criticized such works as distortions of truth, viewing them as evidence that modernist, under the guise of faith, were in fact spreading unbelief. As scholar Pan Guohua has noted, Chao's denial of Jesus' miracles did not mean a total devaluation of Jesus; his research emphasized that the true miracle was the transformation of character and that Jesus' greatest contribution lay in his exemplary personality. Nevertheless, from a fundamentalist perspective, stripping Jesus of divinity and reconstructing him with literary techniques renders such a portrayal unacceptable

translations of Harry E. Fosdick's writings,[5] and publications from the Shanghai YMCA Press as key representatives and channels for disseminating modernist thought (Wang 1955, p. 34). In Wang's view, these were not mere theological differences but marked a fundamental divide between "faith and unbelief." He went so far as to argue that such individuals were not "Christians with divergent opinions" but rather "disguised pagans"—the "unbelieving faction" within the church, "wolves in sheep's clothing." (Wang 1955, p. 35) Consequently, Wang insisted not only on refusing any form of union with the modernist but also on the necessity of exposing and resisting them decisively. This uncompromising language reveals Wang's self-understanding: his militancy stemmed from a conscious sense of responsibility to defend the purity of the faith.

In *We—For the Sake of Faith*, Wang Mingdao made it unmistakably clear that his opposition to the "modernist" faction was neither a momentary reaction driven by emotion nor a newly formed position. Rather, it was a theological stance he had steadfastly maintained for three decades, attested by his long record of debates and polemical writings. As he declared:

> "For thirty years I have continually spoken and written, warning the church to beware of the unbelieving faction, to resist them, to separate from them. I have

as a basis for faith, whether theologically or ecclesiastically. Wang's critique was thus rooted in his commitment to preserving doctrinal purity and the authority of Scripture. See Pan 2012; Chu 2025, pp. 172–181.

5 Harry Emerson Fosdick (May 24, 1878–October 5, 1969) was a renowned modernist pastor in the United States. In 1903, he was ordained as a Baptist minister at Madison Avenue Baptist Church in New York City. Fosdick is best known for his central role in the fundamentalist–modernist controversy within American Protestantism during the 1920s and 1930s. He advocated integrating Christian faith with modern science and historical research, opposing a literalist interpretation of the Bible. On May 21, 1922, he delivered his famous sermon, *"Shall the Fundamentalists Win?"* at the First Presbyterian Church in New York City, defending the modernist position and emphasizing that Christian faith should adapt to contemporary knowledge. Consequently, Fosdick is regarded as one of the leading figures of modernist theology. He stressed the importance of religious experience, arguing that Christian faith must continually evolve with the times to accommodate new scientific and social discoveries. Fosdick supported the historical-critical method of biblical study and promoted the Social Gospel movement, emphasizing Christianity's role in social justice and moral reform. He was a prolific writer, publishing nearly 50 books, some of which were translated into multiple languages. Several of his works were translated into Chinese and published by the YMCA Press, significantly influencing Chinese modernist thought. These include *The Meaning of Prayer* (1915), *The Manhood of the Master* (1913), *The Meaning of Faith* (1917), and *The Meaning of Service* (1920).

> warned the church never to associate with them, never to unite with them… I cannot stand by and watch these people corrupt the Lord's true way and ruin God's church. I will risk everything to fight them. I have fought them for thirty years, and if my Lord still does not return, I will, by the power of His resurrection, continue to fight them." (Wang 1955, p. 34) [1]

He explained that through both preaching and writing he had "continually" warned the church—demonstrating persistent vigilance and deep engagement on this issue—so much so that he was willing to "risk everything" to fight against modernist. If the Lord did not return soon, he declared, he would "continue to fight by the power of His resurrection." This affirmed that his position was not based on personal preference or emotion but on unwavering loyalty to biblical truth and the essence of the gospel. It is evident that Wang Mingdao did not regard modernist as merely a divergent theological perspective; rather, he viewed it as a hostile force against the true faith. For Wang, the issue involved a stark distinction between truth and falsehood, imposing upon him the responsibility to "expose the false and uphold the true." This conviction defined his identity and practice as a fundamentalist pastor, framing his struggle as an uncompromising defense of orthodoxy against what he perceived as the infiltration of unbelief.

2. Faith Cannot Be Compromised: Refuting "Unionism" and False Unity

In *We—For the Sake of Faith*, Wang Mingdao mounts a direct theological rebuttal to an article by H. H. Tsui in *Tianfeng*. He first cites Tsui's claim that although there are many theological schools within Christianity, "our basic faith is essentially the same; the differences are only 'minor variations within a great unity,'" and that Christians should therefore "mutually respect one another's faith." Wang then challenges this with a series of pointed questions and deductions. As General Secretary of the National Christian Council of China, Wang argues, Tsui could not be ignorant of the deep doctrinal divide between fundamentalism and modernist. Yet Tsui still speaks of a shared "basic faith" across all factions. For Wang, this implies one of two possibilities: either Tsui is consciously obscuring the boundaries of true faith, or he lacks even a basic grasp of the widely recognized antagonism between fundamentalist and modernist positions in both the global and Chinese church. In either case, Wang concludes, Tsui's stance is intolerable (Wang 1955, pp. 35-36).

Next, Wang Mingdao contrasted H. H. Tsui's position with Y. T. Wu's candid acknowledgment of his modernist stance. Wang observed that, although Wu rejected essential doctrines such as the virgin birth, resurrection, and second coming, he at least stated openly that he could not accept

traditional theology. Wu did not claim that the differences between modernist and fundamentalists were "minor"; instead, he admitted plainly that "what modernist seeks to oppose is fundamentalism," and that the two camps were divided on five core doctrines. By highlighting this contrast, Wang used Wu's "honest unbelief" as a foil to expose Tsui's "disguised ambiguity." In Wang's judgment, Tsui attempted to blur theological boundaries with rhetoric about "minor differences within a greater unity," thereby obscuring the profound doctrinal gulf between the two positions. Such language, Wang contended, was not only theologically misleading but also lacking in integrity regarding matters of faith (Wang 1955, pp. 36-37).

For Wang, the relationship between fundamentalism and modernist was not a case of "broad agreement with slight differences" but an irreconcilable contradiction—"as incompatible as ice and fire." Denial of the core tenets of faith, he argued, could never be excused under the guise of "respecting diversity" or "tolerating differing opinions." If Christ's deity, atonement, resurrection, and second coming are rejected, then the entire edifice of Christian faith collapses. This, Wang insisted, was not merely a theological nuance but a total disintegration of belief. Thus, Wang stressed emphatically that only by standing firmly upon the truth of Scripture and exposing the mask of false faith could one truly fulfill the responsibility of safeguarding the church (Wang 1955, pp. 36-37).

Furthermore, Wang Mingdao devoted a substantial portion of *We—For the Sake of Faith* to a strong and detailed rebuttal of K. H. Ting's statements in *Tianfeng*. He cited Ting's call for "unity," particularly the remarks: "Imperialism is exploiting Christianity," and "At a time when the entire nation expects us Christians to strengthen our unity in opposing the schemes of imperialism, we find a few individuals engaged in creating division." (Wang 1955, pp. 37-38) Wang responded with uncompromising severity, denouncing such rhetoric as a malicious attempt to politicize and moralize doctrinal differences, branding it an act of "insidious intent" and "vicious slander." He wrote:

> "He charges head-on, linking 'the intensified aggression of imperialism' with 'the intensified exploitation of Christianity by imperialism,' and pins both on those who, for the sake of preserving the purity of faith, refuse to cooperate with the 'unbelieving faction.' 'A few individuals are creating division'? Was this division manufactured? Did it begin just now? Twenty-five years ago, I raised my voice in warning, urging true believers to separate themselves from the unbelieving faction." (Wang 1955, p. 39)

Undoubtedly, Wang Mingdao believed that K. H. Ting's reduction of profound doctrinal differences to a mere issue of unity versus division was, in

essence, an attempt to obscure the theological deviations of the modernist camp.

In his response strategy, Wang Mingdao adopted a threefold line of argumentation: First, historical retrospection. Wang traced his opposition to modernist back to the 1930s, citing numerous articles he had written—such as *"Unity or Separation?"* (*He Yi Ne? Fen Li Ne?*), *"Beware of False Teachers"* (*Jin Fang Jia Shi Fu*), and *"A Solemn Warning to Today's Church"* (*Gei Jin Ri Jiao Hui De Yi Ge Yan Zhong De Jing Gao*). These references demonstrated that his insistence on guarding the purity of biblical faith was consistent over decades, rather than an impulsive or ignorant act of a so-called "divider." On the question of unity, Wang argued that Christian unity must rest on a shared commitment to the truth, not on institutional slogans or superficial human arrangements. To cooperate with those who deny the essential truths of the faith, he insisted, is not an act of love but a betrayal of the gospel. For this reason, Wang categorically rejected K. H. Ting's vision of unity, describing it as a doctrinally vacuous concept and, in practice, a form of compromise with unbelief (Wang 1955, pp. 39-41).

Second, scriptural appeal. Wang invoked biblical texts, including 2 John and Pauline epistles, to assert that fidelity to truth requires a clear stand on core doctrines. Believers must not work together with or maintain fellowship with those who propagate heresy or deny fundamental tenets of the faith, lest they "share in their wicked works" (Wang 1955, p. 42).

Third, empirical evidence. Wang provided concrete examples of how the "unbelieving faction" had, through theological education, undermined the faith of young believers. He further cited cases in which cooperation with modernist had facilitated spiritual decay and the erosion of biblical truth within the church (Wang 1955, p. 42). Through this layered approach—historical continuity, biblical mandate, and practical consequences—Wang framed his rejection of so-called "unity" as a non-negotiable demand of faithfulness to Christ.

He then proceeded to dismantle, sentence by sentence, Ting's statements in *Tianfeng* concerning "division," "unity," and "differences of faith." Wang mounted a firm defense against Ting's attempt to attribute internal theological disputes within the church to "imperialist manipulation" and "political motives." Quoting Ting's opening rhetorical question, "Just when imperialism wants us to be divided, we find ourselves divided; how do we explain this?" Wang immediately countered that such language was a calculated use of ambiguity, designed to insinuate that those who separate from the "unbelieving faction" are tools of imperialism. This tactic, Wang argued, plants suspicion in the minds of readers without presenting any concrete evidence, leaving the accused defenseless while allowing the accuser to avoid

accountability (Wang 1955, p. 43).

Wang Mingdao once again referenced Y. T. Wu's own writings, which acknowledged the long-standing global conflict between fundamentalists and modernists, including the well-known church controversies in the United States in 1922. Wang stressed that such doctrinal struggles were never the result of "imperialist" schemes but arose from a commitment to defend the truth—an essential act of resistance against heresy within the household of God. He then posed a sharp rhetorical question to K. H. Ting: "Are we to conclude, then, that the saints who, throughout the ages, fought for the truth and even laid down their lives as martyrs were all tools of imperialism? Such a claim is nothing less than an erasure of the history of faith and an insult to the memory of the martyrs." (Wang 1955, p. 43)

When K. H. Ting asserted that "our faith is essentially the same" and that doctrinal differences amounted to "minor variations within a greater unity," Wang Mingdao countered that such claims distorted reality. He argued that the fundamentalist and modernist camps diverged on the most essential truths of the faith, a divergence so profound that it constituted, in his words, "a difference of grave consequence." This, he maintained, was the true basis for separation. Wang expressed confidence that Ting, as the president of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, could not be ignorant of the deep rift between modernist and fundamentalism. If Ting genuinely doubted that the division was about matters of faith, Wang insisted, he should have plainly identified what he meant by the so-called "serious reason" for separation, rather than resorting to ambiguity and insinuating ulterior motives. Wang stated bluntly: "Mr. Ting has not 'exaggerated the differences of faith'; rather, he has obliterated them. He erases the differences of faith for the obvious purpose of making others believe that those who refuse to unite for the sake of faith are not motivated by faith at all but are being used by imperialism—thus attaching a political stigma to them." (Wang 1955, pp. 44-45)

In sharp contrast, Wang stressed that the so-called "unbelieving faction" was not a fictitious label but a precise designation based on their public denial of fundamental biblical doctrines. This was not an issue that could be glossed over under the guise of "diversity of faith." He candidly affirmed that his refusal to seek "unity" was grounded solely in these irreconcilable differences over matters essential to the Christian faith (Wang 1955, p. 45).

Because K. H. Ting argued that Christians should unite on the grounds that "we believe in the same Heavenly Father, the same Bible, share in the same redemption of Christ, and are guided by the same Holy Spirit," he sought to minimize internal doctrinal disputes and emphasize the "commonality" of faith over its "differences." However, Wang Mingdao contended that such rhetoric, though outwardly conciliatory and inclusive, in

reality concealed a profound departure from the truth of the faith (Wang 1955, p. 46). Wang reiterated that modernist fundamentally reject the Bible's teaching on creation, the virgin birth, Christ's atoning death, bodily resurrection, and His second coming. These are not minor or negotiable points of theology but the very foundation of the Christian faith. Therefore, if modernist deny these essential doctrines, to claim that they "believe in the same Bible" is contrary to fact; to assert that they "share in the same redemption of Christ" is meaningless, for they reject the necessity of redemption altogether; and to speak of being "guided by the same Holy Spirit" is impossible, since the Holy Spirit was sent on the basis of Christ's resurrection—a truth they deny. For Wang, such appeals to superficial consensus cannot produce true unity in the essence of faith (Wang 1955, pp. 46-47).

In response to K. H. Ting's accusation that some people were "arbitrarily labeling others as members of the 'unbelieving faction,'" even claiming that such actions amounted to "cursing others," Wang Mingdao issued a firm rebuttal. He reiterated that the term "unbelieving faction" was not a subjective insult but an objective designation for those who denied the essential truths of Scripture. Wang pointed out that as early as 1929 he had employed this term to describe individuals who rejected the core doctrines of the Christian faith. In his sermons and writings, he consistently distinguished between "differences within the faith" and the outright "absence of faith." For Wang, modernist were not merely holding divergent opinions on secondary matters; they fundamentally denied or redefined the gospel itself. Therefore, his use of terms like "false brothers" and "unbelieving faction" aligned with biblical language and theological precision, rather than constituting reckless name-calling (Wang 1955, p. 47).

Overall, Wang's response to Ting underscored his conviction that the present divisions within the church did not stem from politics or external provocations but were the inevitable result of internal doctrinal corruption. In the text, Wang issued an urgent call for believers to discern the true gospel from falsehood, to seek unity only with genuine followers of Christ, and to draw a clear boundary from false teachers and those who oppose the truth. Clearly, his rebuttal was not merely a critique of K. H. Ting as an individual but a comprehensive response to the broader trend of "covering up fundamental theological differences under the guise of love and unity."

Indeed, because Wang Weifan's article aligned with K. H. Ting's emphasis on doctrinal "commonality" as the basis for unity within the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, Wang Mingdao responded sharply in *We—For the Sake of Faith*. He argued that such an attitude—appearing harmonious yet in reality blurring the truth—posed a grave threat to the integrity of the Christian

faith (Wang Mingdao 1955, p. 50). Specifically, Wang Mingdao challenged Wang Weifan's assertion that the term "unbelieving faction" was merely a construct "fabricated in my mind." He countered that the divide between fundamentalists and modernist was well documented in both Chinese and global church history, and even acknowledged institutionally within Nanjing Union Theological Seminary itself. To prove this, Wang cited records from the seminary's official journal, *The Journal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary*, which explicitly stated that the school implemented a "split-class system" to separately teach modernist and fundamentalist theological perspectives. Such evidence, Wang Mingdao argued, demonstrated that these differences were not imaginary but formally recognized at an institutional level. By highlighting this, Wang Mingdao underscored that Wang Weifan's claim was not only blind to historical and present realities but also indicative of a compromised and confused faith perspective—an example of how modernist thinking had eroded theological clarity (Wang Mingdao 1955, pp. 50-51).

For this reason, Wang Mingdao launched a sharp critique of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary for structuring its curriculum to allow "fundamentalist" and "modernist" views to coexist and be taught in parallel. He regarded this approach as an embodiment of religious relativism—tantamount to deliberately sustaining a state in which heresy and truth coexist within theological education. Wang remarked that such a split-class system "amply demonstrates the vast gulf that separates these two positions!" What appeared to be "mutual respect and academic freedom," he argued, was in reality a façade—a means of legitimizing and institutionalizing unbelief under the banner of theological education, thereby corrupting the faith under the guise of scholarly liberty (Wang Mingdao 1955, p. 52).

Secondly, Wang Mingdao rebuked Wang Weifan for trivializing the fundamental differences between biblical faith and modernist theology by describing them as "minor variations within a greater unity." Wang argued that this was not only a profound misunderstanding of the essence of Christian faith but also a denial of the coherence of Scripture itself. He posed a pointed rhetorical question: "If one side believes that man was created by God, while the other claims man evolved from apes; if one side believes in the virgin birth, atonement, bodily resurrection, and second coming of Christ, while the other categorically denies them—how can such differences be reduced to mere 'minor variations'?" Wang Mingdao declared bluntly that the propagation of such a view would ultimately "obliterate the Christian faith altogether" (Wang Mingdao 1955, pp. 51-52).

Additionally, Wang Mingdao observed that Wang Weifan's article perpetuated the same line of reasoning found in the writings of K. H. Ting and H. H. Tsui—namely, employing biblical language such as "unity" and

"brotherly harmony" to cloak what was, in reality, a compromise and distortion of truth. Wang regarded this approach as profoundly dangerous, for it not only concealed the essential distinction between faith and unbelief but also misled believers into thinking that everything within the church could be tolerated, ultimately resulting in the abandonment of the gospel's integrity (Wang Mingdao 1955, pp. 51-52). Thus, Wang's response to Wang Weifan was more than a rebuttal to a personal testimony; it was a decisive counterattack against the rising trend of theological syncretism in his day. He articulated a core conviction with clarity: the unity of the church cannot be built upon blurred truths or the dilution of essential differences, but must be grounded in a shared commitment to biblical revelation and the fundamental definitions of the gospel.

In Wang Mingdao's argumentation, several central themes are unmistakable: he refused to endorse the "unity" promoted by the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and instead fought for the confession of fundamentalist. For him, this struggle reflected a pastoral concern for the church that far surpassed any consideration of personal safety; it was an uncompromising defense of what he regarded as the purity of Christian belief. As he declared in the closing passages of *We—For the Sake of Faith*, Wang employed resolute and impassioned language to repudiate and counter the modernist conception of unity. He made it clear that the oft-repeated slogans of "minor differences within a great unity" and "principles of solidarity" were not genuinely concerned with the unity of faith. Rather, they functioned as strategic rhetoric employed by modernist to suppress and neutralize those committed to the integrity of biblical truth. Drawing a parallel to Jesus standing before the political authority of Pilate, falsely accused by the Jewish leaders, Wang underscored his confidence that such charges and schemes against him could never triumph over the truth. He refused to allow the issue of doctrinal division to be trivialized as a mere "excuse for disunity," nor would he permit the formalistic unity advocated by the Three-Self Movement to override the foundational truths of the Christian faith. (Wang 1955, p. 53)

Finally, Wang Mingdao solemnly declared in the text that he not only refused to unite with the "unbelieving faction," but also did not advocate any organizational union with them, even when in fellowship with true believers. For Wang, such alliances lacked any biblical warrant. This reveals his understanding of church unity as being rooted in a shared spiritual faith rather than in institutional or structural integration. At the same time, Wang affirmed that in order to remain faithful to God, he was willing to endure misrepresentation, slander, and persecution, paying any price without compromise—because what he defended was not a matter of personal grievance, but the integrity of the gospel itself. He recognized that, given the

political and social climate of the time, his stance would invite intense pressure and misunderstanding; nevertheless, he emphasized that his battle was not for himself, but, as he concluded emphatically: *We—For the Sake of Faith*! (Wang 1955, p. 53)

In this sense, *We—For the Sake of Faith* served both as Wang Mingdao's personal apologia and as a clarion call to the Chinese church, urging believers to make a decisive choice for faith amid the sweeping tide of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement.

III. From Theological Controversy to Political Labeling: The Three-Self Movement's Response Strategy Toward Wang Mingdao

Following the publication of *We—For the Sake of Faith*, the tension between Wang Mingdao, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and the government quickly escalated into open confrontation ("Strengthen Unity and Clarify Right and Wrong" 1955, pp. 3–5; "Churches in Xi'an Hold Forum…" 1955, p. 7; Qin 1955, pp. 8–12; Ding 1955, p. 13; Jiang 1955, p. 14; Wang 1955, p. 15–16; Sun 1955, pp. 12–13; Zhu 1955, p. 14; Yu 1955, pp. 15–16; Yeh 1955, pp. 17–19; Wu 1955, p. 20; "Criticizing Wrong Words and Actions…" 1955, p. 21; "Short Commentary—Exposing…" 1955, p. 5; Tian Feng Editorial Office 1955, pp. 1–13; Tsui 1955, p. 14; Ting 1955, pp. 16–20; "Churches in Shenyang Criticize…" 1955, p. 21). *Tianfeng* soon carried a series of sharply critical articles by figures such as Wang Weifan, H. H. Tsui, K. H. Ting, and T. C. Chao—many of whom Wang had named in his text. These responses not only sought to refute his arguments but also to marginalize him within the Christian community. The dispute soon acquired an explicitly political character when the Chinese Communist Party labeled his stance part of the "counter-revolutionary clique of Wang Mingdao," framing his theological resistance as a political crime and leading to his arrest and imprisonment. This raises a crucial question: how did the public rhetoric of Three-Self leaders reflect their strategy in responding to *We—For the Sake of Faith*? Their discourse reveals a deliberate effort to recast a doctrinal controversy as a political accusation, portraying Wang not as a defender of orthodoxy but as a threat to national unity and socialist reconstruction.

1. The Nature of the Theological Debate and Its Political Turn

The first major rebuttal came from Wang Weifan in his article "Is It Really for the Sake of Faith?" published in *Tianfeng*. Written in an almost accusatory tone, it forcefully contested Wang Mingdao's criticisms in *We—For the Sake of Faith*, particularly those aimed at his personal testimony and at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary. Responding to Wang Mingdao's doubts about his faith

journey, Wang Weifan reaffirmed that during his three years at the seminary, he had "never encountered the so-called 'unbelieving faction' fabricated in the past." This, he insisted, was a matter of personal experience and thus beyond dispute. He posed the rhetorical question: "If someone who has lived at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary for nearly three years testifies that during this time he never encountered any so-called 'unbelieving faction,' what is so 'astonishing' about that?" Wang Weifan accused Wang Mingdao of basing his criticism on mere subjective speculation and even charged him with misrepresenting *The Journal of Nanjing Union Theological Seminary* by quoting out of context, deliberately omitting its emphasis on the shared foundation of faith expressed in "one Lord, one faith, one baptism, and one God" (Wang Weifan July 21, 1955, p. 15). Furthermore, Wang dismissed Wang Mingdao's portrayal of "minor differences within a greater unity" as a threat to doctrinal purity as nothing more than alarmism. With biting irony, he asked: "How can the 'minor differences' under the umbrella of a 'greater unity' possibly annihilate the Christian faith?" To reinforce his point, he cited the coexistence of Paul, Peter, and Apollos in the New Testament church as evidence that theological diversity had always existed within Christianity and was, in fact, a sign of the richness of the faith (Wang Weifan July 21, 1955, p. 16).

Wang Weifan argued that Wang Mingdao's definition and labeling of the so-called "unbelieving faction" was essentially a pretext to justify his rejection of "any form of organizational union." Citing Wang's own statement from *We—For the Sake of Faith*—"Even with all who truly believe in the Lord and faithfully serve God, there can only be unity in the Spirit, but there should be no organizational union of any kind" —Wang Weifan contended that Wang Mingdao's ultimate objective was not merely a theological dispute but a categorical opposition to any church union or participation in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. He wrote bluntly: "This is no longer a matter of faith at all... The issue is quite simple. Mr. Wang's 'solemn declaration' is nothing more than a veiled appeal—an appeal to believers not to join the great anti-imperialist patriotic unity, not to participate in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement" (Wang Weifan July 21, 1955, p. 16).

Wang Weifan further escalated the charge by framing Wang Mingdao's position as hostility toward New China: "Highlighting the so-called faith issue serves only to make the unity of believers more difficult," he claimed, dismissing Wang's insistence on faith as a mere "pretext" or "excuse," the real aim being to undermine unity. He posed the pointed question: "Is Mr. Wang truly acting for the sake of faith?" In doing so, Wang Weifan insinuated that Wang Mingdao's words and actions were essentially a political maneuver to defend an imperialist position (Wang Weifan July 21, 1955, p. 16). Clearly, this article shifted the portrayal of Wang from a principled defender of faith to an

agitator opposing the "anti-imperialist patriotic cause." His claim to "fight for the faith" was reframed as a deliberate tactic to sabotage unity, incite division, and, by implication, serve the agenda of anti-Communist and anti-people forces.

Later, on August 15, *Tianfeng* published H. H. Tsui's article titled "The Disguise of 'Faith' Cannot Deceive Anyone." Written in an overtly confrontational tone, the piece directly targeted Wang Mingdao's *We—For the Sake of Faith*. Tsui categorically denied that the differences between fundamentalists and modernist represented an essential theological divide. Instead, he reiterated the notion of "minor differences within a greater unity," citing over two decades of cooperation within the Chinese Church as evidence against Wang's claim that his critique of modernist was based on doctrinal necessity (Tsui 1955, p. 14).

In Tsui's view, "Wang Mingdao has labeled all co-workers participating in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement as 'unbelievers' and expressed an intense sense of hatred," asserting that Wang's true aim was to use the banner of doctrinal purity as a pretext to sow division—"shifting attention" and "sabotaging the patriotic movement" (Tsui 1955, p. 14). Tsui's rhetoric did more than question Wang's motives; it repeatedly accused Wang of "gnashing his teeth in hatred toward New China," of "lawlessly attacking responsible church leaders," and of "spreading venomous slanders against the government and the Three-Self Movement." He concluded that Wang's insistence on faithfulness was nothing but a "fraudulent disguise under the signboard of faith." This line of argument effectively deflected the debate from "faith versus unbelief" and reframed it as political opposition to the state and the socialist order (Tsui 1955, pp. 14-15).

Tsui underscored that the new Constitution guaranteed freedom of religious belief, even quoting United Nations Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld to demonstrate that, despite Wang's vehement opposition to the government, he still enjoyed freedom of publication, speech, and belief—thus countering public suspicion about state restrictions. Viewed in hindsight, especially after Wang's subsequent arrest by the Public Security Bureau, Tsui's argument sought to construct an image of the government as tolerant of dissent, thereby undermining the legitimacy of Wang's narrative of "suffering persecution for faith." Instead, it positioned him as one who "abused freedom" for subversive purposes. The article concluded by asserting that Wang's struggle was not for faith at all, but "for the interests of imperialism." This interpretive shift laid a crucial rhetorical and ideological foundation within the church community for Wang Mingdao's eventual arrest and conviction on political charges (Tsui 1955, p. 15).

In the same *Tianfeng* issue, K. H. Ting published an article titled "A

Solemn Warning to Wang Mingdao." In it, Ting framed Wang Mingdao's insistence on doctrinal purity in *Spiritual Food Quarterly* and his critique of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement as manifestations of hostility and sabotage—directed not only against the church but also against the people and the state. Ting did more than dispute Wang's theological position; he sought to unmask what he portrayed as the underlying essence of Wang's thought: "anti–New China, anti-people, and anti-unity." To achieve this, Ting combined theological rebuttals with concrete examples and accusatory rhetoric, painting Wang's opposition as an ideological threat aligned with reactionary forces. His argument functioned as both a doctrinal critique and a political indictment, signaling that Wang's stance was no longer perceived as a matter of faith alone but as a challenge to the national and social order (Ting 1955, pp. 16–20).

K. H. Ting asserted that Wang Mingdao harbored deep resentment toward the new China, accusing him of "a clear hostility toward the new state." Ting argued that Wang's comparison of New China to Babylon, along with his portrayal of contemporary believers as persecuted martyrs, was intended to incite a spirit of confrontation against the people. Ting highlighted Wang's call in *We—For the Sake of Faith* for believers to "set life and death aside" and to "stake their very lives," interpreting these exhortations not as spiritual nourishment but as a "stimulant for reactionaries." He wrote: "If these appeals are to be called 'spiritual food,' then they suit only those who, lurking on our mainland, are plotting to destroy New China." (Ting 1955, pp. 16–17)

Furthermore, Ting cited Wang's statement: "What you call the toxins of imperialist thought are nothing other than the truths of the Bible," and retorted: "Such words would delight imperialism! But they are also shockingly arrogant and reckless!" He accused Wang of deliberately confusing biblical truth with the distorted interpretations exploited by imperialist forces, framing the state's efforts to eliminate imperialist influence as "persecution of the faith." In Ting's view, this amounted to "shielding imperialism and laundering its crimes." Ting also condemned Wang's refusal to sign the anti–atomic weapons petition, branding it as evidence of his "lack of love for the people" and questioning whether he truly desired to glorify Christ: "If this is not standing in opposition to the people, what is it? … Even the tone of his words betrays an irreconcilable hostility toward the people." (Ting 1955, pp. 17–19) By this point, Ting's rebuttal was no longer concerned with theological interpretation in *We—For the Sake of Faith*. Instead, it leveraged Wang's rhetoric as proof of political subversion, casting him as a spokesperson for imperialism. The response adopted an unmistakably political stance, transforming a doctrinal dispute into an ideological indictment.

Regarding Wang Mingdao's sharp criticisms of modernists as "disciples

of Judas" and those who "use godliness as a means of gain," K. H. Ting expressed profound indignation. He countered: "These individuals… are loyal servants who love the Lord and hold a pure faith… Wang Mingdao has gone too far." Ting repeatedly emphasized that the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was "God's own work"—a divine process of purification for the church, a necessary stage in which God would "pluck up and break down, destroy and overthrow, build and plant" (Jeremiah 1:10). Thus, Ting insisted: "Since the Three-Self Patriotic Movement is a patriotic movement of Christians, there is absolutely no one within it who uses this movement to propagate a private faith." (Ting 1955, pp. 17–18)

Returning to the theme of "unity," Ting charged that Wang Mingdao was "more obstinate than ever in his refusal to unite." He supported this claim by citing numerous biblical passages that exhort believers to mutual forbearance and respect, declaring: "Unity is not a matter of faith—it is a matter of love." According to Ting, Wang lacked love, was "rigid and dogmatic," and arbitrarily condemned those who held different theological positions. By refusing to acknowledge the possibility of cooperation in patriotic endeavors beyond doctrinal issues, Wang, Ting argued, fractured the unity and witness that the church ought to display. He concluded with a rhetorical question: "What age are we living in? Why must we still cling to sectarian divisions?" (Ting 1955, pp. 19–20)

It becomes evident that Ting portrayed Wang Mingdao as a dogmatic, love-deficient schismatic and leveraged Wang's insistence on doctrinal purity to accuse him of being "anti-people" and "anti-nation," even of "collaborating with imperialism." Under this logic, Wang was no longer simply opposing the Three-Self Movement on theological grounds or out of a conscientious stance for faith; rather, he was framed as a subversive element—one who threatened church unity and endangered social stability. Through Ting's rhetoric, we can clearly observe how Three-Self leaders transformed *We—For the Sake of Faith* from a theological defense into a political text, thereby laying the ideological and rhetorical groundwork for Wang Mingdao's classification as the head of a so-called "counter-revolutionary clique."

2. Political Accusations and the Counter-Revolutionary Label

T. C. Chao, then a Standing Committee member of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and a figure explicitly criticized by Wang Mingdao, published a pointed rebuttal titled "A Few Questions Concerning Wang Mingdao." This article marked a decisive shift: the critique of Wang had now moved entirely from theological debate to overt political indictment. The tone was sharp and unapologetically combative, scarcely bothering to maintain a theological pretense; instead, it openly cast Wang as an adversary intent on "undermining

the people's state" (Chao 1955, p. 14).

At the outset, Chao articulated three key positions—each designed to delegitimize Wang's faith-based narrative and firmly delineate the lines of "friend" and "enemy". First, Chao asserted: "Between the people and imperialism, between progress and reaction, there is absolutely no middle road," thereby demanding that Christians choose sides unequivocally in the ideological struggle. Second, he stressed that "respecting others' religious faith" was an essential moral obligation, accusing Wang of presuming to "sit on the judgment seat of God" by arbitrarily branding others as "unbelievers" and "false teachers." Such labeling, Chao argued, disrupted the harmony and mutual respect that should characterize Christian fellowship. Third, Chao charged that Wang's publication of *We—For the Sake of Faith* was nothing more than an attempt to "divert attention," using the pretext of a "fundamentalist-modernist divide" to mask his alleged true intent: sabotaging unity and attacking the government (Chao 1955, p. 14).

Next, T. C. Chao launched a series of rhetorical questions to level political accusations against Wang Mingdao. He first asked: "As a citizen of the People's Republic of China, can one use the excuse of 'for the sake of faith' to refuse to fulfill political obligations?" He then listed several major political events in which Wang had refused to participate, including: refusing to contribute to and support the Resist America, Aid Korea campaign; refusing to sign the petition against the use of atomic weapons; refusing to endorse the liberation of Taiwan; refusing to take part in democratic elections under the Constitution; and, ultimately, completely rejecting the Three-Self Patriotic Movement. In Chao's argument, these actions were all evidence of "serving the enemy in a passive way," directly indicating Wang Mingdao's stance of undermining the people's state, resisting national reconstruction, and submitting to imperialist interests (Chao 1955, p. 14).

The most explosive charge was Chao's citation of Wang Mingdao's statement: "What you call the toxins of imperialist thought are nothing other than the truths of the Bible." Chao ruthlessly labeled this as "reactionary rhetoric," asserting that it proved Wang was disguising the toxins of imperialist ideology as biblical truth in order to instruct believers. He asked: "Consider this: which prophet in the Bible did not actively participate in patriotic political activities? Which prophet did not stand with the people and struggle against anti-people rulers?" Chao went further, declaring that Wang's act of treating such "toxins" as truth was, in essence, the dissemination of imperialist ideological poison and an attempt to champion hostile forces. Even more gravely, Chao accused Wang of exploiting religious language such as "God speaks through my mouth" to mislead the masses, likening him to previously denounced counter-revolutionary religious figures such as Gu

Ren'en and Jing Dianying. He concluded with a call to action for believers: "Now is the time to expose Wang Mingdao! We must rise up to uncover the political background of Wang Mingdao's group and lay bare his reactionary face." (Chao 1955, p. 14)

Undoubtedly, in T. C. Chao's rhetoric, Wang Mingdao was no longer portrayed as a religious figure holding a particular faith stance but had been fully transformed into a political symbol—a negative archetype of being "an enemy of the people." Chao's statement read like a standard political manifesto, deploying rapid-fire questions, accusations, and denunciations to construct a narrative of Wang's record of being "unpatriotic, politically disengaged, and anti-people." These actions were further interpreted as manifestations of imperialist ideological poison, with Chao even insinuating that Wang served as a "religious agent of imperialism."

In this context of comprehensive political characterization, the factual accuracy of the charges T. C. Chao enumerated became irrelevant; what mattered was their political utility. These accusations served as tools to justify state action against Wang Mingdao, furnishing both legitimacy and public support for his designation as a target of suppression. Consequently, Wang's religious convictions, ecclesial practices, and steadfast commitment to faith were all reduced to mere veneers for counter-revolutionary ideology. He was not condemned for specific actions per se but because he had been classified as a "political enemy." Once positioned in opposition to the "patriotic" front, every act could be construed as incriminating evidence, and every silence could be interpreted as a seditious plot.

In reality, T. C. Chao was well-versed in the propaganda logic prevalent during the 1955 Anti-Rightist political climate—linking dissenting religious voices with state enemies and imperialism. Through mass mobilization, moral denunciation, and political struggle sessions, religious dissent was thoroughly stigmatized and stripped of legitimacy—a phenomenon not limited to Christianity but observable across other religious spheres as well (Xueyu 2015, pp. 384–389). As an intellectual within the church and a representative voice for the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, Chao's discourse operated as part of a broader ideological apparatus, aligning with the state's effort to enforce ideological uniformity and dismantle the autonomous space of the church. This discursive maneuver transformed Wang Mingdao from a "defender of fundamentalist faith" into a "threat to national security." Such a narrative strategy directly laid the groundwork for legitimizing the public campaigns of "confession" and "repentance" later imposed on Wang Mingdao and his followers, many of whom were already imprisoned at the time.

At the same time, as Chairman of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, Y. T. Wu delivered a speech at the Jiangnan Conference on August 17, 1955, in

which he assigned an explicitly political characterization to Wang Mingdao using harsh and accusatory language. Wu opened bluntly: "Wang Mingdao's counter-revolutionary crimes have now been exposed. He is a counter-revolutionary disguised in religious garb—a wolf in sheep's clothing." Such rhetoric, steeped in the tone of struggle sessions, immediately stripped Wang of his identity as a Christian and recast him as an "enemy" within the binary of friend versus foe. Wu accused Wang of having "consistently colluded with imperialism and reactionaries for decades" and of plotting to "overthrow the People's Republic of China and restore imperialism and reactionary forces in the country." This framing positioned Wang's religious statements and actions squarely as acts of political hostility, providing the theoretical rationale and legal legitimacy for his arrest ("Speech by President Y. T. Wu…" 1955, pp. 10–12).

It is noteworthy that Y. T. Wu did not address Wang Mingdao's critique of his work *Darkness and Light*. At this moment, Wu deliberately avoided engaging in substantive theological debate, shifting instead to a purely political attack. He characterized Wang's delineation of "Fundamentalists versus Modernists" in *We—For the Sake of Faith* as a "smokescreen to confuse the public" and a calculated attempt to "split the Three-Self Patriotic Movement." In other words, Wu refrained from offering any theological rebuttal and instead interpreted the entire matter as a manifestation of counter-revolutionary intent and hostile maneuvering. Thus, every point of faith-based contention was redefined as politically motivated subversion ("Speech by President Wu Y. T. …" 1955, pp. 10–11).

Y. T. Wu also spoke from personal testimony, emphasizing the relationship between "faith and action," framing his support for the Three-Self Movement, endorsement of the Communist Party, and participation in anti-American and anti-Chiang campaigns as expressions of loyalty to Christian faith. He explicitly stated: "My advocacy of resistance against Japan and Chiang, my opposition to America, my support for the Communist Party, and my initiation of the Three-Self Movement with fellow believers in the country—these were not motivated by politics but by religious faith." This argument aimed to counter the Spiritualist stance of separating faith from politics, seeking to present the Three-Self Movement not as a political manifesto but as a practical outworking of Christian belief in China ("Speech by President Y. T. Wu…" 1955, pp. 10–12). In Wu's narrative, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was a voluntary organization initiated by Chinese Christians themselves, not a party-state-imposed structure—a perspective that remains the mainstream interpretation of Three-Self history. At the same time, Wu integrated "patriotism" into the core test of Christian faith, asserting: "The line we ought to draw is not between belief and unbelief…but between

patriotism and lack of patriotism." Such a nationalized reinterpretation of Christian doctrine effectively sacralized the Three-Self Movement, constructing a theological logic in which loyalty to the nation became synonymous with loyalty to God ("Speech by President Y. T. Wu…" 1955, p. 12).

Furthermore, Y. T. Wu delivered a highly political critique of Wang Mingdao during his speech at an expanded meeting of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, aiming to align with the political climate of the "Suppression of Counterrevolutionaries" campaign and to intensify efforts within the religious sector to expose and purge "counterrevolutionaries." In his address, Wu called on all Christians to report individuals associated with Wang Mingdao, insisting that the church must "cleanse itself of degenerates and purify its ranks." Under the intense pressure of the Anti-Rightist atmosphere, Wang Mingdao was no longer regarded as a defender of faith but had been fully categorized as part of the state's enemy camp, subject to comprehensive political repudiation and attack (Wu 1955, pp. 9–12). Wu's rhetoric went beyond personal accusation, portraying Wang as the principal adversary of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and an agent of imperialism, further reinforcing the ideological narrative that religion must submit to state policy and serve as an instrument of political conformity.

In such a climate of political repression and relentless public denunciation, Wang Mingdao's voice was effectively silenced, leaving him no space for open response or self-defense (*Tianfeng* Editorial Office 1955, pp. 2–4; "Tianjin Churches Hold Forum…" 1955, pp. 5–6; "Letters from Believers Nationwide…" 1955, pp. 7–9; Jian 1955, p. 2; *Tianfeng* Editorial Office 1955, pp. 3–7; *Tianfeng* Editorial Office 1955, pp. 8–9; *Tianfeng* Editorial Office 1955, pp. 10–13; Chao 1955, p. 14; "Believers Nationwide United…" 1955, pp. 15–17; "Short Commentary—Resolutely…" 1955, p. 2; Zheng 1955, pp. 3–8; "Pastors Nationwide Hold Forums…" 1955, pp. 9–10; He 1955, pp. 3–4; Liang 1955, p. 4; Yu 1955, p. 5; "Preface to 'Expose…'" 1955, pp. 4–5; "The Relationship Between…" 1955, pp. 6–7; Committee on Study 1955, pp. 5–9; Li 1955, p. 11; "Short Commentary—Eliminate…" 1955, p. 2; "Guangzhou Churches Expose…" 1955, pp. 3–6; "I Accuse Wang Mingdao…" 1955, pp. 8–9; "Preface to 'Accusations…'" 1955, pp. 2–3; "Believers Nationwide Angrily…" 1955, pp. 4–5; Cui 1955, pp. 6–7; Chen 1955, pp. 13–14; Tan 1955, pp. 23–27; "Wang Mingdao Harms Nation…" 1955, p. 28). Though he spoke in the name of faith and sought to uphold what he believed to be truth, the rebuttals and condemnations from the Three-Self Movement had long surpassed the realm of theology or intra-church differences. Instead, he was branded as a political heretic, in language and tone nearly identical to the state's criminal indictment against him. This reveals that the controversy was not merely a theological

dispute within the Christian faith, but a sweeping purge under the guise of ideological struggle within the party-state context. Frankly, as a fragile individual, how could he possibly withstand the immense machinery of a state operating with full force within the church?

IV. The Contested Meaning of *We—For the Sake of Faith* as a Manifesto

After Wang Mingdao's arrest in August 1955, news of his situation spread through various channels, sparking intense concern among churches in Hong Kong, Taiwan, and among Chinese Christians in North America and Southeast Asia. His story soon became a defining example of "suffering for Christ" within the Chinese church, drawing profound sympathy and respect. His unwavering stance—expressed in *We—For the Sake of Faith*—his refusal to join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, and his bold denunciation of syncretistic faith practices, established his reputation as one who stood firm for the truth and resisted authoritarian pressure, often hailed as a "modern martyr" (Brother David 1990; Lin and Zhang 1995; Wang 2000). Within the Cold War context, Wang Mingdao came to be portrayed as concrete evidence of the persecution of Christians under the communist regime. Numerous overseas evangelical and missionary organizations cited his case as representative of the suffering Chinese church, launching prayer movements and advocacy campaigns in his support. His writings, sermons, and periodicals such as *Spiritual Food Quarterly* were collected, reprinted, and widely circulated, profoundly shaping subsequent narratives of "the persecuted church" both within China's emerging house church movement and among overseas Chinese congregations ("The Wang Mingdao Collection" 1995). By the 1980s, Wang's resolute refusal to compromise fundamental doctrines reinforced the identification and support of overseas Chinese churches for unofficial house churches in China. Consequently, Wang Mingdao became not merely a personal symbol of fidelity to faith but a pivotal spiritual figure for understanding the history of Christian suffering in modern China.

1. The Contested Interpretations of *We—For the Sake of Faith*

In the 1980s, K. H. Ting explicitly instructed Wang Weifan to provide a clarification, stating: "Certain individuals in Hong Kong and overseas are making every effort to draw this conclusion: that Mr. Wang Mingdao's later arrest was due to his opposition to the Three-Self Movement. This is completely contrary to the facts." (Wang 1989, p. 13) In other words, Ting sought to emphasize that Wang Mingdao's arrest was a decision made by the Party-state in response to his extreme words and actions, and that it had

nothing to do with the Three-Self Patriotic Movement as an organization.

At this time, Wang Weifan, already serving as a professor at Nanjing Union Theological Seminary, wrote an article titled "Y. T. Wu and Wang Mingdao," mainly to revisit the polemics of the 1950s and address the debates between himself and Wang. Wang Weifan sought to reinterpret for the Chinese Christian community the relationship between Wang Mingdao and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, as well as the nature of their conflict. His argument unfolded along the following lines, reflecting an intention toward historical reconciliation (Wang 1989, pp. 12–13).

In order to affirm the legitimacy of the Three-Self Principles, Wang Weifan emphasized the "justice" and "mutual respect of faith" underlying them. He pointed out that many fundamentalist church leaders of the time—such as Jia Yuming and Xie Yongqin—though initially cautious, eventually supported the Three-Self initiative. This, he argued, demonstrated that the movement was not designed to suppress faith. Y. T. Wu's original intent: Wang asserted that Wu promoted unity out of "love for the church" and even renamed the movement as the "Three-Self Patriotic Movement" to reduce misunderstanding. Reframing the 1955 controversy: Wang portrayed the early debates before 1955 as "mild, rational exchanges of thought" that avoided personal attacks. He claimed that neither he nor other contributors to Tian Feng initially named Wang Mingdao; their writings, he said, focused on promoting unity. In contrast, Wang Mingdao's decision to "name names" and sharply criticize Wu, Wang, and others in *We—For the Sake of Faith* forced Tian Feng to escalate its tone and eventually use terms like "reactionary," though, Wang stressed, never "counter-revolutionary." Denial of responsibility for Wang Mingdao's arrest: Wang repeatedly clarified that "no one in the Three-Self organization had such authority," asserting that Wang Mingdao's imprisonment was a government decision based on "political activities," not because of his opposition to the Three-Self Movement. He stated explicitly: "Wang Mingdao was arrested for counterrevolution, not for opposing the Three-Self." Criticism of Wang Mingdao's rhetoric: Wang described Wang Mingdao's writings as numerous and highly aggressive, marked by "malicious language and personal attacks" against church elders. Finally, Wang expressed hope that the aging Wang Mingdao, after his release, would "turn back," noting that the church had since developed well under the Three-Self framework. He also remarked that "every national conference prayed for Wang Mingdao," presenting an image of historical magnanimity and self-legitimation (Wang 1989, p. 12).

In this paper, Wang Weifan's tone is conciliatory, revealing an apparent attempt to mend historical rifts. However, it must be acknowledged that his defense of *Tian Feng* and Y. T. Wu as engaging in a "rational exchange of ideas"

overlooks the dramatic rhetorical shift that occurred after 1955, when *Tian Feng* and other official publications clearly aligned with the "Suppress Counterrevolutionaries" campaign and broader political purges. Leading figures such as K. H. Ting, T. C. Chao, and Y. T. Wu themselves later explicitly equated Wang Mingdao with imperialism, espionage, and counterrevolution, language that moved far beyond the boundaries of theological debate (Wang 1989, p. 13). Wang Weifan's effort seems aimed at presenting the Three-Self Movement as more religious in nature and self-initiated, yet the historical record demonstrates that as early as the mid-1950s, the movement actively synchronized with the state's accusatory discourse. Y. T. Wu, though he initially emphasized "mutual respect of faith," gradually accommodated political critique, presided over or tacitly endorsed *Tian Feng's* high-pressure rhetoric, and, contrary to Wang's assertion that he "never wrote any article rebutting Wang Mingdao," explicitly supported the government's handling of Wang by branding him a counter-revolutionary in speeches such as his Jiangnan address and contributions to *Mu Sheng* and other publications. Four decades later, can these documentary realities simply be disregarded by Wang Weifan? His selective recollection and omission of these historical materials clearly call into serious question the integrity and authenticity of his retrospective narrative.

Criticism of Wang Mingdao often began with "doctrinal differences" but quickly slid into a framework of "enemies and allies." Wang Weifan attempted to separate these two dimensions, claiming that the Three-Self Movement engaged only in theological debate while political judgment followed an entirely different system. However, this view overlooks the structural entanglement between the Three-Self Movement and the state—by its very nature, the movement could not remain an outsider. Wang argued that Wang Mingdao was excessively radical, whereas the Three-Self Movement remained consistently rational and tolerant, and thus was not the root cause of Wang's political disaster. Yet, viewed in the broader historical context, the Three-Self Movement and the regime had long formed an integrated discursive apparatus, and the collective criticism and labeling of Wang Mingdao were indeed part of a political struggle. Wang's retrospective account reflects the pattern of official religious narratives in the post-1980s era—aimed at justifying the past—but its minimization of the coercive political climate and shifting of responsibility warrant critical historical scrutiny. [6]

By the 1980s, Wang Mingdao was living in his home in Shanghai, where a steady stream of visitors came to see him, causing unease among

6 Wang Weifan later compiled this article into a book published in Hong Kong (Wang 2011, pp. 577–562).

government officials. They specifically warned him not to engage in any more "counter-revolutionary" activities. Wang responded bluntly:

> "Before God, I am full of wounds and utterly broken—a great sinner. But with regard to the laws of the state, I have never violated a single one. From childhood I have been timid and thin-skinned, never daring to break the law. In school I was a student who strictly observed the rules; in the nation and society I was a law-abiding citizen. Yet you still arrested me. I have never broken any national law; I spent over twenty years in prison entirely because of my faith… I opposed the Three-Self Church, and I still oppose it to this day." (Wang 1997, p. 245)

This late-life statement by Wang Mingdao underscores that what he opposed was not the state itself but the distortion of the church's spiritual essence represented by the theology of the Three-Self Movement's "modernist" faction. His assertion, "I have never broken any national law; I spent over twenty years in prison entirely because of my faith," reveals the core reason he consistently refused to acknowledge himself as a "counter-revolutionary." In his view, his arrest resulted from his defense of the independence of the church and the purity of faith as mandated by Scripture (Wang 1997, p. 245).

From another perspective, Wang Mingdao's statement, "I oppose the Three-Self Church, and I still oppose it," was intended to clarify that his stance did not stem from hostility toward the state but from opposition to a religious organization that, in his view, compromised essential principles of faith. For him, the Three-Self Church was not merely an administrative body but a system that subordinated faith to modernist theology—something fundamentally irreconcilable with his convictions.

However, the political context of the 1950s, marked by a high-pressure atmosphere of ideological conformity, rendered such a purely faith-driven stance as an act of "anti-government" or "anti-socialist system." Consequently, during Wang Mingdao's imprisonment, some at home and abroad framed his opposition to the Three-Self Movement as resistance to the Communist Party or the socialist system—another narrative that politicized a theological dispute (Mingyan 1991, p. 13).

Wang's self-description that he had been "timid since childhood, thin-skinned, and never dared to break the law" was neither pretentious nor evasive but an expression of his caution and self-restraint as a law-abiding citizen (Wang 1997, p. 245). His opposition was not political but spiritual; his concern was not the regime itself but whether the church could still freely acknowledge, proclaim, and preserve the fundamental doctrines of the Christian faith without censorship. This was also why, after his release, Wang wrote appeals to the People's Court in Shanghai, seeking to overturn the

verdict against the so-called "Wang Mingdao counter-revolutionary Clique." In these petitions, he repeatedly emphasized that his imprisonment was solely for the sake of faith, not because of hostility toward the state (Ying 2009, pp. 211–214).

Therefore, Wang Mingdao consistently regarded himself not as a political dissenter but as a witness to the faith. Yet the suffering and imprisonment he endured vividly reveal how, in a highly politicized era, religious freedom was curtailed and internal theological disputes within the church were elevated to the level of political antagonism. While opposing the Three-Self Movement, Wang repeatedly asserted that his stance did not conflict with national law, nor did it stem from opposition to the state; rather, his resistance lay in refusing to allow the faith to merge with modernist theology. Although he recognized the political forces behind the modernist camp, he explicitly stated that his opposition to the Three-Self Movement had nothing to do with resisting the government. [7] Nevertheless, his experience underscores a critical reality: when the state equates church loyalty with political conformity, anyone who stands for faith but does not align with the Party-State's notion of "unity" is easily branded as "counter-revolutionary" or anti-government. This was the peril Wang Mingdao fully understood—yet he willingly bore the cost.

Regarding Wang Mingdao's late-life confession of faith, Philip L. Wickeri—who maintained a long friendship with K. H. Ting and authored the biography *Reconstructing Christianity in China: K. H. Ting and the Chinese Church*—offers a different interpretation when discussing the debates between Wang Mingdao and Ting in the 1950s. [8] Wickeri acknowledges that, in the 1950s, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was primarily a political unity campaign under the banner of "anti-imperialist patriotism," rather than an effort to achieve theological unity among Christians from different denominational backgrounds. "This was especially emphasized in dealing with evangelicals and fundamentalists, to reassure them that their faith was not being 'diluted' or compromised by participation in the Three-Self Patriotic Movement." (Wickeri 2007, pp. 149–150) At the same time, he argues that by 1955, the confrontation between Wang and Ting was no longer a theological debate but had become an intensely politicized conflict, decisively shaped by the ideological struggles of that era. He further states:

7 According to Ni Buxiao's research, Wang Mingdao was fully aware that the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was an organization supported and promoted by the government amid the increasingly intense political accusation campaigns of the 1950s. See (Ni 2025, pp. 271–330).

8 This book was first published in English and later translated and expanded for release in Chinese in 2022 (Wickeri 2007).

> "According to Wang Mingdao, K. H. Ting was a "modernist" aligned with the government, and the debate between them centered on the core principles of Christian faith. From Ting's perspective, Wang showed no concern for fellowship with Christians of differing views and appeared indifferent to patriotism and the anti-imperialist struggle. This, in Ting's view, revealed a political stance that sought to accommodate Western interests. Wang opposed Ting's theology, while Ting criticized Wang on political grounds. Wang regarded small denominational churches as gatherings of true believers, whereas Ting adopted a broader vision of the church, emphasizing mutual respect to maintain unity amid diversity." (Wickeri 2007, p. 151)

Thus, Wang Mingdao's refusal to cooperate with Ting and others was seen as a narrow and exclusionary theological stance, whereas Ting emphasized the integration of politics and theology, which he regarded as an inclusive and pragmatic approach. In Wickeri view, this represented a theology characterized by mutual respect and diversity.

Furthermore, in Wickeri's view, Wang Mingdao's refusal to join the Three-Self Movement was interpreted as both unpatriotic and anti-government: "He became internationally known for his opposition to the Chinese Communist government and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, winning deep admiration among conservative Christian circles in both China and the West." (Wickeri 2007, p. 150) Wickeri adds, in a critical tone, that "whether in the 1950s or today, fundamentalism could never serve as the foundation for Christian participation in a socialist society with Chinese characteristics" (Wickeri 2007, p. 152). He continues: "In many religious traditions, fundamentalism is the most common response to modernization, but it is always a reactionary force rather than a creative response. While Wang Mingdao's works remain popular in some Chinese churches, these communities offer little room for open dialogue. In contrast, Ting's vision of mutual respect created the possibility for Christians from different backgrounds to work together." (Wickeri 2007, p. 152)

Wickeri classifies Wang Mingdao's theological stance as a reactionary form of "fundamentalism" and characterizes fundamentalism as resistance to "modernization" rather than a constructive dialogue partner. This represents a critique of the fundamentalist theological tradition. His underlying implication is that such a faith perspective cannot adapt to the modern trajectory of socialist China and cannot serve as a resource for developing a "Chinese-contextualized theology." In sharp contrast, K. H. Ting is portrayed as a symbol of "openness, plurality, and mutual respect," representing a path of "modernist theology" that can coexist with a socialist state and actively participate in public life. Here, the affirmation is not merely of Ding's theology

itself but of the fact that he embodies a theological orientation politically acceptable and aligned with state expectations. This pluralistic theology is presented as the legitimate path for the future development of the Chinese church.

The most noteworthy aspect of Wickeri's statement is its blurring of the boundary between theology and politics. What Wang Mingdao asserted in *We—For the Sake of Faith* was a core issue of "belief or unbelief," yet it is reframed here as the cause of "hostile attitudes." This effectively interprets the question of fundamentalist as a potential source of social instability, introducing an alternative form of "politicized critique" of doctrinal purity. Such a critique mirrors the logic of the 1950s official discourse that equated Wang Mingdao's theological stance with a political position.

This approach arguably marginalizes Wang Mingdao's legacy from the perspective of faith transmission, not merely as a theological disagreement but as a warning against a mode of Christianity deemed incompatible with contemporary Chinese church development. Wickeri's analysis reveals that the divergence between Wang Mingdao and K. H. Ting represents two contrasting theological orientations, illustrating what counts as an "acceptable" faith model under the current Chinese theological and social context, and what is relegated to an incommensurable, non-dialogical position. In short, Wickeri's interpretation frames the future direction of the Chinese church not around Wang's fundamentalist commitment to faith purity, but around a pluralistic and inclusive vision premised on the capacity to engage with socialist modernization.

2. The Declaration Texts of Unregistered Churches

In fact, Wickeri overlooks the influence of Wang Mingdao's *We—For the Sake of Faith* on the motivation of Chinese house churches (unregistered churches) to resist those who differ on the essence of faith. He also glosses over their commitment to Christ and their public stance regarding politics. For example, unregistered churches such as Beijing Shouwang Church and Chengdu Early Rain Covenant Church are far from the imagined picture of irrationality or backward, closed-off religious spaces.

During the 2010 outdoor worship incident involving Beijing Shouwang Church, Elder Sun Yi (孫毅) wrote an article titled "Why We Do Not Join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement?" In it, he publicly declared the church's stance to the government, explicitly citing Wang Mingdao's 1955 essay *We—For the Sake of Faith*. Sun emphasized that the fundamental reason for refusing to join the "Three-Self" organization lies in differences of faith, and that this does not hinder the church's openness and public visibility. He also pointed out that Wang Mingdao regarded the "Three-Self" Movement as a conflict between

"Fundamentalists" and "Modernists," asserting that the essence of "modernist" was unbelief, and therefore refused any form of union with it. By referencing Wang, Sun made it clear that Shouwang Church's refusal to join the "Three-Self" was not based on practical benefits but was rooted in a firm commitment to preserving pure faith (Sun 2015, p. 29).

It is precisely this refusal to compromise with the "church–state integration" system inherent in the nature of the Three-Self organization, insisting on the inalienable spiritual sovereignty of the church as the Body of Christ, that prompted various house church networks across the country, along with overseas Chinese Christians, to support Shouwang Church. They even issued a public petition to the National People's Congress titled *We—For the Sake of Faith* in connection with the Shouwang incident. The main purpose of the petition was to assert that when the government requires churches to register under the Three-Self system, the church must uphold the principle of maintaining pure and authentic faith. They further explained that their refusal to join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was not an act of defiance against the government, but a matter of fundamental doctrinal difference. Through this petition, they called on the National People's Congress to respect the constitutional right of religious freedom and to cease forcing churches to register or interfering in the church's internal spiritual affairs ("*We—For the Sake of Faith*: A Citizen Petition…" 2011).

Undoubtedly, Shouwang Church's refusal to join the Three-Self organization was not driven by hostility toward the government or by a desire for special privileges, but by the conviction that the church is the Body of Christ and that, in spiritual matters, it should submit directly to Christ's authority rather than to state-imposed structures. In a sense, this emphasis on the inalienability of the church's spiritual sovereignty is a continuation of Wang Mingdao's position in the 1950s: rejecting any "organizational union" while affirming only "unity in the Spirit." However, Shouwang Church took this stance a step further by explicitly declaring that the Three-Self organization is a government-led institution which requires churches to register and accept administrative oversight, thereby subjecting the invisible life of the church to a controllable institutional framework. This, they argued, constitutes an infringement on the church's spiritual sovereignty (Sun 2015, p. 29).

Like Wang Mingdao and the Beijing Christian Assembly, Shouwang Church also faced administrative and public security pressure. However, its statements and actions took place in a relatively open environment under international attention, and its engagement with the government carried stronger legal appeals and a more public character, rather than outright confrontation with the state. In other words, Shouwang Church did not reject

public dialogue; on the contrary, it emphasized interaction with the government, legal professionals, and both domestic and international opinion. Their "non-cooperation" was an expression of religious freedom with civic consciousness, not a denial of the state or social order. Submitting petitions, seeking legal assistance, and publishing open letters all indicated a strategy of "striving for religious freedom within the boundaries of the system." Thus, Shouwang Church's reference to Wang Mingdao's *We—For the Sake of Faith* created communal resonance and reinforced house church identity. Yet, Shouwang's actions went beyond citing an article—they embodied an interpretive tradition of faith. In the public sphere, this helped mobilize national and overseas Chinese churches to recognize and support their cause. This underscores that Wang Mingdao's legacy continues to hold significant symbolic power, providing historical legitimacy and a consciously public articulation of faith for movements seeking spiritual autonomy in the Chinese church. [9]

Similarly, Rev. Joshua Wang of Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, publicly stated in 2015 that Wang Mingdao's essay *We—For the Sake of Faith*, written before his arrest in 1955, is the most important foundational text for the birth of China's house church movement and "a classic manifesto of Chinese Christians' commitment to religious freedom in the 20th century" (Wang 2019, p. 92). Joshua Wang argued that this text is not only a concentrated expression of Wang Mingdao's faith position but also carries both theological and political significance. Theologically, it upholds the absolute authority of Scripture; politically, it rejects any regime's interference in matters of faith, manifesting the transcendence of faith. It was precisely this unwavering stance under "totalitarian pressure" that made this apologetic declaration one of the most outstanding testimonies of faith in the 20th-century Chinese church and laid the spiritual foundation and theological tradition for the house church movement. He further declared that Early Rain Covenant Church sees itself as a direct heir to this faith tradition (Wang 2019, p. 92).

In this interpretation, Wang Mingdao is not merely expressing dissatisfaction with the Three-Self Movement; rather, he is engaging in a theological defense of the church's ontological independence and doctrinal purity under the constraints of totalitarian politics. This positioning transforms Wang Mingdao from an individual into a foundational figure for the construction of a collective identity—providing the theological source for house churches to resist affiliation with the Three-Self system and to uphold

9 For studies on Shouwang Church, several works are available: (Kan 2013, chap. 6; Yuan 2014; Zhu 2015; Yu and Wang 2015; Sun 2022; Gao 2013, pp. 117–154)

congregational sovereignty. Although Joshua Wang argues that Wang Mingdao's refusal to join the Three-Self Movement was not an act of political confrontation but a determination to preserve the transcendence of faith and the purity of the church, he portrays Wang as a representative of the stance that resists political interference in ecclesial life. Joshua Wang explains: "Wang Mingdao did not represent a church tradition that avoids political discussion, but rather a church tradition that declares: *Politics cannot influence my faith.* Whether we speak about politics or remain silent, the purpose is to manifest the transcendence of faith itself. This tradition is one that bears witness to and demonstrates the transcendence of faith and the church in the face of totalitarian politics." (Wang 2019, p. 92) In short, Joshua Wang is not merely conducting historical retrieval; he is actively engaging in interpretation and application to construct the "historical influence" and "spiritual symbolism" of this text as a theological and ideological resource for legitimizing the public identity of the house church movement.

Beyond the public statements and citations by mainland Chinese house churches, the 2015 conference titled "Wang Mingdao and the Rise of the Chinese House Church" held in Vancouver, Canada, provided an important occasion for overseas Chinese Christians to commemorate the 60th anniversary of Wang Mingdao's publication of *We—For the Sake of Faith*. The participants reaffirmed the core theological stance conveyed in this text, regarding it as a shared confession of faith for the Chinese Christian diaspora. They emphasized that this apologetic declaration not only demonstrates the church's unwavering commitment to Christ as the head and the Bible as the ultimate authority, but also represents a categorical rejection of political interference and modernist theology's distortion of the gospel. The text is viewed as the origin and foundation of the spiritual tradition of China's house churches. The conference further underscored that just as Wang Mingdao and others suffered persecution for their steadfastness in truth, today's churches—both within China and abroad—must inherit this uncompromising spirit of faith, resist heresies and the oppression of secular powers, and "remain united in the truth, courageously walking the way of the cross" (ChinaAid 2015). This illustrates that Wang Mingdao's text functions not only as a historical testimony but also as an identity marker for overseas Chinese churches, embodying a cross-generational collective memory of rejecting political control over religious life.

In addition, the U.S.-based Chinese Christian magazine *Chinese Christian Life Fellowship*, since its founding in 1995, has been one of the most widely read publications among Christians in China's house churches. The magazine once published a book titled *A Specimen of the Unbelieving Faction—An Analysis of The Collected Works of K. H. Ting* (Li 2003). This work reaffirmed Wang

Mingdao's criteria and definition of the "unbelieving faction" and drew extensively on his apologetic stance in *We—For the Sake of Faith*, which emphasizes the authority of Scripture and the refusal to compromise on essential doctrines. In doing so, it offered a theological response to K. H. Ting's views and demonstrated that even after half a century, the spirit of "contending earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints" remains alive in certain overseas Chinese churches. This illustrates the profound and enduring influence of *We—For the Sake of Faith* on contemporary Chinese diaspora churches. It also underscores their assertion that the Three-Self Patriotic Movement still carries elements of modernist theology—or what they term the "unbelieving faction." This claim continues to serve as a critical theological foundation and spiritual resource for many house churches Christians in China who refuse to join the Three-Self Patriotic Movement system (Li 2003, pp. 7–9).

From the above, it is evident that within the diverse spectrum of faith in the contemporary Chinese church, the image of Wang Mingdao is far from uniform. When this text was re-appropriated by house church leaders such as Joshua Wang and Sun Yi, as well as overseas Chinese Christian leaders, its role shifted from being merely a theological defense document to being interpreted as a "symbol of faith" and an "identity marker." It became an important basis for house churches to reject the union of church and state and to uphold the independence and spiritual sovereignty of the church. Conversely, within the Three-Self Patriotic Movement system, some discourses interpret Wang Mingdao's *We—For the Sake of Faith* as ostensibly related to the defense of doctrinal purity, but in essence, still regard it as a representative work of "refusal of unity" and "theological narrowness." Therefore, the reception history of Wang Mingdao's text is itself a site of contested interpretations within a field of power. Different church systems interpret Wang Mingdao to legitimize their own stance or assert their superiority. To this day, no single interpretation has formed an uncontested "orthodox" narrative capable of persuading the other side. Rather, these divergent readings reveal that the reception of Wang Mingdao's theological symbol is not merely an act of preserving memory, but also a struggle for meaning, reflecting the persistent pluralism within the Chinese church.[10] This,

10 In contrast to the above interpretations of *We—For the Sake of Faith*, Zhou Zijian of the Brethren Assembly in Hong Kong takes a different approach in his work *We Are Also for the Sake of Faith: Reflections on the Faith Stance of Today's Evangelicals*. By revisiting the spirit of Wang Mingdao's *We—For the Sake of Faith*, Zhou highlights the current faith crisis within contemporary evangelicalism, particularly criticizing the emergence of the "New Evangelical" movement within evangelical churches. He strongly denounces the incorporation of philosophy, psychology, and other

in fact, embodies the existential significance of Wang Mingdao's confession: the text of *We—For the Sake of Faith* continues to live on through its ongoing reading, interpretation, transmission, and debate—an enduring and dynamic process even today.

Conclusion

Wang Mingdao's *We—For the Sake of Faith* is a faith text of profound historical significance in the history of the contemporary Chinese church. Its content and meaning have undergone multiple layers of dialogue, debate, transformation, and re-interpretation throughout the course of history, evolving from a theological document into a powerful symbol and an identity marker, producing far-reaching historical effects. The text's original historical significance lies in its role as a declaration of autonomy by fundamentalist Christians in the 1950s, resisting the encroachment of modernist theology and its push for "unity" that threatened the integrity of the church's faith. In this context, Wang Mingdao sharply perceived that the compromises and modern tendencies of modernist theology were not merely academic disputes, but a deeper danger of the church being fully assimilated under the guise of "unity." For this reason, he explicitly articulated the fundamentalist position, clearly demarcating an unbridgeable line between "true faith" and "false faith."

Thus, in its textual meaning, *We—For the Sake of Faith* first represents the defense of core Christian doctrines by conservative believers, and at the same time voices the resistance of churches striving to maintain their independence and refusing to merge with the modernist camp. Moreover, this text was published in 1955, at a time when the Three-Self Patriotic Movement was advancing aggressively, and churches were under immense pressure for political rectification and self-reform. Wang Mingdao fully understood that making this statement public would inevitably expose him to unpredictable pressures. Nevertheless, he emphasized that Christians must stand firm on biblical truth, even in the face of persecution—demonstrating a form of martyr-like public witness of faith within the life of the church.

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secular elements into theology, arguing that such influences deviate from biblical truth and urgently require the church's serious reflection and repentance. Zhou emphasizes that the church should return to pure biblical faith and reject humanistic ideas from philosophy, psychology, and sociology, in order to discern truth from error. His aim is for the church to continue Wang Mingdao's original apologetic stance and courage. Thus, in Zhou's interpretation, *We—For the Sake of Faith* primarily serves as a warning and critique of the faith crisis within the modern church, underlining the necessity of steadfast adherence to biblical orthodoxy—an essential element of China's evangelical tradition as Zhou understands it (Zhou 2006).

In reality, the debate between Wang Mingdao and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement vividly reveals the fundamental divide within the church at that time regarding how to navigate the relationship between faith and politics. Wang Mingdao sought to clarify that he was not opposing the Communist Party or the government, but rather affirming the independence and purity of the Christian church. However, the Three-Self Patriotic Movement, represented by *Tian Feng* magazine, consistently treated "joining the Three-Self Movement" as the absolute criterion for determining whether a church was patriotic. They uniformly asserted that refusing to join the movement equated to being unpatriotic, and more gravely, to being labeled counter-revolutionary and anti-government. The Three-Self Movement's critical stance and rejection of Wang's text demonstrate the extremely limited space for dissent. Their discourse of condemnation and labeling underscores how political power asserted control over the definition of "patriotism," forcefully intruding into the realm of religion. This dynamic exposes the deep and irreconcilable tension between state ideology and religious freedom in the 1950s.

Thus, under the dual pressure of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM) and the state power behind it, Wang Mingdao's suffering elevated the significance of this text beyond the realm of theological debate. As the TSPM's response gradually shifted from theological discourse to political labeling, portraying Wang as a "counter-revolutionary" and a "hostile force," the handling of the issue through politicization ironically reinforced Wang Mingdao's symbolic status as a non-TSPM figure in subsequent history. His steadfastness and suffering unintentionally established a paradigm for the martyrdom tradition within the Chinese church. Consequently, this text became not only a theological discourse but also a historical testimony that embodied the sharp tension between political persecution and the perseverance of faith. It was transformed into a symbolic language representing the spiritual emblem of Christians refusing to compromise under political pressure. For this reason, it has served as a faith perspective and a practical foundation for some churches in China to maintain their stance of "not joining the TSPM."

As seen in the reinterpretation of this text by China's house churches and overseas Chinese churches after the Reform and Opening period, *We—For the Sake of Faith* was endowed with new historical significance in a contemporary context, becoming an important identity marker and theological basis for unofficial church communities. Wang Mingdao's theological logic in opposing the TSPM continued to influence house churches in mainland China after the 1980s. Their refusal to join the official registration system was not driven by political positions but by a conviction that the church is a community of faith,

and that TSPM-affiliated churches still contain elements of modernist theology—or what Wang termed the "unbelieving faction." Furthermore, they insisted that the spiritual sovereignty of the church as the Body of Christ is non-transferable to any secular regime. As a result, house churches regard Wang's position as a legitimate foundation for defending the independence and purity of faith. Over time, this text was redefined from a theological treatise into a declaration of spiritual resistance. Contemporary house churches such as Shouwang Church and Early Rain Covenant Church have publicly cited Wang's text, demonstrating that it has become a crucial spiritual resource and common language for resisting religious control systems in the public sphere. Its enduring influence is evident.

It is worth noting that the historical status of *We—For the Sake of Faith* is inherently complex, as reflected in the contested interpretations and competing claims over its meaning. The official TSPM system once framed this text as narrow-minded, dogmatic, and even reactionary theological rhetoric, aiming to weaken its influence and undermine its legitimacy as an expression of faith. In contrast, house churches and the overseas Chinese Christian community have reinforced its symbolic role as the "foundational text" marking the birth of the house church movement, interpreting Wang Mingdao as a steadfast exemplar of suffering for Christ. This contest for meaning highlights the persistent and diverse spectrum of church models and theological perspectives within Chinese Christianity. Yet, it cannot be denied that in the reception history of Chinese Christianity, the text also reflects the church's prolonged struggle over the tension between faith autonomy and religious freedom. In other words, *We—For the Sake of Faith* became a classic in the history of the Chinese church precisely because it embodies the struggle of Christian faith under the party-state and its mode of response. From a theological argument addressing a specific historical context, it has evolved into a declaration of faith that transcends its original setting and carries profound symbolic significance. This transformation from text to symbol bears witness to the perseverance and martyr-like spirit within Chinese church history. It also reveals that the state's relationship with religion has fundamentally been about exercising control rather than granting genuine religious freedom, a tension that continues to this day, shaping how Chinese Christians interpret and practice the call of *We—For the Sake of Faith*.

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How Cooperation Drove the Origin and Evolution of Religion: A Literature Review in the Economics of Religion

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Abstract: The use of economic methods to study and explain the origin and evolution of religion has become an important component of the economics of religion. Compared with disciplines such as religious anthropology, psychology, sociology, and phenomenology, economics often focuses more on the role and effectiveness of the earliest religions in promoting in-group cooperation. That is, religion's capacity to enhance cooperation within a group is regarded as the principal driving force behind its origin. In explaining the evolution of religion, economics emphasizes the dynamic strategic interaction between religion and other social factors.

Keywords: Economics of religious, cooperation, origin of religion, evolution of religion

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Introduction

The economics of religion is an emerging discipline that uses economic methods to study religion (Stark 2006; McBride 2023). Generally speaking, contemporary economics can be divided into two research approaches: neoclassical economics and modern economics. Therefore, the economics of religion can also be divided into two types: those based on neoclassical economics and those based on modern economics.

Neoclassical economics constructs a "supply-demand" analytical framework; therefore, when applied to religion, it tends to interpret religion as a special kind of commodity(s), with religious organizations as suppliers and believers as demanders. Concepts widely discussed in the sociology of religion in China, such as "rational choice theory of religion", "religious market theory", and "religious economy" — all derive methodologically from neoclassical economics (Finke & Stark 2003; Lechner 2007). Modern economics, represented by transaction cost theory, new institutional economics, game theory, and evolutionary game theory, has not yet formed a unified theoretical framework and is usually oriented toward concrete problem domains. Furthermore, because religion intersects numerous aspects of society, the research topics and results on religion using modern economics are dispersed across many fields including economics, sociology, political science, ethics, philosophy, linguistics, and biology. Therefore, a comprehensive and systematic review of the economics of religion based on modern economics becomes extremely difficult.

This paper focuses specifically on research in the economics of religion that addresses the origin and evolution of religion. Because the neoclassical economics approach concentrates on supply-demand analysis, related research rarely touches upon the topic of the origin and evolution of religion except in limited involvement of the organizational evolution of religious organizations when discussing church-sect dynamics. Research on religious origins and evolution therefore mainly adopts the approach of modern economics.

One of the greatest achievements of game theory is effectively demonstrating that non-cooperative games can nonetheless yield cooperative outcomes (Zhang 2023, p. 129). Consequently, cooperation has become a crucial topic in modern economics. Given that cooperation is indeed a perpetual theme in human society, this paper examines and analyses research on the origins and evolution of religion within the economics of religion from the perspective of social cooperation (i.e., a game theory perspective).

It should be noted that the relationship between religion and cooperation is bidirectional. Therefore, the economics of religion, based on modern

economics, can explain human cooperation from a religious perspective—that is, explain the mechanism by which religion affects cooperation—and can also explain human religion from a cooperative (or game-theoretic) perspective—that is, explain the origin and evolution mechanism of religion within the context of the complexity and evolution of cooperative forms. In a previous paper, we outlined outlining three mechanisms by which religion affects human cooperation: signaling mechanism, punishment mechanism, and norms internalization mechanism (Peng, forthcoming). This article will review relevant research on the impact of human cooperation on the origin and development of religion.

It should also be noted that, from an evolutionary standpoint, the origin and evolution of religion are almost synonymous. Generally speaking, in these Evolutionary Religious Studies (ERS), religion is viewed as a product of natural selection (or a by-product of certain evolutionary cognitive characteristics), possessing inherent adaptability and capable of enhancing individuals or groups fitness (Wilson & Green 2012). Furthermore, since the forms of human cooperation and their evolution involve numerous factors (such as social scale, war, politics, economics, and cultural institutions), these forms of social cooperation and their influencing factors also shape the evolution of religion.

This paper proceeds as follows: first, we provide a cooperation-based overview of the origins of religion; then, we examine the evolution of religion from the perspective of the relationship between religion and many factors; after that, we analyse religion's interaction with cultural evolution and institutional change; finally, we briefly discuss the evolution of church-sect.

I. The Origins of Religion

Compared with explanations offered by the anthropology of religion, the psychology of religion, the sociology of religion, or the phenomenology of religion, the economics of religion places greater emphasis on the role and effects of the earliest religion（primitive religion） in promoting intragroup cooperation. That is, religion's ability to enhance cooperation among members of a group is regarded as the primary driving force behind the origin of religion (Steadman & Palmer 2008; Wilson 2004). This section primarily presents several arguments proposed by Michael McBride (2023).

1. Earliest forms of religion could enhance cooperation and provide evolution advantages

McBride notes that determining when religion first appeared in human groups is difficult, because we cannot reconstruct the exact conditions under which religion first emerged, and scholarly conclusions continue to shift as

new evidence becomes available. The best currently available evidence traces the emergence of religion to somewhere between 30,000 and 70,000 years ago. This time frame helps us understand the earliest forms of religion, its connection with morality, and its potential role in early human evolution (McBride 2023, p. 295).

There is no evidence that pre–*Homo sapiens* species believed in supernatural beings, engaged in formalized ritual practices, or possessed sacred concepts. Although they did display certain forms of cooperation—such as meat sharing and cooperative breeding—they appear not to have had religious beliefs. Only with *Homo sapiens* did the earliest forms of religion arise, and these forms may have promoted cooperation in the small groups in which early modern humans lived, thereby contributing to the global dispersal of our species. Early *Homo sapiens* were primarily hunter-gatherers, living in small groups of 15–100 genetically related and unrelated individuals. Their social norms enforced economic and social equality. These small-scale egalitarian groups had no formal leaders, group membership was fluid, and social norms were crucial for sustaining cooperation. Such groups did not possess formal institutions capable of enforcing prosocial behavior; the execution of such behaviors depended entirely on group members' ability to identify and punish norm violators. Evidence suggests that religion may have expanded the scope of social cooperation and thus enhanced the evolutionary fitness of groups that possessed religious practices (McBride 2023, pp. 295-296).

McBride identifies three main early religious forms—animism, ancestor worship, and shamanism—and argues that these forms originally spread widely because they provided evolutionary advantages, namely: they strengthened cooperation among those who shared the same religious practices. These religious forms helped create, maintain, and promote cooperative norms within groups, thus improving the evolutionary fitness of participants (McBride 2023, pp. 297-301).

Animism integrated the non-human natural world into human social life. It served to constrain the selfish behavior by individuals or households. Excessive exploitation of natural resources (e.g., overhunting) could jeopardize the group's long-term survival; thus individuals faced a prisoner's dilemma regarding resource extraction. The beliefs and rituals associated with animism played a crucial role in promoting restraint and norms of sharing.

In ancestor worship, the reverence and respect for deceased ancestors (including the careful burial of the dead and the offering of sacrifices) allows ancestors to play a vital role in maintaining social harmony. Generally, ancestors were believed to reward prosocial behavior and punish violators of social norms. These beliefs encouraged cooperation among group members, increased the frequency of intragroup exchanges, and reduced violence.

In shamanism, shamanic practitioners acquired knowledge through interactions with the spirit world to benefit the community. Shamans typically underwent years of training, learning the proper and most effective methods of communicating with the spirits. They might communicate with deceased ancestors to understand their wishes, consult ancestral and animal spirits before hunting expeditions to determine the best hunting locations, or be asked to speak with ancestors on behalf of sick members to determine if the illness is a result of violating social norms. Thus, shamans played a vital role in promoting harmony and cooperation among community members and upholding social norms.

Thus, the evolutionary advantages of these early forms of religion were specific to the small-scale human societies that lacked political and legal institutions. In such environments, any innovation—such as religion—that provided additional mechanisms for promoting prosocial and cooperative behavior conferred evolutionary benefits. Accordingly, religious forms that strengthened cooperation were more likely to survive evolutionary pressure, while those that did not promote cooperation were less likely to persist.

From the perspective of strategic interaction, when actors interact with partners who share the same religious beliefs, they are more confident that the other party will be a trustworthy partner. Therefore, religion can serve as a reliable signal for identifying the type and trustworthiness of others, thereby increasing the likelihood of reciprocal cooperation and improving evolutionary fitness. Furthermore, religion provides a narrative framework for actively teaching prosocial norms within the group, fostering shared knowledge among group members about appropriate behavior for group interactions, thus increasing the probability of cooperation. Ultimately, groups that follow the same cooperative norms and achieve high levels of cooperation will disseminate these cooperative behaviors within the group over time.

2. Questions

McBride acknowledges that the argument that the earliest religions provided an evolutionary advantage also faces some criticism (McBride 2023, pp. 301-302). One criticism is that early religious forms were not always closely linked to morality, and in such cases, some earliest forms of religion may not have offered any evolutionary advantage. Another criticism is that evolutionary pressures vary dramatically across different times and places: in some environments, non-religious social norms are sufficient for evolutionary success; but in others, religion that enhances cooperation has an evolutionary advantage. These criticisms imply that the connection between religion and morality can differ among different hunter-gatherer groups.

McBride points out that neither side in the debate is likely to find conclusive evidence. Many potential forces may have contributed to the success of cooperative forms in evolutionary environments. Although we cannot determine exactly which factors promoted cooperation in humanity's distant past, we can still identify a wide range of factors that may have existed in early human life that facilitated social cooperation.

From an evolutionary standpoint, the origin and subsequent evolution of religion are essentially the same analytical problem. Research on religious evolution across later societies—examining relationships between religion and group size, cooperation quality, social complexity, and competition—can retroactively support explanations for the origin of religion. If early human groups reached a threshold in terms of cooperation scale, cooperation complexity, and intergroup competition, they may have needed to develop certain earliest forms of religion rather than relying solely on nonreligious norms in order to gain evolutionary advantages. In this sense, while nonreligious norms may indeed have sufficed in earlier hominin societies, the emergence of religion among *Homo sapiens* can be understood as a critical evolutionary accelerator. Over time, these early accelerators became internalized into human cognition and social life, enabling religion to occupy a continuous and significant place in human societies. Meanwhile, religious concepts and forms continued to evolve in response to changing cooperation demands.

II. The Relationship Between Religious Evolution and Social Scale

It is widely recognized that the formation and evolution of religious norms (and consequently religions) are highly correlated with the way social groups are constructed and their scale.

1. Social Norms and Social Group Building

In real society, individuals are invariably embedded in a large society with multiple relationships. The relationships between people are not always fixed transactions and repeated games; rather, their cooperation and exchange partners change frequently. In such a complex interpersonal environment, human societies require the development of specific social norms to promote cooperation among members (Zhang 2023, pp. 148-153).

From the perspective of punishment mechanisms, boycott (third-party punishment mechanism) is a social norm. Boycott means that every member of society should act with honesty and cooperation, refrain from deception, and assume a responsibility to punish those who deceive. If a member fails to punish a deceiver, that member will also be punished by others.

Boycott is very similar to the everyday "friend-enemy rule". According

to the rule, everyone begins as a friend, but whether a person remains a friend in the next game depends on their behavior in the previous game: if a member did not deceive anyone and did not cooperate with any of one's enemies, he/she remains a friend; conversely, if the member cheats any friend, he/she becomes a permanent enemy. Intuitively speaking, the friend-enemy rule means that if you deceive anyone, you become the enemy of everyone, given that everyone else follows this rule. The friend-enemy rule can be simplified to: (1) a friend's friend is a friend; (2) a friend's enemy is an enemy; (3) an enemy's friend is an enemy. Bendor and Swistak(2001) proved that if individuals sufficiently value the future, the "friend-enemy rule" is not only a Nash equilibrium strategy but also an evolutionarily stable strategy, meaning that those who adopt this strategy are most likely to survive in social competition, and the evolutionary result is that the whole society becomes a cooperative society.

Another mechanism for maintaining cooperation among people in a large society is "joint liability," in which a group becomes collectively punished for the wrongdoing of any one of its members. Some forms of joint liability arise naturally—for example, those based on kinship, location, or even nationality. However, a large amount of joint liability stems from the organizational design. For example, joining a community organization is equivalent to obtaining a "social seal of approval," a kind of credibility certification, but the misconduct of an individual member can damage the credibility of the community as a whole, thus leading to group punishment.

In modern economics, one way to solve the problem of asymmetric information is to divide society into different organizations or communities whose members bear joint responsibility for one another to a certain extent. In this way, social norms can operate through community norms and industry/professional norms (Zhang 2023, p. 353). Joint boycotts, friend-enemy rules, and joint liability all function similarly.

Thus, the formation and internalization of social norms are linked to the categorization and construction of social groups; that is, social norms and their internalization lead to the distinction between our group and other groups. Simultaneously, the categorization and construction of social groups reinforce in-group favoritism, thus strengthening the internalization of norms within groups. The same logic also applies to religious norms and their internalization, and the construction of religious groups.

2. The Relationship Between Religious Evolution and Social Scale

On the one hand, the construction of social groups results from the development of increasingly large (in a relative sense) societies; but on the other hand, the distinction between our group and other groups also raises the

issue of cooperation between groups, and even the construction of larger-scale social communities. In fact, in-group favoritism and out-group hostility are a possible source of conflict between early human groups (Choi & Bowles 2007). In-group favoritism leads people to show higher prosocial behavior toward members of their own group than toward outsiders (McBride 2023, pp. 305-306). Therefore, as human societies expand into larger and more complex cross-social group communities, social norms and religion need to develop and evolve simultaneously. That is, religious evolution and group-size expansion thus have a mutually reinforcing relationship.

(1) The relationship between the formation of moral religions and group scale

Numerous studies suggest that deities in the hunting era were not particularly concerned with moral issues. For example, ethnologist L. Marshall (1962) observed that among the San people of the Kalahari Desert, "Man's wrong-doing against man is not left to Gao!na's (the name of the local god) punishment nor is it considered to be his concern. Man corrects or avenges such wrong-doings himself in his social context." Similarly, Ara Norenzayan (2013, pp. 121-123) mentions that the Hadza were the last hunter-gatherer society, with a total of about 1,000 Hadza-speaking people scattered across approximately 4,000 square kilometers of territory along and around Lake Eyasi in northern Tanzania, East Africa. The Hadza had a creator god named *Haine* who cares little about human morality.

In other words, while the universal connection between morality and religion is taken for granted in modern world religions, historically this connection emerged quite late. Many scholars attribute this development to changes in social scale.

Robert Wright, in *The Evolution of God* (2009), attributes the rise of religion to its ability to enhance social stability, arguing that religion began to evolve during the transition from hunter-gatherer societies to settled agricultural societies. "This sort of laissez-faire law enforcement is a shakier source of social order in chiefdoms than in hunter-gatherer societies. In a small hunter-gatherer village, you know everyone and see them often and may someday need their help. So the costs of getting on someone's bad side are high and the temptation to offend them is commensurately low. In a chiefdom, containing thousands or even tens of thousands of people, some of your neighbors are more remote, hence more inviting targets of exploitation.....In this phase of cultural evolution—with personal policing having lost its charm but with government not yet taking up the slack—a supplementary force of social control was called for. Religion seems to have responded to the call. Whereas religion in hunter-gatherer societies didn't have much of a moral

dimension, religion in the Polynesian chiefdoms did: it systematically discouraged antisocial behavior.....Believing that anyone you mistreat might haunt you from the grave could turn you into a pretty nice person." (Wright 2009, pp. 55-57)

Nicholas Wade argues in *The Faith Instinct* (2010) that from an evolutionary perspective, religion is a system that emotionally links belief and behavior. In this system, a society negotiates with supernatural agents through prayer and offerings, receiving instructions from them to govern its members. Fear of divine punishment compels them to sacrifice their own interests for the common good. Religion is an evolutionary behavior that prompts individuals to prioritize collective interests over personal ones. It imposes moral intuitions, instilling a deep fear of the consequences of violating these intuitions. In hunter-gatherer religions, all members of society participated equally in interactions with the gods. However, by the Neolithic period, around 10,000 years ago, as the population continued to increase, social hierarchy replaced the egalitarian system of hunter-gatherers. A priestly official class emerged between humans and gods, monopolizing religious rights. This priestly class held supreme power in organizing religious activities, elevating their status through monopolizing contact with supernatural deities. The priestly class became the cornerstone of ancient kingdoms, and the rulers of these kingdoms became theocratic kings (Wade 2010, Chinese translation 2017, pp. 15, 38, 173).

Robert N. Bellah, in *Religion in Human Evolution* (2011), argues that play is crucial in the evolution of religion, and shared intentionality is fundamental to human cooperation. Play cannot exist without shared intentionality; players express their readiness to play, not fight or do anything else, through various means. Ritual evolved from play, requiring shared intentionality and attention. The intention of a ritual is to celebrate the solidarity of the group, attending to the feelings of all its members and probably marking the identity of the group as opposed to other groups. The intensity of the emotions evoked by a ritual leads to what Durkheim called a sense of the sacred. As Johann Huizinga notes, people become aware of "a sacred order of things" in rituals, and Geertz defined religion as providing a model of "a general order of existence" (Bellah 2011, pp. 90-96). It goes without saying that concepts such as shared intentionality, shared attention, sacred order, and a general order are all related to the scale of the social community.

Norenzayan points out even more explicitly that the emergence of prosocial "Big Gods" is a consequence of expanding human groups whose membership increasingly consisted of strangers. He argues that in early small-scale human groups—where relatives and close friends make up the majority—cooperation relies primarily on inclusive fitness and direct

reciprocity. Only when societies expand to include large numbers of non-kin and unfamiliar individuals do prosocial religious norms become necessary. Thus, the rise of large-scale communities and the rise of prosocial, moralizing Big Gods are not coincidental; rather, the latter provides the conditions and possibilities for sustaining cooperation among members of large groups (Norenzayan 2013, pp. 6-8.).

In other words, there is a correlation between the size of a society and the type of deity it worships. Small-scale societies have small gods, while large-scale societies have Big Gods. The power of small gods is limited and localized, unable to extend to other groups. In contrast, Big Gods are often described as omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent, extending to all of humanity rather than being confined to a single local group. It is precisely the emergence of religious communities centered around such Big Gods that enables societies to expand in scale and increase in complexity. Small-scale societies are able to maintain social cohesion without Big Gods because social life occurs primarily within the small group, where repeated interactions and social norms alone are sufficient to sustain prosocial behavior. However, many interactions in large societies are anonymous or infrequent, which necessitates Big Gods to enhance cooperation among people. If an individual's actions are unlikely to be observed or punished, they are more likely to act selfishly. But if they believe in a Big God who can observe all behavior and threaten to punish their selfishness in the afterlife, they are more likely to engage in prosocial activities, even if the probability of such anonymous interactions being observed by other members is low. When more powerful gods emerge—demanding devotion and endowed with the ability to reward moral behavior and punish immoral behavior—society becomes capable of expanding in scale despite anonymity and infrequent interactions (Shariff & Norenzayan 2007; Norenzayan 2013).

Norenzayan (2013, p. 124) further concludes that as human societies evolve from small-scale groups into larger and more complex communities, religion has shown the following evolutionary characteristics: (1) gods have become more and more common from being relatively rare; (2) religion and morality have become more and more intertwined from being basically disconnected; (3) group norms (e.g., prohibitions against deception, selfishness, adultery, and dietary taboos) have gradually strengthened, and the effectiveness of supernatural punishments (e.g., redemption, eternal curses, eternal karma, and hell) has also increased; (4) rituals and other credible displays of belief have become more and more organized, unified, and regularized.

(2) The relationship between formal religion and group size

If a religion possesses organization, unity, and ethical norms, it develops into a formal religion. Among organized religions, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—the three major Abrahamic monotheistic religions—display striking characteristics. All three emerged in the Middle East between 606 BCE and 622 CE, and subsequently spread rapidly and prominently across North Africa, Asia, and Europe, in parallel with the rise of centralized governments. According to Murat Iyigun (2015, pp. 33-35), until the 8th century AD, societies primarily adhering to one of the three Abrahamic monotheistic religions accounted for about 15% population of the Old World; however, by the year 2000, 161 countries worldwide primarily adhered to one or more of the three monotheistic religions, representing 86% of 188 countries and a population of nearly 3.3 billion, approximately 55% of the world's population (Iyigun 2015, pp. 33-35).

Scholars have offered many explanations for the rise of Christianity in the Roman Empire and eventual establishment as the dominant religion of the Western world. The 18th-century historian Edward Gibbon, in his monumental *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, identified five causes for the growth of early Christianity: the devotion and fervent zeal of Christians, Christian doctrines concerning the afterlife, the miraculous power of the early church, the pure and rigorous character of Christians, and the internal unity and discipline of the church. moreover, Roman conquests prepared the ground for and accelerated this process (Gibbon, Chinese translation 2011 Vol.1, pp. 248-249, 303). In 1996, Rodney Stark further argued that the Christian community's compassion and indiscriminate aid during natural disasters (plagues), and their respect for women and infants, were the fundamental reasons for the sustained population growth of Christian communities (Stark 1996, Chinese translation 2005, p. 2).

In *War, Peace and Prosperity in the Name of God (2015),* Iyigun analyses the driving forces behind the development of the three major Abrahamic monotheistic religions. His analysis largely illuminates how monotheistic expansion interacts with social scale, and thereby also sheds light on how other formal religions evolve dynamically with group size. In the book, Iyigun summarizes several common characteristics of Abrahamic monotheism that contributed to the growth in the number and proportion of monotheistic believers (Iyigun 2015, pp. 36-40).

First, there is the scale economy advantage of religious services. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all acknowledge and proclaim the existence of one supreme God. This implies high barriers to entry in the religious market, thus enabling monopolistic power and increasing returns to scale in providing

religious services . For example, research by Eklund et al. indicates that the fixed costs of establishing a religion affect the scale of the faith equilibrium that a society or state can maintain (Ekelund et al.1996; Ekelund et al. 2002). When the cost of establishing a religion is high, state religions are more likely to emerge. Conversely, when multiple gods exist, the barriers to entry into the religious market are significantly lower. When monotheism dominates the market, the cost of entry is relatively high. Potential competitors seeking to enter the medieval religious market faced a formidable challenge: convincing potential adherents that their alternative product was more reliable than that offered by institutions endorsed by an omnipotent God. As long as monotheism possesses scale advantages in the religious market, it is more likely to achieve a monopoly in supplying religious goods within the political system. As a result, monotheistic churches, as widespread and pervasive monopolists in medieval society, possessed a significant advantage in producing the spiritual goods of salvation.

Second, there is accountability cum personalized spiritual exchange. In polytheistic beliefs, multiple gods govern various aspects of secular life, but there is no single deity who controls all aspects of secular and spiritual life. In contrast, monotheistic beliefs involve an omnipotent God who governs the entire universe and expects everyone to fulfill his will, thereby requiring personalized participation and communication. For example, Stark provides a functionalist analysis of the psychological and social effects of monotheism (Stark 2001, pp. 15-19). He argues that the individual accountability to God is a unique feature of monotheism. Because the relationship between God and the individual is both personal and extends to the afterlife, there is a strong purpose of exchange based on personal commitment. In the pursuit of afterlife rewards, people are willing to accept an exclusive exchange relationship, meaning that one can only exchange with a single specific God, and the greater the scope of this deity, the more likely it is to provide afterlife rewards (Stark & Finke, Chinese translation 2004, p. 344).

Third, the existence of an afterlife broadens the timeframe for exchange. Belief in an afterlife is not unique to monotheism, but Final Judgment is unique to the Abrahamic faiths. On that day, individuals must be held accountable for their behaviors before God and receive judgement from God. Essentially, afterlife rewards serve as compensation for an individual's worldly actions and can partially substitute for material goods that might be unattainable in this life. Individuals are accountable to God for their actions in this life, and their rewards are often only received after death. Stark points out that this longer time horizon of exchange relationship "is a major factor allowing godly religions to generate long-term levels of commitment necessary to sustain strong religious organizations" (Stark 2001, p. 19).

Fourth, the belief in a single God provides a motivating factor for resisting external non-believers. Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are all founded on the fundamental belief of "one God and one religion," a dualistic concept known as particularism. Real or imagined external enemies foster cohesion, compromise, and unity within a society. As Karen Armstrong observes, monotheistic beliefs are unique in their mutual exclusion, especially in their insistence on worshiping only *one* God, while polytheism has historically been more tolerant than monotheism; as long as the old sect is not threatened by a new deity, there is always room in the pantheon for yet another deity (Armstrong 1993, p. 49).

Furthermore, Iyigun points out that when competition and conflict are considered, it becomes easier to see that net conversion flows favor monotheism over polytheism. As long as the net conversion probability into monotheism is strictly positive, one can readily demonstrate that, over time, all other faiths will become monotheistic (Iyigun 2015, p. 433).

III. The Relationship Between Religious Evolution and Other Social Factors

In the above discussion, social size has been considered as an influencing or influenced factor in religious evolution (i.e., an independent or dependent variable). However, social size itself is also related to the complexity within society, including social factors such as competition (conflict and war), politics, and economics. Therefore, religion also has a dynamic evolutionary relationship with other social factors.

1. The Evolutionary Relationship Between Religion and War

The relationship between religion and warfare exhibits complex diversity, which has led to divergent findings and conclusions among scholars.

In 1960, L. F. Richardson, using data on more than 300 violent conflicts worldwide between 1820 and 1949, was the first to reveal that religious differences—especially those between Christianity and Islam—were a cause of war. Richardson found that in his statistics, not a single conflict arose because the parties shared the same religion; nor did he find any conflict limited by the differing beliefs of the participants. Instead, conflicts arose and persisted primarily because of religious differences, or were quelled or ultimately contained mainly because the participants were followers of the same religion (Richardson 1960, p. 239).

However, researchers at the University of Bradford in the UK examined 73 major historical wars and found that religion played a particularly important role in only three of them: the Arab Expeditions (632-732), the Crusades (1091-1291), and the Reformation conflicts between Protestants and

Catholics. They discovered that 60% of the wars were completely unrelated to religion (Wade 2010, Chinese translation 2017 p. 235).

In Samuel Huntington's *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order*, he argues that religion is a core characteristic of civilization. He divides the world into several major civilizations: Sinic, Japanese, Hindu, Islamic, Orthodox, Western, Latin American and African (possibly). These civilizations have different histories, languages, cultures, traditions, and, most importantly, different religions. He believes that each society utilizes its religion for its own purposes, and that civilizational conflicts will be the dominant form of future conflict (Huntington 1996, pp. 45-55). However, many scholars and politicians oppose Huntington's assertion.

2. The Evolutionary Relationship Between Religion and Politics

The religious market theory, based on neoclassical economics, argues that government regulation has a significant impact on the development of the religious market (Stark & Finke, Chinese translation 2004, p. 245). However, the dynamic relationship between religion and politics is far more complex than simple religious regulation. For example, Stark, a representative scholar of the religious market theory, has pointed out that it was precisely because the proportion of Christians had continued to rise and become a significant political force that led to Emperor Constantine's Edict of Milan. Therefore, the Edict of Milan was a sensitive response to the situation at the time, rather than the cause of Christianity's dramatic growth (Stark 1996, Chinese translation 2005, p. 2).

In 1960, Guy E. Swanson conducted a study of 50 primitive societies, which was the first attempt to statistically link social structure with beliefs in a supreme god or supreme creator (Swanson 1960). His research showed that belief in a supreme god was correlated to political complexity. More precisely, he discovered and predicted that belief in a supreme god was closely related to the number of "sovereign organizations" in a society. Swanson defined sovereign organizations as stable groups with autonomous decision-making power in certain areas of social affairs. Swanson pointed out that societies that developed belief in a supreme god all exhibited a common characteristic: numerous hierarchical alliances extending from the individual to the outermost level of society. For example, among the Iroquois, the individual is part of a nuclear family, the nuclear family belongs to a household, multiple households reside in a longhouse, longhouses constitute a clan, clans form a tribe, and tribes together make up the Iroquois Confederacy. Swanson noted that the concept of a supreme god emerged when the political coordination of at least two subordinate groups was accomplished by a hierarchy higher than them.

In Jared Diamond's words: "At the end of the last Ice Age, much of the world's population lived in societies similar to that of the Fayu (hunter-gatherer) today, and no people then lived in a much more complex society. As recently as A.D. 1500, less than 20 percent of the world's land area was marked off by boundaries into states run by bureaucrats and governed by laws. Today, all land except Antarctica's is so divided. Descendants of those societies that achieved centralized government and organized religion earliest ended up dominating the modern world. The combination of government and religion has thus functioned, together with germs, writing, and technology, as one of the four main sets of proximate agents leading to history's broadest pattern"(Diamond 1999, pp. 266-267).

In 2011, Bellah argued that religion has been ubiquitous in human societies, and in early history, religion tended to affirm existing political authority. Early religious deities were powerful beings, so people naturally associated them with the secular power held by kings and chieftains. the idea of the divinity of the king persisted, with divinity and humanity merging in the king. The king, whether as incarnation, son, or servant of the gods, is the key link between humans and the cosmos. This characteristic gradually changed throughout ancient societies, only being completely broken down during the Axial Age (Bellah 2011, p. 232).

In 2017, Jared Rubin argued that rulers rely on religion to provide a readily available and low-cost source of political legitimacy. Because governments face high costs in governance—paying salaries to bureaucrats, soldiers, and tax officials while monitoring them to prevent opportunistic behavior—the emergence of moralizing Big Gods expands the scope of human cooperation and punishes misconduct to safeguard group interests. This significantly reduces the cost of governance, and political authority also requires the affirmation provided by such gods (Rubin 2017).

It is clear that religion has been a primary source of political legitimacy since recorded history. But why is religion a natural source of political legitimacy? And how does the relationship between religion and politics evolve? Noel Johnson and Mark Koyama developed a formal model to address these questions in 2013. In this model, legitimacy derived from religion can enhance the state's capacity to tax, and the state's ability to derive legitimacy from religion depends on enforcing religious homogeneity. Therefore, as rulers begin to govern a more dispersed population with diverse religious beliefs, the cost of enforcing homogeneity increases. The model further predicts that rulers' attempts to build state capacity, particularly through the implementation of uniform laws, may increase religious persecution in the short term, but result in greater religious tolerance in the long term (Johnson & Koyama 2013).

In 2019, Johnson and Koyama, building on a review of several related studies, further explored the evolutionary logic of the state, religious tolerance, and religious freedom (Johnson & Koyama 2019). They argued that in a world where religion serves as the primary source of legitimacy, the ruling coalitions of any society consist of both secular and religious authorities, whose relative positions depend on their comparative strengths.

Johnson and Koyama describe the relationship between the state and religion in the premodern era as a conditional toleration equilibrium, arguing that it is a governance mode based on identity rules in contexts of low state capacity. "Identity rules" refer to rules whose form or enforcement depends on the social identity (e.g., religion, ethnicity, or language) of the parties involved. Such rules are ubiquitous because they are a low-cost form of governance; low state capacity and identity rules mutually reinforce each other (Johnson & Koyama 2019).

Rulers govern according to identity rules, where different rules apply to different religious and ethnic groups. These identity rules generate economic rents that help rulers maintain political power. Sometimes, reliance on identity rules leads to widespread religious violence; in normal times, it contributes to peace and a de facto form of religious toleration, but this equilibrium is not genuine religious freedom. For example, the Jewish community has existed in Europe since Roman times. Jews received protection from secular rulers, but they also faced discriminatory laws forbidding them from carrying weapons and sometimes requiring distinctive clothing or badges. Johnson and Koyama also cite evidence from Anderson et al. (2017), showing that the equilibrium of conditional tolerance can collapse under economic pressure. For example, during difficult economic periods, European rulers found it far harder to credibly commit to protecting Jews.

Johnson and Koyama argue that in regimes that rely on religion for legitimacy, the lack of religious freedom is closely linked to the dependence on identity rules. Weak secular authorities depend both on religion as a source of political legitimacy and on identity rules for governance. In particular, lacking the administrative and legal capacity to enforce general rules and ensure equality under the law, they rely on the lowest-cost form of governance: utilizing existing religious or national identity rules. This **conditional toleration equilibrium** has dominated religious affairs in Europe for over a thousand years. It was only after 1500 that continuous social development led to the collapse of the conditional toleration equilibrium. The religious changes brought by the Reformation interacted with developments in military technology and led to the rise of stronger states such as the Dutch Republic, England, and France. The legitimacy of these larger and more powerful states no longer depended on religion. As these states established their own taxation

and law enforcement agencies, they gradually abandoned identity rules and increasingly relied on more universal behavioral rules. This was a gradual process, one that allowed policymakers to see the possibility of an alternative form of government: a secular state, governed by general rules and constrained by the rule of law, rather than justified through religious authority. Attempts to establish governance based on general rules contributed directly to the emergence of religious freedom—which in turn played a crucial role in the rise of liberalism. As Rawls stated, "Liberalism originated in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries; it developed in conjunction with various debates over religious tolerance." (Rawls, Chinese translation 2011, p. 280)

3. The Evolutionary Relationship Between Religion and Economy

Economics is another important factor influencing the evolution of religion, and it is often closely linked to war and politics. Jean-Paul Carvalho and others concluded in 2019 that, undeniably, religion and the state may be the two most important social institutions created by humans. How religion interacts with the political economy of the state is one of the fastest-growing fields in political economy in recent years, with a series of influential studies in theoretical, empirical, and economic history work (Carvalho et al. 2019).

As early as 1975, Ralph Underhill used Murdoch's cross-cultural data to conduct research and showed that belief in the supreme God is related not only to political complexity but also to economic complexity, and that economic complexity is the more important of the two (Underhill 1975).

In 1987, R. D. Alexander proposed his theory of the evolution of morality, arguing that social size, moral systems, and the complexity of social, political and economic organization are all responses to competition with other societies and to maintaining a balance of power among them (Alexander 1987). He points out that human social groups become large because of inter-group competition for habitats and resources. While larger social groups are more successful in such competition, they also face greater pressure toward fragmentation. Moral problems stem from conflicts of interest, and moral systems exist to address inter-group conflicts of interest through the convergence of interests within the group. In this framework, moral systems are described as indirect reciprocity systems, where moral rules are established to impose rewards and punishments to influence social behaviors that help or harm others. Morality unites society and reduces division by limiting violations of the rights of other members . Large, intact societies may have more effective, inviolable moral rules, such as rules in which a moral deity imposes rewards and punishments.

Several cross-cultural analyses support Alexander's idea. For instance, the study carried out by Frans L. Roes and Michel Raymond in 2003 found

that in resource-rich environments—where inter-group competition is more intense—larger-scale societies tend to dominate such environments. Larger societies participate more frequently in external conflicts and are more likely to exhibit the characteristics of belief in moralizing gods (Roes & Raymond 2003).

The dynamic relationship between religion and economics is also reflected in the ability of religious organizations to provide public goods. For example, Johnson and Koyama argue that religious authorities played an important role in all premodern societies largely because they provided public goods that the state could not. A classic example is the Catholic Church in medieval Europe, which provided welfare, healthcare, and education. Because of this, the Church was able to influence believers and encourage obedience to political authorities. They also emphasize that religious organizations excel at providing many public goods because they have developed institutionalized practices, such as strict rituals and rules, which allow them to screen out free riders and address problems of moral hazard and adverse selection (Johnson & Koyama 2019).

4. A comprehensive analysis of religious evolution and various social factors

The above discussion explored the relationship between various social factors such as war, politics, and economics, and the evolution of religion. In actual history, however, these factors are often intertwined and difficult to distinguish from one another. Therefore, related research rarely focuses on a single social factor, as demonstrated above. Indeed, many works aim to integrate multiple social factors into a unified analytical framework. Here, we introduce a multi-actors game-theoretic model constructed by economist Jared Rubin in 2017.

In his book *Rulers, Religion and Riches: Why the West Got Rich and the Middle East Did Not*, Rubin constructs a complex game-theoretic model to explain why religious legitimacy (the legitimacy of political authority derived from religion) varies across different societies. The model analyses the behavioral choices of participants in different environments, starting with the incentives they face in negotiating laws and policies (Rubin 2017, pp. 28-72).

As shown in Figure 1, this model assumes that the universal objective of a society's political authority is to remain in power, and its various agents, based on their respective identities or resource channels, can help the ruler remain in power. Generally, political authority has two means to maintain power: legitimacy and coercion. Correspondingly, the agents who assist the ruler remain in power fall into two categories: legitimacy agents and coercion agents. Coercion agents use violence to drive people to follow the ruler ;

legitimacy agents use legitimacy to make people follow the ruler, that is, to persuade people to believe that the ruler has legitimate power. Both types of agents can bring huge benefits to the ruler, but the latter also has to pay a cost : the ruler must grant them a seat at the bargaining table in exchange for their support. The legal and policy outcomes generated through this bargaining process thus reflect the relative bargaining power and preferences of each participant.

In this game-theoretic model, the participants include three classes of actors: political authorities, all possible agents, and citizens or non-elites. It is important to note that even those agents not actually chosen by the rulers still play a significant role in the game because they represent the external options available to the rulers. Although most policies are the result of bargaining among elites (agents), citizens exert a crucial influence on all parties. Without the support of citizens, rulers cannot remain in power; and if agents lose their influence over citizens, they likewise lose the ability to sustain political authority.

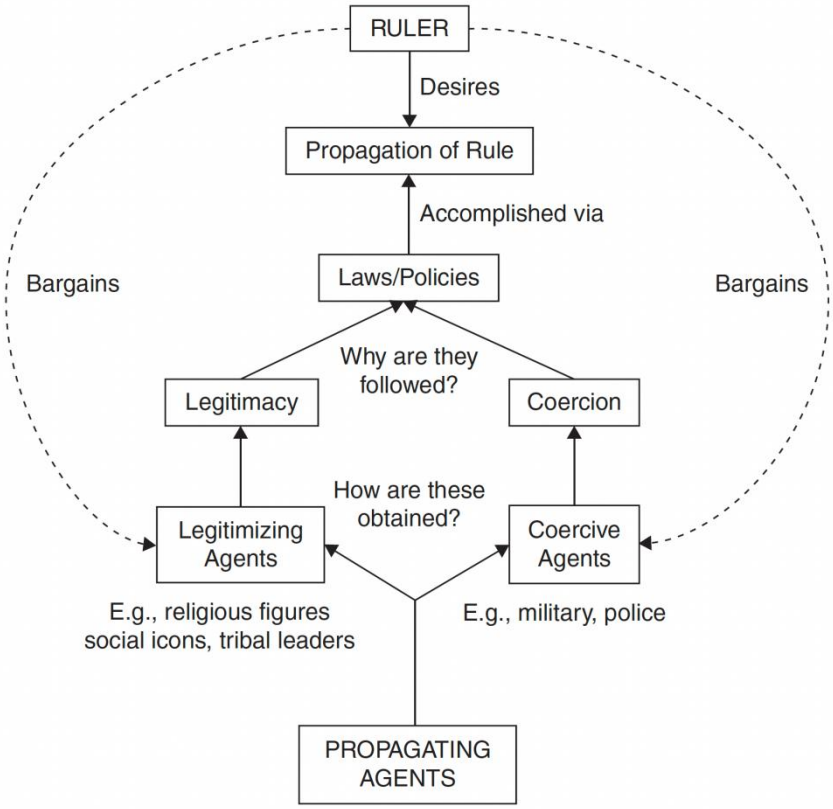

Figure 1: How rulers propagate rule

The objectives of the various participants differ. The ruler's goal is to remain in power. The goals of the agents, however, depend on their identities: military elites typically seek policies that increase military expenditures, promote conquest, or enhance the state's capacity to tax; economic elites

generally support policies that increase their own wealth; and religious authorities usually desire tax exemptions, policies compliant with religious doctrines, and the suppression of rival religions.

All participants must obtain something from their interactions with one another; otherwise, the game cannot proceed. The benefits to rulers are obvious: agents support their political authority and help them remain in power. Agents, in turn, receive the returns they desire. For example, rulers may enforce religious laws or suppress rival religious movements to maintain good relations with religious institutions. Many pre-Reformation European kings acted in this way, assisting the Church in suppressing heresy.

The implementation of policies ultimately depends on the ruler's selection of agents and the bargaining power of these agents. Understanding policy outcomes requires answering several key questions: How many agents does the ruler need to propagate and maintain political authority? Can agents effectively perform these tasks at a relatively low cost? Does the ruler have other good alternative sources of promotion and maintenance? What determines the relative costs and benefits of different laws and policies?

A key component of the game-theoretic model is the external, or exogenous, factors that influence participants' incentives. Among these, the most important factor is social institutions, which constrain human behavior. These constraints shape behavior because they affect the costs and benefits associated with alternative actions. When the rules of the game align religious doctrine with the legitimacy religion provides to the ruler, rulers will be more likely to resort to religion.

Assuming these institutional rules are fixed, all participants tend to form equilibrium behaviors, and the equilibrium outcome is determined by their relative bargaining power.

If agents are highly effective or low-cost, they are in a favorable bargaining position. In such cases, agents can threaten to withdraw legitimacy, depriving rulers of an essential source of political authority. If this threat is credible, rulers will make substantial policy concessions to these agents—even if such concessions reduce the ruler's chances of remaining in power.

The game becomes more complex when the preferences of agents diverge from those of the citizens. In this scenario, rulers must choose between supporting their legitimacy-providing agents and implementing policies that benefit the citizens. When rulers choose to support the policies favored by agents, citizens who violate these policies face "double punishment"—they may be sanctioned both by the ruler and by the legitimacy-providing agents. For example, in Saudi Arabia, any individual who violates legal rules concerning women's behavior may face religious sanctions from clerics as well as imprisonment or fines from the state. This dual punishment diminishes

citizens' incentive to push for such rule changes in the future, creating a cycle where, over time, citizens have little motivation to drive change; once arguments for reform disappear from public discourse, society may even forget that they existed. Consequently, pushing for rule changes may no longer even be a citizen's preference, and rulers and agents no longer need to bargain over such laws and policies because these are not matters of public concern.

Religious legitimacy is especially attractive to rulers because it is inexpensive. Religious authorities have historically been among the most important legitimizing agents. In medieval Europe, for instance, the Catholic Church could transform kings into emperors. When religious authorities possess the capacity to legitimize political rule, rulers will rely on them. In such environments, rulers will lack incentives to change laws in response to changing social conditions if doing so would threaten religious authority. Existing policies are likely to reflect religious doctrines and reinforce the power of religious authorities, who prefers policies aligned with religious teachings because such laws make it easier for them to maintain moral authority among the populace.

Rubin also cites an interesting example provided by Eric Chaney. Chaney's study of Islamic Egypt between the 12th and 14th centuries shows that when the Nile's water level fell far below normal (indicating drought) or rose far above normal (indicating flood), the likelihood that religious authorities would be replaced decreased. These were times of food scarcity, when rebellion was most likely. The benefits of religious legitimacy were greatest under such conditions because religious authorities could discourage people from rebelling. As a result, in years when Nile water levels were unfavorable, religious authorities possessed greater bargaining power in legal and policy negotiations (Chaney 2013).

Rubin argues that although rulers in both Western Europe and the Middle East historically relied on religious legitimacy, their trajectories diverged due to two key factors.

The one factor was the rise of commerce in Western Europe—the so-called "Commercial Revolution." From the 10th to the 13th centuries, economic development and the rise of a new bourgeois class created incentives for European rulers to bring this new class into political negotiations (even if for no other reason than to obtain tax revenue). The rise of bourgeois power was primarily manifested in burgeoning parliaments, at the expense of the Church. However, despite the Middle East's substantial economic advantages over Western Europe in the centuries following the rise of Islam, this political transformation never truly occurred there. Middle Eastern commerce did not weaken the role of religious authorities in legitimizing political rule because

Muslim religious authorities were particularly effective at providing legitimacy. Any action that might undermine it (including bringing alternative sources of legitimacy to the negotiating table) could threaten the ruler's ability to legitimize their rule. In other words, the cost to Middle Eastern rulers of losing religious legitimacy was far greater than that to their Western European counterparts.

Another was the Protestant Reformation. The Reformation spread to England, Scotland, the Netherlands, Scandinavia, and parts of the Holy Roman Empire and Switzerland, making religious legitimacy no longer an option for rulers. Where reformers succeeded, reformed churches replaced Catholicism, and many of these churches were under state control (as in England and Sweden, where the establishment of state churches coincided with the spread of the Reformation). These churches could not provide legitimacy because their discourse was not independent of the state and could not increase credible information about "ruling power." Therefore, rulers tended to resort to parliament to legitimize their rule.

Rubin also emphasized the key difference between religious authority and other types of agencies: religious authority can provide a relatively consistent interpretation over a longer period, which is extremely valuable for rulers. If a large number of citizens openly contradict the religious authority's position on a particular issue, the religious authority will lose credibility and thus its ability to sustain political power. In such cases, the religious authority will have a short-term incentive to update its views, that is, to approach and maintain relevance to the citizens by modifying or reinterpreting its doctrines. However, such reinterpretations impose greater long-term costs: they undermine the very basis of religious authority's power. Over time, those religious authorities with a weaker ability to continue ruling will become more vulnerable. This process may continue until the rulers exclude them entirely from the set of agents used to remain in power.

However, when religious authorities are highly effective at legitimizing political rule, this long-term erosion does not occur. In such cases, citizens are unlikely to disobey religious commands or challenge religious authorities, because doing so would incur extremely high costs. Therefore, religious authority never faces pressure to reinterpret doctrines. This means that the legitimizing relationship between religious authorities and rulers is strengthened over time.

IV. Religious Evolution, Cultural Evolution, and Institutional Change

Religious evolution is also connected with cultural and institutional changes. This section outlines the analysis model of the joint dynamics of culture and institutions proposed by Alberto Bisin and his collaborators, as

well as its extended model.

1. A Joint Dynamics Model of Culture and Institutions

In 2019, Bisin and coauthors used the analytical approach of joint dynamics between culture and institutions to explored the phenomenon that religious power leads to changes in the institutional power structure among political elites, religious clergy, and civil society in the context of religious legitimacy (Bisin et al. 2019).

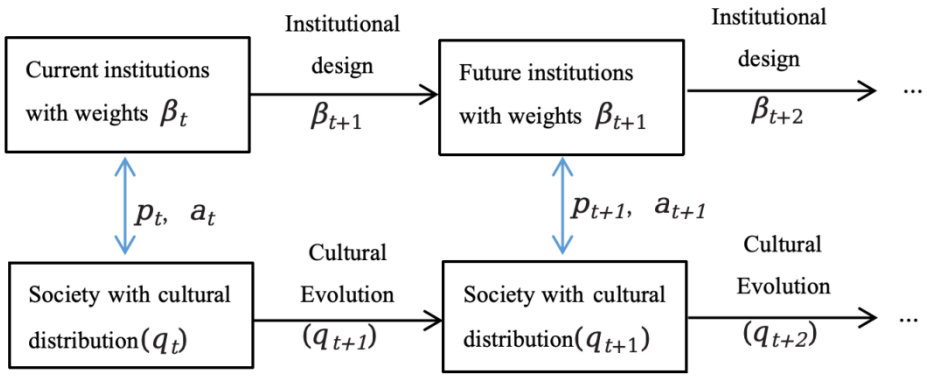

Figure 2: Joint dynamics of culture and institutions(I)

As shown in Figure 2, at a given time *t*, a society's cultural environment can be described as the distribution of groups characterized by different cultural traits, denotedq_t; A society's institutions (or institutional design) can be described as the distribution of institutional weights assigned to different cultural groups, denoted β_t. Let denote a_t the set of individual behavioral choices available to all citizens, and p_t the set of possible social policy choices.

Over time, institutional system at t evolves dynamic from β_t into the one at *t*+1, β_{t+1}; similarly, the cultural profile of society q_t evolves over time, driven by cultural diffusion and social selection processes within and across generations and influenced by the status of the institutional system, β_t. This is the joint dynamics of culture and institutions.

The joint dynamics of culture and institutions may reinforce or hinder specific socio-economic equilibrium patterns. A typical scenario operates as follows: when a society experiences an external shock whose externalities or political consequences become highly salient, the shock triggers institutional responses aimed at internalizing these externalities or selecting new policies. Consequently, political groups that benefit more from policy changes gain greater institutional weight. In this case, when the strength of the institutional response is positively correlated with the distribution of the group's cultural characteristics, and the policy change also positively impacts the group's

incentives, the two become complementary. During such institutional transitions, groups capable of securing more political power through institutional responses also see their cultural traits disseminated more widely. The broader diffusion of these cultural traits further increases the likelihood of future institutional changes that enhance the group's political power, thereby facilitating the resolution of externality problems. Over time, the dynamic development of institutions and culture reinforces each other, playing a dynamically complementary role.

Under the framework of religious legitimacy, religious actors (including clergy and believers) constitute part of the institutional-weight distribution, and religious culture forms part of the cultural distribution. The basic principles through which religion drives the co-evolution of institutions and culture can be summarized as follows: (1) Religious legitimacy can help (secular) elites solve political and economic problems related to policy implementation; in turn, this will trigger institutional changes and transform the distribution of political power between elites and religious figures. (2) The ability of religious actors to help elites implement policies depends fundamentally on how religious values are spread in society. Therefore, institutional changes related to legitimacy depend on a society's cultural characteristics concerning religious beliefs and values. (3) The spread of religious values will be promoted by institutions that grant clergy more political power. Likewise, the institutional system reflecting the power structure between elites and religious clergy will also significantly shape the cultural spread dynamics of religious values among the population.

The above framework can explain the emergence of two distinct types of societies: the first is the strong religious state, characterized by the widespread dissemination of religious norms and influential clergy capable of imposing religious constraints on the population, thereby helping political rulers seize power (ultimately at the expense of economic efficiency); the second is the secular state, where religious norms are not widely disseminated, the clergy gradually lose the economic and political influence, and civil society (merchants, workers, or the masses) ultimately gains control over production and redistribution.

Interestingly, the joint evolution of religious values and institutions largely depends on initial conditions. When religious values initially spread widely in society, institutional evolution tends to steadily increase the political power of clergy. In fact, when religious values are widely disseminated, granting clergy greater power is the most effective mechanism for reducing policy choice problems and externalities. Conversely, institutional changes that empower clergy further reinforce religious values and ultimately strengthen the ability of political elites to seize power. Alternatively, when

religious values are not initially widespread, institutional changes gradually weaken the power of both clergy and political elites, while the religious character of society diminishes.

Furthermore, the influence of a ruler's initial political power on institutional evolution also depends on the nature of the externalities arising from the social policy bargains among social groups. A powerful political elite, suffering from a lack of commitment and resulting in severe inefficiency, may find it particularly beneficial to reduce inefficiency by delegating some power to religious clergy, thereby strengthening policy assurances. Simultaneously, a powerful political elite may also address their governance issues using means beyond those provided by religious clergy, thus eliminating the need to delegate power to them.

2. Extended Model

In 2024, Bisin and coauthors (with the addition of Rubin) constructed a more refined model to examine how religious legitimacy, religious prohibitions, and limited governance shape the interdependence between a society's institutions and culture (Bisin et al. 2024). This model can be understood as an extended model built upon the joint dynamics model of culture and institutions, incorporating the Rubin model.

This model identifies three fundamental elements of the socioeconomic environment. The first element concerns the role of religious legitimacy in institutional design. The religious services provided by clergy shape the moral beliefs of civil society. Crucially, religious authorities can leverage this influence to legitimize rulers—embedding obedience to political authority within the broader moral obligations of the faith they promote. The second element is the trade-off between religious legitimacy and religious prohibitions. Clergy demand the enforcement of religious prohibitions (such as usury laws), but these prohibitions often ultimately suppress economic activity. The third element concerns the role of secular elites and limited governance in enhancing state fiscal capacity. Limited governance refers to the decentralization of power from the ruler to secular elites who wield fiscal power through the tax system.

This model analyses how power structures dynamically change when rulers, clergy, and secular elites establish institutions within a religious setting. Most importantly, it also emphasizes and analyses how institutional and the cultural transmission of religious beliefs interact when the relative dynamic power of rulers, clergy, and secular elites shifts over time.

In period *t*, the power distribution among different social groups is as λ_t. for simplicity, the relative power of the ruler is fixed at 1/2; the weight of clergy in influencing social choices is $\lambda_t/2$; and the weight of civil society is

(1-λ_t)/2. The distribution of religious and secular populations is q_t, with higher values indicating a higher proportion of religious populations. The efficiency of clergy in granting legitimacy to the ruler is θ, where legitimacy primarily focuses on the legitimacy of taxation. The strictness of religious prohibitions on economic activities is $\emptyset$.

(1) Institutional Dynamics. Institutional change refers to the changes in institutions that each generation brings about, which determine the relative power to be delegated to clerics and civil society in the future. that is , the choice of $\lambda_{t+1}$is from the point of view of the social welfare function with weight λ_t. at the end of each period *t*, λ_{t+1} is re-selected through the maximization of a social welfare function that include λ_t.

From the perspective of all participants at any given point in time, institutions are exogenous; however, they change over time to reduce externalities associated with policymakers' decisions. Institutional change from period *t* to period *t*+1 internalizes two externalities that are ignored in the optimal decision-making process of the Nash equilibrium at period *t*. The first externality is that religious products conferring legitimacy to the ruler, can lower the perceived tax rate among the religious population. That is, the stronger the ruler's legitimacy, the higher the acceptable tax rate for the people. The second externality is that religious products imposing prohibition inhibit labor productivity. Therefore, increasing the supply of religious products not only affects the utility of clergy but also further impacts the utility of the ruler and citizens.

The first conclusion drawn from this model is that solving the optimal social welfare function (details omitted here due to the complexity of the function and its variables) yields a unique optimal solution λ_{t+1}. This optimal solution is characterized by a threshold for population distribution $\bar{q}(\lambda_t)$ such that: $\lambda_{t+1} > \lambda_t$, if $q_t > \bar{q}(\lambda_t)$. It means the current religious population distribution exceeds this threshold, then the weight of clerics in the ruling power will increase in the next period, and vise versa. The threshold $\bar{q}(\lambda_t)$ decreases as the efficiency of religious legitimacy θ increases and increases as the intensity of religious prohibitions $\emptyset$ increases. When clergy can effectively legitimize the ruler (higher θ) , the ruler finds it beneficial to delegate power to clergy, lowering the threshold $\bar{q}(\lambda_t)$ and expanding the potential for clergy empowerment λ_t; Conversely, when the intensity of religious prohibitions increases, the cost for the ruler to acquire resources through religious legitimacy increases, increasing the threshold $\bar{q}$ and lowering the potential for clergy empowerment λ_t ; When religious prohibitions are more unsatisfied among the secular population than among religious believers, the threshold $\bar{q}$ decreases.

(2) Cultural Dynamics. Cultural dynamics refers to the purposeful

intergenerational transmission of cultural traits. It is achieved through the socialization influence of parents on their children (vertical transmission) and the imitation of the entire society (oblique transmission). Religious and secular families, in maximizing their respective cultural characteristic transmission utility functions, will choose the optimal level of socialization effort that matches their own circumstances. The difference in effort between religious and secular families is the relative "cultural fitness" of the religious trait which determines the population distribution q_{t+1} at time *t*+1 .

Given the complementarity between religious legitimacy and religious values, the model draws a second conclusion: there exists a threshold $q^*(\lambda_t)$ such that $q_{t+1} < q_t$, if $q_t > q^*(\lambda_t)$. If the current religious population distribution exceeds this threshold, then the religious population distribution in the next period will decrease, and vise versa. The reason is that when q_t is high, parental effort will decreases, leading to a decrease in the "cultural fitness" of religious characteristics. Therefore, $q^*(\lambda_t)$ is the optimal solution when the cultural fitness equal to 0. Above (or below) this threshold, the proportion of religious individuals q_t shrinks (or expands) toward $q^*(\lambda_t)$, moving in the direction of convergence.

The threshold $q^*(\lambda_t)$ increases with θ and λ_t increase and decreases as $\emptyset$ increases. The extent to which the threshold $q^*(\lambda_t)$ depends on the institutional environment λ_t and on the parameters θ and $\emptyset$ is determined by how these features affect religious cultural fitness. For example, the institutional environment λ_t affects cultural adaptation through two pathways: it affect the utility of parents derive from cultural transmission preferences and it affect the role of religious infrastructure as a supplementary investment in household socialization. Both pathways shape how parents transmit cultural traits to their children. In both cases, an increase in λ_t enhances the propagation of religious cultural traits, thereby raising the threshold $q^*(\lambda_t)$.

(3) Various Scenarios. Figure 3 illustrates various scenarios of the joint dynamics of culture and institution:

A. Stable states: Point A and Point B. Point A is the first stable state, which can be described as a religious polity: the rulers are legitimized by religion, clergy have significant decision-making power (λ_t is very high), taxes are high, and the civil society is religious (q is very high). Point B is the second stable state, which can be described as a secular polity: the rulers are not legitimized by religion, clergy have almost no political power (λ_t equals to zero), taxes are limited, and the civil society is secular (q is very small).

B. Monotonic convergence paths: Regions I and IV. In these two regions, cultural and institutional dynamics are complementary. Taking Region I as an example, on the one hand, clergy provide religious services to civil society,

which shape the moral beliefs of civil society and support the moral obligation to obey the rulers, thereby lowering the perceived tax rate of the religious population. Therefore, the institutional design of the rulers delegating power to clergy （high λ_t） strengthens the incentive for the religious population to transmit their religious values, which further increases the relative share of the religious population. On the other hand, the larger the religious population, the stronger the political motivation for the rulers to decentralize power to clergy to increase legitimacy. Therefore, this complementarity subsequently generates a drive toward a religious regime (point A). Similarly, Region IV generates a drive toward a secular regime (point B). Therefore, the complementarity between cultural and institutional dynamics will lock society into one of two stable equilibria.

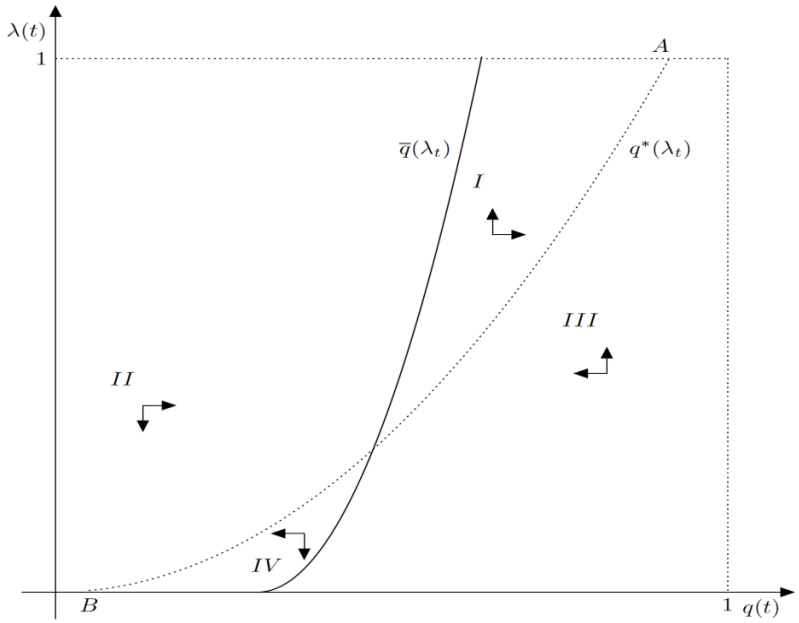

Figure 3: the joint dynamics of culture and institutions(II)

C. Non-monotonic convergence paths: Regions II and III. In these two regions, cultural and institutional dynamics are not complementary, thus the society is not monotonic; instead, a race occurs between them. The "winner" of this horse race will determine which stable equilibrium will emerge in the long run. For example, in Region II, the religious population is insufficient (lower q_t) and λ_t decreases over time. At the same time, the religious population invests more in direct socialization. Depending on the rate of institutional change relative to cultural change, the joint dynamics of the two can propel the society to Region I or IV. When the religious population grows rapidly while the political influence of clergy declines over time, Region II may generate a temporary path to equilibrium point A (i.e., first to Region I).

This could occur because religious parents, as a minority, have a greater incentive to pass on their religious cultural traits to their children. In this case, when the religious population becomes large enough at some point that the decline in institutional change λ_t is reversed, the political power of religious clergy starts regaining political power after a transitional period. In Region III, the religious population is large enough that the political power of religious clergy increases over time, but the religious population is so large that the secular population invests more in its socialization. Again, depending on the relative speeds of institutional and cultural evolution, joint dynamics may reach Region I or Region IV. If the rate of decline in the religious population outpaces the rate of increase in religious power, the joint dynamics can be expected to reach Region IV. In this case, the religious population becomes so small after the transition period that the political influence of clergy declines over time, and equilibrium point B is achieved in the long run.

Using this model, researchers attempt to provide a general approach to explain how the interaction between institutions and culture shapes social change and determines institutional trajectories. Specifically, this approach may be seen as "an illustration of the explanatory power of a class of models centered on some simple, general, and yet minimal components: i) institutions as reflective of the relative political power of different groups in society to affect policy decisions, ii) institutional change as a mechanism to internalize externalities and other distortions characterizing the equilibrium, iii) the cultural profile of values and preferences in society as evolving according to socioeconomic incentives." Researchers also hope that this methodology can serve as a stepping stone for future theoretical and practical research.

V. The Evolution of Churches and Sects

In the study of religious organizations and beliefs, church–sect theory is perhaps the most important mid-level theory offered by the sociology of religion (Swatos 1998, p. 90). The terms "church" and "sect" are not only used to classify religious groups, but also to develop theories to explain the changing forms of religious groups over time.

The classic church–sect theory established in the early twentieth century by H. Richard Niebuhr remains one of the most influential frameworks for studying religious organizations. In his 1929 work The Social Sources of Denominationalism, Niebuhr viewed "church" and "sect" as two poles of a continuum of religious organization, rather than simply as discrete categories. He not only categorized groups based on relative sectarian or church similarities but also analysed the dynamic historical processes through which organizations move along this continuum, thereby describing the rich pathways connecting churches and sects (Niebuhr 1929).

Subsequently, the theoretical community shifted the focus of church-sect theory from comparative analysis tools to classification systems, applying sociological terminology to religious organizations and generating many complex types. Howard Becker developed four types: cult, sect, denomination, and ecclesia. J. Milton Yinger further expanded this to six: cult, sect, established sect, denomination, church, and universal church, and further subdivided sects based on their relationship with the social order—whether they accept, avoid, or attack the social order (Swatos 1998, p. 91). Regarding sectarian types, the four types proposed by Bryan R. Wilson in 1959—Conversion, Revolution, Introspection, and Gnosticism—remains the most enduring (Wilson 1959).

However, Stark and Bainbridge pointed out that much sociological interest in church–sect distinctions originated from the analysis of religious movements, yet typological classification often hindered theoretical development (Stark & Bainbridge 1979). This section primarily introduces the evolutionary study of church-sect.

1. The Evolution of Church-Sect from the Perspective of Tension

In 1961, Benton Johnson rethought church-sect theory, abandoning dozens of static classifications defined by various related factors. Instead, he proposed a single dimension: acceptance or rejection of the surrounding social environment. A church is a religious group that accepts its social environment; a sect rejects it. He proposed a tension axis, arguing that religious communities are a continuous unity along this axis, ranging from complete rejection to complete acceptance (Johnson 1961).

This new thinking has profoundly influenced religious market scholars, represented by Stark and his collaborators. Stark and Finke define tension as the degree of distinction, separation, and antagonism between a religious group and the "outside" world. Large churches are religious groups with relatively low tension with their social environment, while sects are religious groups with relatively high tension (Stark & Finke, Chinese translation 2004, pp. 178-181). Tension can be observed along two dimensions: the extent to which a group violates the general behavioral norms of society, and the extent to which its behaviors or characteristics attract the contempt or punishment of powerful secular elites (Stark 1996, Chinese translation 2005, p. 58). High-tension religious groups are clearly different from the value and behavioral systems of society dominated by elites. Therefore, tension is a cost for religious groups, representing the loss of secular opportunities. For religious groups to survive and develop, they must demand returns commensurate with these costs. The higher the degree of tension between a religious group and its surroundings, the more exclusive, profound, and costly the commitment

required. For consumers, the degree of commitment represents cost. Commitment to a highly committed religious group means paying high material, social, and psychological costs. The consumer's reward lies in the higher quality of religious products offered by such groups.

Niebuhr once pointed out that, over time, successful sects tend to reduce their tension with society, thus transforming into large churches. However, this can also lead to schism, as dissatisfied members break away to form new denominations (Niebuhr 1929).

Stark and Finke further use the concept of religious tension to explain long-term church–sect dynamics. They argue that religious movements can be either church movements—where religious groups move toward reducing tension — or sect movements — where religious groups move toward increasing tension. Most religious groups begin with a relatively high tension, with growth concentrated in high-tension groups. However, growth can also lead to a decrease in tension within the group and thus lowers commitment among its members. Similarly, a religious group in a state of declining low tension will shift toward higher tension to obtain greater religious rewards. Both tranformations occur simultaneously (Stark & Finke, Chinese translation 2004, pp. 175-206).

Religious groups with varying degrees of tension correspond to the religious needs of different groups. Stark and Finke introduced the concept of "niches"[1] that borrowed from economics, referring to potential believers with shared religious preferences (needs, interests, and expectations). The religious market can be divided into six niches: ultra-liberal, liberal, moderate, conservative, strict, and ultra-strict. Moderate and conservative niches, corresponding to moderate tension, are the largest and have the most potential believers. Each niche is served by specific religious organizations. For example, Unitarian Universalists and Reform Judaism serve ultra-liberal niche, while Amish and Benedictine monks serve ultra-strict niche. As tension between religious groups and the outside world changes, it attracts and serves believers in different niches. During the transition from sect to church, as tension decreases, the religious group leaves its original base niche and attracts larger niches, thus increasing its size. If religious groups in moderate niches continue to lower their tensions, they will drift away from this larger location and cease to grow. If the church abandons its original location, it becomes vulnerable to schism in serving members who prefer high tensions (Stark & Finke, Chinese translation 2004, pp. 237-267).

[1] In a market economy, niche refers to a segment of the market comprised of a specific group of consumers.

2. The Evolution of Church-Sect from the Perspective of Generational Transformation

The tension-based approach to church-sect evolution is characteristic of neoclassical economics. Furthermore, McBride developed a simple dynamic model to explain the long-term evolution from sect to church (McBride 2023, pp. 242-257). This model employs a dynamic perspective of intergenerational evolution, a research approach common in modern economics.

The dynamic model makes the following assumptions: (1) Religious groups have three levels of strictness: low, medium, and high; (2) Members of each generation are replaced by children born into the same religious group in the next period; (3) Each person gains the greatest benefit from the group whose strictness is closest to their ideal strictness; (4) Each child's social class is drawn randomly; (5) the most "elite" members choose the group's strictness ; (6) If no religious group matches an individual's ideal strictness, people can establish a new religious group at no cost; (7) The system starts from a starting state called the initial condition. Changing the initial condition will change the dynamical path. once we start the system, several steps are followed in each time period. Step 1 is that the elites in the group determine the group's strictness. Step 2 is that each individual gives birth to a child and then dies. Each child is born into their parent's religious group. Step 3 is that each child reaches adulthood and makes their affiliation decision. Each individual can stay in their parent's group, switch to another group, or form a new group. Step 4 is that each individual gains member benefits from their affiliation decision. After Step 4 is finished, a new period begins, and the steps repeat.

The dynamic model suggests that additional conditions are required for the classic sect-to-church cyclical pattern. One crucial condition is that individuals must be moderately bound (i.e., a moderate amount of religious capital). If the ties are too weak, dissatisfied members will leave immediately, preventing a sect-to-church transition; if the ties are too strong, then the elites enact the sect-to-church transition, but dissatisfied members never leave to establish a new sect. Other conditions include social mobility, the control of elites and leaders, and barriers to new group formation. If intergenerational social mobility among group members is limited, if social elites cannot control group decisions, or if the cost of forming new groups is too high, then the classic cyclical prediction is unlikely to occur.

Conclusion

In summary, the economics of religion, employing modern economic theory and methods, has achieved significant insight into the origins and evolution of religion. It is evident that, from the perspective of modern

economics, the origins and evolution of religion are inextricably linked to human cooperation and its evolution; as a product of human society, religion itself evolves in ways that adapt to evolving individual and group cooperation. Consequently, the factors influencing religious evolution are extremely complex and diverse.

It must be acknowledged that the economics of religion is still developing and advancing rapidly, and related research is increasingly becoming the frontier of interdisciplinary scholarship; this article offers only a brief and necessarily incomplete overview of existing research on the origin and evolution of religion from a limited perspective.

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Why Magic Still Dwells?:

A Historical Overview of the Methodologies in the Comparative Study of Religion

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Abstract: The comparative study of religion has long occupied an uneasy position between claims of academic rigor and charges of subjectivity. Since its nineteenth-century origins in the comparative philology initiated by Max Müller, comparison has been alternately defended as the methodological core of religious studies and dismissed as an intellectual construct imposed by scholars. This thesis provides a historical and critical overview of the major comparative methodologies adopted by representative East–West comparative scholarship in the past five decades and asks why comparison continues to exert theoretical appeal despite persistent skepticism about its coherence. Engaging with scholars such as Robert Neville, Lee Yearley, Yao Xinzhong, Aaron Stalnaker, Julia Ching, David Hall, Roger Ames, and Michael Puett, the thesis analyzes their strategies for negotiating emic and etic perspectives, historical context, and conceptual translation. The discussion begins with Jonathan Z. Smith's rejection of Mircea Eliade's archetypal and universalizing categories. While Smith's critique is often interpreted as a challenge to the legitimacy of comparison itself, this thesis argues that it instead opens a space for methodological renewal. The thesis then examines the emergence of a "new comparativism" in response to Smith, especially in the work of William Paden and Kimberley Patton, which reconceives comparison as reflexive and heuristic. Finally, this thesis argues that comparison entails both promise and risks, including decontextualization, analogical overreach, and the theological instrumentalization of religious objects and ideas. Hence, this thesis concludes that no single methodology can resolve the inherent tensions of comparison. Nevertheless, it is suggested that a viable comparative study of religion requires careful selection of categories, sensitivity to historical and cultural contexts, and a sustained balance between similarities and differences. If comparison remains "magical," it is because it demands epistemic humility—the condition under which its power becomes self-restrained and intellectually responsible.

Keywords: Comparative Religion, Comparative Theology, New Comparativism, Jonathan Z. Smith, East-West Comparison

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Introduction

The comparative study of religion is inherent to the nature of religious studies as a *sui generis* discipline. The field's predecessor, Max Müller, once said: "He who knows one, knows none." (Müller 1893, p. 13) Although his argument stemmed from the perspective of comparative philology, he set the tone for religious study to become truly scientific. Unsurprisingly, there have been counterarguments that doubt how one tradition has anything to do with another and whether the comparative study of religion is only an illusion. Jonathan Z. Smith is an exemplary critic who is skeptical about the viability of comparison, which he regards as the artifact created by the comparativists. The Chinese master of military strategy, Sun Tzu, says, "If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles" (Sun 2014, p. 17). Drawing from Sun Zi's wisdom, I believe that a religion scholar must learn from the critique of comparativists to reflect upon the methodologies of comparativists and save the comparative study of religion.

Hence, my essay treats Smith's challenge of comparative study of religion first, especially the schematic and problematic categories used by Mircea Eliade in his analysis of religious patterns. Then, I turn to William Paden's frame of comparison and Kimberley Patton's new comparativism to demonstrate how they responded to Smith's criticism and defended the comparative study. Later, I use Robert Neville's theoretical framework of comparative theology as a transition to scholars who have a particular interest in comparing the East with the West. Starting from Lee Yearley, Yao Xinzhong, and Aaron Stalnaker who focused on either key terms or key figures in comparing two traditions, I discuss Julia Ching and John Berthrong who shared the drive of syncretism between Confucianism and Christianity informed by their different theological interests. I also include David Hall and Roger Ames who advocate a comparative philosophy and philosophy of culture to connect Confucius with Western society. Ultimately, I touch upon Michael Puett's methodology of contextualizing texts against the reading of Confucius by Hall and Ames. Cautiously speaking, none of the methodologies I mentioned above is perfect for conducting the comparative study, but at least all of them offer valuable inspiration for exploring the new direction for the comparative study of religion in a postmodern and post-secular age.

I. Jonathan Z. Smith against the Comparative Study of Religion

The comparative study of religion centers on similarities and differences among various traditions. Jonathan Z. Smith rejects the simple pursuit of similarities between religions as he ridicules comparativists such as Eliade who hypothesized the existence of a comprehensive system of every religion

that consists of the sacred and different levels of manifestation. Smith fears such a comparative tendency leaning toward correspondence between traditions would lead to the superficial and even incorrect association of things on the surface without preserving the uniqueness of each religion and differences between the comparands. He cautions against the association of the collection of similarities in comparative study, as the law of association is contiguity. (Smith 1982, p. 21) He shares his reading experience of Eliade and criticizes the latter for his "un système cohérent behind the various manifestations and hierophanies" (Smith 1971, p. 84) In Smith's eyes, the problem lies in the archetype of "hierophanies from the most elementary to the most complex" in Eliade's arrangement of materials, which was assumed to "preexist any particular manifestation" (Smith 1971, p. 84). For Smith, the presupposition of *Homo religiosus* is at best a hypothesis, which cannot constitute an objective standard for similarities. Moreover, the coherent system proposed by Eliade in Smith's opinion is the recreation and reconstruction of religions with scholarly endeavor but does not necessarily reflect the essence of religions in comparison. According to Smith, Eliade assumed the interconnectedness between myths and rituals across time and space in terms of the possibility of repetition and correspondence. (Smith 1993, pp. 308-309)

Eliade lays out his phenomenological approach to religion, which hinges on "the analysis of each group of hierophanies, by making a natural division among the various modalities of the sacred, and showing how they fit together in a coherent system" (Eliade 1996, p. xiv). However, Smith mocks Eliade's "fitting economy" because he finds Eliade's comparative study is self-restraining (Smith 1971, p. 85). Smith points out that the "limited number of systems or archetypes" straitjackets "an infinite number of manifestations" (Smith 1971, p. 85). In other words, the binary models adopted by Eliade such as sacred vs. profane and mana vs. taboo cannot exhaust all classes of hierophanies. Smith suggests that the comparative study of religion with a global scope should not be confined by a fixed framework offered by Eliade. Specifically, Smith attacks Eliade's archetypes as transcendent models that "do not take historical, linear development into account" (Smith 1971, p. 85).

On the contrary, Eliade objects to taking historical or linear development into account as he believes it rests on the highly unwarranted "presumption of an evolution in the religious phenomenon, from the simple to the complex" (Eliade 1996, p. xii). Instead, he aims at "seeing just what things are religious in nature and what those things reveal" (Eliade 1996, p. xii). Yet, Smith has reservations about whether Eliade's comparisons between the pattern and manifestation only arrive at "the degree of manifestation and its intelligibility" so the latter only translates religions onto a cosmic map that is already

prescribed by categories or archetypes suited to display their similarities. Smith is sober about religion as "a distinctive mode of human creativity, a creativity which both discovers limits and creates limits for humane existence" (Smith 1993, p. 291). Furthermore, he acknowledges that studying religion entails "the variety of attempts to map, construct and inhabit such positions of power through the use of myths, rituals and experiences of transformation," but he is still concerned with the abusive use of interpretive or the mapping power of the comparativist (Smith 1993, p. 291). Smith is not completely against comparative study but worries about its lack of coherent rules. Consequently, it would be too creative to sketch religion out of one's imagination in comparative study.

Smith doubts whether comparative study would lose its explanatory power and its validity as science as it slips into the performance of magic by the comparativist. He dismisses the idea that the comparative "procedure is homeopathic" and its "theory is built upon contagion" (Smith 1982, p. 21). Similarities found between religions are not discoveries but inventions for Smith if the study is less methodological than impressionistic. He worries that the incongruities between religions are overshadowed by the phenomenological and morphological comparison. He rejects the type of comparative study that makes judgment calls and identifies affinities among religions at the expense of their differences. For Smith, comparative study should be grounded upon differences between traditions rather than imagined similarities. (Smith 1982, p. 35) Concluding comparisons with the message that religions are more or less the same falls into perennialism. More importantly, differences give meaning to comparative projects. If two religions appear almost the same, there is no need to conduct comparative research. Hence, Smith stresses the significance of preserving differences in comparison because he maintains that is how new knowledge or thought emerges. (Smith 1982, pp. 293-294) Smith's critique is not an announcement of the death of comparison between religions but offers an opportunity to reflect upon how to build solid theoretical grounds for it.

II. Defending Comparative the Study of Religion: William Paden's Comparative Paradigm and Kimberley Patton's New Comparativism

In *A Magic Still Dwells: Comparative Religion in the Postmodern Age*, comparativists respond to Smith's challenge by providing their case studies and theoretical frameworks to champion a new comparativism that recognizes the incommensurability among various traditions. Cautioning against Smith's disapproval of schematic comparative archetypes, they treat similarities via a self-controlled and self-examined application of comparative categories. However, scholars such as Kimberley Patton and Benjamin Ray who strive to

save the comparative study of religion from Smith's criticism find Eliade unredeemable because of his "vision of a universal, transcendent 'sacred' refracted in the ritual and mythic behavior of a cross-cultural human archetype called *Homo religiosus*" (Ray and Patton 2000, pp. 1-2). They seem to side with Smith against Eliade's archetype, which has "a visionary quality" inescapable from the charge of universalism and anti-contextualism (Smith 1982, p. 23). Still, they attempt to defend the potential of the comparative study of religion from the standpoint Smith also comes from: its creativity and possibility of generating knowledge. They argue that comparison might not work as hard-core science as Smith demands since it is an art- "an imaginative and critical act of mediation and redescription in the service of knowledge" (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 4). They reenvision a self-critical comparative study of religion that "attends as strongly to difference as to similarity while recognizing that both depend upon the scholar's choices and assumptions" (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 18). In other words, they align with Smith that differences between the religious objects of studies should not be neglected but be directed to "thicken the description of similarity" (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 52).

William Paden proposes a helpful comparative framework to incorporate both similarities and differences in comparison: (1) the bilateral function of comparison, (2) the heuristic nature of the comparative process, (3) a conceptually expanded notion of the idea of patterns, (4) the controlled, delimitative function of comparison, and (5) the distinction between meaning to-the-comparativist and meaning-to-the-insider. (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 182) Such a frame stresses the sense of reflexivity in using patterns for comparing religions. Paden finds Eliade's patterns problematic in the sense of "staticism and noncontextualism" but they capture comparable human behaviors in world construction. (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 183) For Paden, comparative categories can be refined to reflect cultural-historical specificity embedded in religions as imaginative creations of the universe across time and space.

To avoid timeless hierophanies in Eliade, Paden introduces the pattern as a "common factor" to illuminate both similarities in the world-formation of religious systems and differences in their cosmic configurations. The bilateral comparativism situates differences and similarities in relation to the common factor without reducing cultural and social styles and contents to a simple and transcendent pattern as Eliade does. (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 185) Furthermore, the heuristic nature of the comparative process requires "refinement, differentiation, or reconstruction, as each element of the pattern is confronted by historical data, new questions, or possible misfits" (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 185). Hence, the comparative process becomes a self-scrutinized and open-ended investigation of both the compared objects and

the patterns through which to look into them. Consequently, patterns are extended from religious themes to "topical, conceptual, or classificatory categories" including "authority, power, gender, or discourse, or it could be a function like class empowerment, or a process like urbanization" (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 187). The overall purpose of expanding patterns is to engage the comparative study of religions with the complexity and inexhaustible contents of the world. For the new comparativism to operate a multiform nexus of analysis with continuously generated and updated reference points in the changing world, it is essential to accumulate the repertoire of conceptual apparatus and build a network of particular variables.

From Paden's perspective, it helps disenchant the magical process of comparing and adds scientific layers to the enterprise. Also, Paden's theoretical framework shifts the focus of comparative study to aspectual features of religions. Instead of making generalizing and totalizing claims about religions, the new comparativism delimits the scope of comparability without stretching too far. Guided by moderation and prudence, comparativists should be aware of the usage of the pattern not for wholesale analysis. They only address "one point of resemblance that has interpretive utility" while leaving untouched all other meanings and contexts connected with that object that are not intrinsic to the limited theoretical function of the pattern" (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 188). Most importantly, comparativists should distinguish the emic voices from the etic ones to avoid subjecting the discourse of insiders to the interpreter. Kimberley Patton notices that "the similarities that comparativists perceive between different religious traditions are often realities for the believers themselves" rather than the outsiders (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 14). The Eliadean archetype and his assumption of its universalism exemplify the etic perspective while Smith's dissatisfaction with Eliade's approach embodies the emic stance with an emphasis on difference and uniqueness. It is important to examine whether similarities and differences are uncovered by scholars from a neutral stance or the vantage point of religious adherents themselves. The differentiation of the domains of meaning restrains comparativists from reading their own commitments into studies and favoring one tradition over others.

More importantly, the new comparativism with a self-consciously eclectic approach requires the comparativist to be fully aware of himself as "enculturated, classifying, and purposive subject" in the process and practice of selectivity (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 190). Dwelling upon such a theoretical frame that "evenhandedly defends the bilateral prospects and character of the comparative process," William Paden is confident that comparativists "neither ignore resemblances nor simplistically collapse them into superficial sameness"; and they will "neither ignore differences nor magnify them out of

proportion to the human, cross-cultural commonalities of structure and function which run through them" (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 190). Paden envisions the comparative study of religion would become "an exercise in understanding what recurs, what is different, and why" without running headlong to the radical conclusion that all traditions are more or less the same or one has nothing to do with others (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 190). Such statements reveal the prejudices that ought to avoid in comparing religions that are not conducive to acquiring new knowledge.

For Patton, Smith's suspicion of similarities among religions betrays his preference for differences. His skepticism is based on the belief that differences constitute religious realities while sameness is fantasized by the comparativists as truth. (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 155) Patton acknowledges that comparison is identical with magic but not the same. Since she admits "comparison is the scholar's invention" but to empower mutual dialogue and the quest for understanding," a comparative framework is disposed to generate insights into religion in all its variety through shared beliefs and practices (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 157). Comparative religion operates similarly to magic as a mental play and display because it can be "an efficacious act of conjuring, of delineating and evoking homologous relationships" (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 18). However, it simultaneously beholds "undisputed differentials" to maintain "a fruitful tension" (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 18). The outcome yielded from comparison is also magical because it sheds light on what gives birth to it as a third party. More importantly, it would be impossible to accentuate the uniqueness of each tradition alone. With a self-conscious comparativism, Patton refashions the comparative study of religion in "eclectic and circumscribed" manners that entail "dialogical in style and heuristic in nature" (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 18). The goal of comparing religions is not to "create more generic patterns of the sacred" and impose them upon others under the guise of the hegemonic pursuit of knowledge but to enlarge the understanding of ourselves and others in the explanatory mode (Ray and Patton 2000, p. 18). Even though the comparative study of religion is conceived as a magical work of the mind, Patton intends to show it is magic without tricks and secrets. Comparativists are intellectual magicians with truthful shows but not tricksters with deceitful devices.

III. Robert Neville's Comparative Theology

The self-critical and self-examined comparativism also resonates with Robert Neville's methodology. He argues that the comparative study as an ongoing process should keep amending its comparative categories. Besides, comparison ought to overcome biases and lacunae, and maintain fairness and

inclusiveness. For Neville, the starting point of comparison is to pinpoint the aspects of religious objects that can be compared, which he identifies as comparative categories. (Neville 2018, p. 148) The three broad categories proposed by him are the human condition, ultimate reality, and religious truth. He suggests that "a comparative category needs to be logically vague" to the extent of allowing "mutually incompatible instantiations" (Neville 2018, p. 149). He is aligned with Patton's new comparativism and Paden's comparative frame to open up comparative categories for further specification and revision. For example, he mentions that one may begin from conceptions of God from theistic traditions but then "consciously amend its comparative category to something like ultimacy, in order to embrace in a vague and fair way the nontheistic theological conceptions of ultimacy" (Neville 2018, p. 149). The vagueness of categories opens to variegated expressions of ultimate realities conveyed by various traditions, so they can contain all specific statements and notions on ultimacy.

Based on the specification of categories among various traditions, Neville proposes five procedures in comparison to preserve both similarities and differences, etic and emic voices, and theological and academic perspectives. First, the intrinsic expression that allows religious tradition to specify categories in its terms and words; second, its unique take on the world and other traditions; third, a conceptual analysis of traditions in scholarly terms as a form of specification; fourth, the practical implications of tradition for specifying its identity; finally, the singular and incommensurate element of one tradition for specifying the limits of potential comparison. (Neville 2018, p. 151) These five procedures though not a guarantee for avoiding inserting prejudices into comparison at least establish "sites of phenomenological analysis" with objective criteria (Neville 2018, p. 151). With procedures in mind, comparativists analyze comparative categories in diverse religious expression to see just how traditions "agree, disagree, overlap, lift up different subcategories for comparison, differ in perspectives on the world, imply different practical consequences, and so forth" (Neville 2018, p. 151). For Neville, comparisons are formulated as hypotheses to be put to test with the enriched categories of the human condition, ultimacy, and religious truth. Interpretation and analysis of religious data in comparison are hypotheses and hence religious truth is susceptible to fallibility. (Neville 2001, p. 189) Therefore, comparative study is an ongoing dynamic process between finding comparable categories, enriching categories with specific religious content and ideas, and refining them with analysis and hypothesis.

For Neville, a comparative study is self-consciously dialectic and dialogical as it is a self-correcting conversation between religious data and comparative categories. It is also self-critical and heuristic in cumulatively

enhancing the understanding of comparable traditions in the light of new observations of religious phenomena. There is nothing magical in the selection of comparative categories for Neville, but the affirmation of the human condition, ultimate realities, and religious truth as the taxonomic categories is the upshot of his presupposed selection. Neville presumes they have universal validity and applicability as they are the foundation and canopy covering other subcategories in comparison, and hence are likely to be immune to revision and refinement in the comparative process.

He declares his approach as comparative theology that "is inevitably normative in ascribing importance to the categories of comparison," which means comparativists are obligatory to "turn its normative ascriptions into hypotheses that can be examined and tested" (Neville 2018, p. 156). Put differently, Neville's affirmation of comparative study as a self-scrutinized process is close to Patton's new comparativism but for a theological reason. He regards comparative theology as inseparable from "normative theology in the larger systematic sense" (Neville 2018, p. 157). Neville posits comparative theology against systematic theology to circumscribe and test itself with the larger normative sense embedded in the latter. The norms of comparative theology are not given by any single tradition but by an all-embracing theology, under which collaborative inquiry into theological topics gives rise to the important categories for comparison and reflections on religious truth for each tradition.[1] Distinguished from confessional statements of truth rooted in religious identities, Neville envisages a theological public that would ensure comparative theology as a continuous collaborative theological process. It is open to correction and inclusive to religious others. (Neville 2018, p. 159-160) The vision of a theological public is not found in Patton and Paden, as Neville goes as far as to recommend a social structure favorable to the actualization of comparative theology in the world. Undoubtedly, Neville assigns to comparative study a theological mission that not every

1 The all-embracing theology still has the residue of process theology in debt to Alfred North Whitehead's *Process and Reality* (1929). Yet, Neville started to get over Whitehead from *Creativity and God: A Challenge to Process Theology* (1980), as the concrescence, relationality and creativity cannot fully solve the problem of one and many. Neville explains the problem as "how different things can be sufficiently unified so as to relate as determinately different from one another, and at the same time be external enough from one another so as to be different in the first place" (Neville 2018, p. 25). For a neatly treatment of process theology and Neville's deviation from Whitehead, see John H. Berthrong, *All under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 142-153.

comparativist shares.

IV. How to Compare Religious Traditions in the East and the West: Magic Still Dwells?

Lee Yearley's *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* exemplifies how the magic of comparison performs as he finds virtues and religious ethics as the middle ground for bringing Mencius and Aquinas into a fruitful conversation concerning human flourishing. He depicts his project as both "a descriptive enterprise" relying on "utilizing our imaginative power" and "a constructive enterprise" depending upon "utilizing descriptive materials" (Yearley 1990, p. 1). Yearley's magic dwells upon the fact that both Mencius and Aquinas believe in the singular form of human flourishing. At the same time, there are resemblances between "their ideas on semblances of virtue and expansions of virtues, and in the conceptions of the self that underlie their ideas on virtue; that is, in their accounts of the character and interactions of practical reason, the emotions" (Yearley 1990, p. 5). Besides that, he is fully aware of the stark contrast between Mencius and Aquinas in terms of their historical context and culturally given conceptual vocabularies. Thus, he adds more tricks to the magic of comparison. He elevates the intricacy of comparative study by eliciting the interrelation of the compared objects since he attempts to "chart similarities within differences and differences within similarities" by examining the idea of virtue in Mencius and Aquinas (Yearley 1990, p. 3).

He appropriates the conceptual apparatus of primary and secondary theories from the anthropologist Robin Horton. Primary theory is the discourse on the phenomena in nature and daily life that empowers people across different cultures to cope with normal problems in the world. (Yearley 1990, p. 176) It has a universal characteristic in which resemblances among different traditions can be found. Secondary theory usually offers diversified metaphysical or religious accounts of peculiar events by appealing to invisible entities, where cross-cultural differences reside. (Yearley 1990, p. 176) Furthermore, Yearley adds practical theory to the reflection upon the nuanced dynamics between religious discourses and practices. In Yearley's account, practical theory wedges into the primary and secondary theories but synthesizes both to generate an understanding of how to live. (Yearley 1990, p. 177) It is partially shared across cultures as it offers guidance for human actions, so it is a fertile ground for comparison, especially for finding dissimilar in similar and similar in dissimilar. He suggests that partially overlapping practical theories are "real and textured resemblances" between Mencius's and Aquinas's conceptions of virtue, especially courage, while noting only "thin resemblances" and stark differences in other areas of their

thoughts. (Yearley 1990, p. 174) Undoubtedly, Yearley's comparative methodology is innovative in advancing the complexity and profoundness of comparative study. However, it is not replicable and imitable for comparativists to apply its theoretical framework to any other two thinkers in two distinct traditions. It is a work that shows more genius of the comparativist than the religious truth and the commensurability of Mencius and Aquinas.

The comparative tricks boil down to the "analogical imagination" mentioned by Yearley, which does not necessarily mean one can wield the imaginative power wildly.[2] Instead, it operates as "a shaping, ordering power that can enable an interpreter to see inner relationships that bind and even unify what appears only to diverge" (Yearley 1990, p. 200). Yet, Yearley's imaginative power puts aside the religious objects in comparison and becomes the mental game of the comparativist. He claims that "the locus of comparison must exist in the scholar's mind and not in the objects studied" (Yearley 1990, p. 198). His assertion makes his comparative project the target that Smith's criticism hits. Although he emphasizes the analogical imagination ought to be "rule-governed and liable to specifiable forms of error," it is unclear what the standard of evaluating whether "interpretations and rules that can be followed well or badly" is (Yearley 1990, p. 197). I think Yearley is too eager to prioritize the etic over the emic. He argues that the imaginative redescription of religious objects produces "personally formed, evocative kinds of invention" that confront the living experience with the study of the distant world (Yearley 1990, p. 197). The prospect of human flourishing under the moral guidance produced by comparing moral ideals is too tempting for him. What is at stake in his book is his belief in the necessity of intellectual virtues for knowing and comparing ideals of religious flourishing markedly different from one's tradition to meet the challenge of diversifying society. (Yearley 1990, p. 3-4) Given that Mencius and Aquinas shared no texts, culture, language, religion, time, or place and knew nothing of each another, one must rely on analogical imagination to expand one's moral concepts and lead oneself to a more complete flourishing for fully grasping Yearley's enterprise.

Still, what Yearley leaves unaddressed is a serious discussion about the truth of those moral ideas outside of one's cultural-linguistic context, so that he can engage profoundly with both traditions. Also, it is questionable

2 See Lee Yearley, *Mencius and Aquinas: Theories of Virtue and Conceptions of Courage* (Albany, N.Y: State University of New York Press, 1990), 236. He points out his borrowing the term from David Tracy's *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* but with less theological orientation and strong modesty for criticism.

whether Yearley's analogical imagination works on non-moral concepts with respect to which one seeks similarities and differences between different traditions. The comparative methodology proposed by Yearley requires the comparativist to be familiar enough with the compared traditions to utilize the analogical imagination at its best power. Nevertheless, it has the great danger of turning the comparative study into a self-fulfilling prophecy as the comparativist is the only one who knows the scheme. I am sympathetic with Yearley's effort of fusing a prescriptive enterprise into a descriptive comparison but his approach seems limited to religious ethics.

Influenced by Yearley's work, Yao Xinzhong in *Confucianism and Christianity*: *A Comparative Study of Jen and Agape* compares religious ethics by focusing on moral concepts of universal love in Confucianism and neighborly love in Christianity. Yao does not adopt the analogical imagination of Yearley but seeks an objective standard that is lacking in Yearley's approach. Yao advocates a "consistent principle of impartiality" in the comparative study of religions to avoid promoting one tradition at the expense of others (Yao 1996, p. 4). He is aware of the religious commitment of different researchers that readily results in imposing personal values upon the object of study. Meanwhile, one needs to give evaluative claims and criticism in comparison. Dismissing comparative study as a way of reinforcing one's bias and preference is the equivalent of throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Thus, he suggests that one should not aim at finding a perfect middle ground in comparing two religions but rather "apply the same criteria to both sides from beginning to end" (Yao 1996, p. 5). In doing so, Yao assures that "one's own values and commitments are also subject to examination" in observing and interpreting religions. Therefore, impartiality guarantees that one's judgments of religion are also open to self-criticism and self-reflection.

Furthermore, adhering to the same principle, Yao proposes three tasks of comparative study: finding similarities, discovering differences, investigating similarities in differences, and uncovering differences in similarities. (Yao 1996, p. 5) Yao borrows from Yearley's suggestions of constructing a productive comparative philosophy of religious flourishing. He believes "similarities are based on the common nature of human beings while differences reflect discursive expressions of human civilization" (Yao 1996, p. 12). Then, he supplies two approaches for completing the task: phenomenological and structural. The phenomenological study of religion concerns the religious practice and belief in time and space, which satisfies sociological and anthropological examinations but falls short of philosophical and religious inquiry into the "inner structure and corresponding functions" of religions (Yao 1996, p. 6). Thus, the structural approach goes beyond the descriptive presentation of religious phenomena. Examining the similarities

against the backdrop of differences and vice versa also demands a structural study of religion that overcomes "the phenomenological variety of origin and geography" (Yao 1996, p. 13). It aims at digging out the ultimate meaning of life furnished by religion.

Yao's methodology is premised on his definition of religion as "a way to overcome the limitations of life" and "a search thereby for life's ultimate meaning" (Yao 1996, p. 6). Hence, Yao uses a triad pattern consisting of the Transcendent, Humans, and Nature to display the inner structure of religion. (Yao 1996, p. 7) Yet, one of them can be the pivotal point that the others have a bearing on. Next, he defines the transcendent aspect as "a super-natural and super-human power or force or personality, in which Transcendent Being or Power is believed to control human affairs and destiny and to decide the evolutionary course of nature" (Yao 1996, p. 8). Thus, religion functions in the sense of generating dependence of humans and nature on the transcendent through "theoretical reflection on the Unlimited, or Infinite, and his/her/its creation to human beings and to the natural world" (Yao 1996, p. 8). If a religion situates human beings at its center, Yao thinks they are religious subjects, and the Transcendent and Nature are religious objects. According to Yao, it focuses on the religious dimension and seeks "the ultimate meaning of life through communicating with the Infinite and through harmonizing life with its material conditions" (Yao 1996, p. 9). Hence, faith as a religious expression mediating between religious subjects and objects determines whether religion functions well. However, when he turns to the ethical dimension, he centers the interaction between Humans and Nature but treats it as an extension of the two aspects mentioned above. Meanwhile, he states that religious ethics are distinct from philosophical or anthropological ethics in the sense of their foundations are on "the transcendental value of moral rules and moral perception" (Yao 1996, p. 9). It seems that the inconsistency of the ethical dimension lies in the fact it concerns "the relationship extending from humans to other humans and to nature" but its moral justification is grounded in the commitment to "the religious ultimate" (Yao 1996, p. 9). Therefore, Nature is not the center of gratuity in his paradigm of analyzing the inner structure of religion, which I regard as the weakest point in his pattern of studying religions.

He places excessive emphasis on the transcendent aspect in the triad since he admits that "the transcendental consideration is always decisive and lays the basis for the other two aspects" (Yao 1996, p. 11). Consequently, the other two aspects "are regarded as its extension and application," so his triangular structure is unbalanced, positing the Transcendent on the top (Yao 1996, pp. 10-11). Yet, the inconsistency within his structural pattern is further illustrated when he offers a typology of religion. Nature resumes the central position for

naturalistic religion, e.g., classical Taoism. (Yao 1996, p. 16) It is natural to match the Transcendent with the theocentric religion and Humans with the humanistic religion, but the gap between Nature, ethical aspect, and Naturalistic religion is hard to bridge. The insistence on the triad pattern reveals the loophole in his theory. It elicits speculation on whether a Christian framework fundamentally informs his enforcement of a structural entity with three aspects of the Trinity. At least, it is evident that his comparative methodology relies heavily on Confucianism since he confesses his adaptation of the five ways of learning mentioned in *the Doctrine of the Mean* to his study. (Yao 1996, p. 18) Thus, I have reservations about how he can stick to the principle of impartiality while his structural paradigm is Christian and his methodology is Confucian. More problematically, he does not apply his structural approach of looking into three corresponding aspects of Christianity and Confucianism in the book but picks one word from each tradition, i.e., agape and jen respectively. Although he argues that both words are the focal points of each religion, it is unconvincing and irresponsible to reduce Confucianism merely to Jen and Christianity to agape, considering he promises a comparative study of religion ought to tease out their similarities, differences, and similarities in differences and differences in similarities.

Aaron Stalnaker's *Overcoming Our Evil Human Nature and Spiritual Exercises in Xunzi and Augustine* continues the path that Yearley and Yao have paved for comparing East and West moral concepts. Theoretically, he introduces the theoretical apparatus of "bridge concepts" and "thin concepts" that reflect the middle ground on which Yearley and Yao's methodologies have bearings respectively. According to his definition, bridge concepts are "general ideas, such as 'virtue' and 'human nature,' which can be given enough content to be meaningful and guide comparative inquiry yet are still open to greater specification in different cases" (*Overcoming Our Evil*, p. 17). In contrast, Yao's "jen" and "agape" are "thin concepts" meant specifically to "facilitate a particular comparison of a delimited number of objects, and so are chosen with those objects in mind" (Stalnaker 2010, p. 17). Stalnaker would agree with Patton's envision of comparative study as a self-critical and dialogical enterprise that registers creativity. He is inclined to put the focal concepts in analysis to test for further revision or complete abandonment. (Stalnaker 2010, p. 2) For example, his book "attempts to analyze and refine ideas of 'human nature' and 'spiritual exercises', but ironically not to discard them. Because they are not just "categories for ordering primary material from other sources" but also "topics of inquiry themselves", from which readers would gain greater purchase on virtue ethics through refining such concepts (Stalnaker 2010, p. 2). Besides human nature and spiritual exercises as bridge concepts to discuss how both Augustine and Xunzi perceived the inherent

depravity in human nature, both thinkers advocated self-transformation as the mode of forming moral characters. He also focuses on personhood and will as thin concepts to articulate the mechanism of exercising personal transformation.

Generally, the magical part of comparison for Stalnaker is its generation of "a hypothetical dialogue between various positions" and consequently its creation of "a new dialectic that points toward positions that would have been difficult to arrive at without comparison" (Stalnaker 2010, p. 2). Also, he brings out the practical value of comparison as it is a way of cultivating the virtue of global citizenship and prepares future generations for handling religious pluralism and social complexity responsibly. The underlying motivation behind the comparative study for Stalnaker is "global neighborliness, which seeks to live with others peaceably and learn from them as much as can be learned, and to offer help carefully and respectfully as needed, within imprecise limits set by humility and tact" (Stalnaker 2010, p. xiii). It also has a theoretical dimension serving as "a governing ideal for cross-traditional interpretation" for "grappling with alternative regimes for the cultivation of virtue" (Stalnaker 2010, pp. xvii-4). It entails a charitable interpretation and friendly gesture toward treating religious others. Without overgeneralization and oversimplification, it takes the religious commitment of others seriously and alerts the complexity and changeability of bridge concepts for different traditions (Stalnaker 2010, pp. 299-301).

Then, the comparative study for Stalnaker allows exploration of "different ethico-religious 'vocabularies' of thought and practice allows moderns to reflect on them as candidates for contemporary retrieval, adjustment, and use." (Stalnaker 2010, pp. xv-xvi). These ethico-religious vocabularies provided by alternative regimes are meant to preserve the distinctiveness of different traditions within the interrelation while bridge concepts enable "distant ethical statements into interrelation and conversation" (Stalnaker 2010, p. 17). Inherited from Yearley and Yao's intricate structure of comparison, Stalnaker argues "bridge concepts can be articulated in the process of comparison in such a way that they highlight both similarities and differences, and even more subtle similarities within differences, and differences within similarities" (Stalnaker 2010, p. 18). Yet, unlike Yearley's analogical imagination and Yao's structural analysis of religion, Stalnaker looks for "near-equivalent terms for the various aspects of the bridge concept can be found in each set of writings to be compared" without hypothesizing "transcultural universals that purport to bring" deep or epistemic structures of "human religion or ethics to the surface" (Stalnaker 2010, p. 17). However, it is unnecessary to pin down exactly equivalent terms, because bridge concepts as matrixes of religious thoughts and practices rely upon inductive

reasoning. In other words, the process of selection and refinement on bridge concepts requires comparativists projecting them into "each thinker or text to be compared as a way to thematize their disparate elements and order their details around these anchoring terms", so they are "essentially hypothetical and subject to further testing and revision in wider inquiries" (Stalnaker 2010, p. 17).

This approach makes comparative study an ongoing self-scrutinizing and self-revising process. Nevertheless, it faces the problem of decontextualizing culturally given concepts from their traditions, so the comparative analysis turns into a groundless analytic and semantic exercise. I understand Stalnaker has no interest in a wholesale evaluation of traditions, so he intentionally chooses a tight focus in comparison for the sake of precise treatment. He even states the narrowed-down focal points in the comparative study "approximate the level of contextualization in capable intellectual history" (Stalnaker 2010, p. 14). Still, the induction from bridge concepts to the entirety of traditions has theoretical gaps and explanatory hoops to jump. It also means comparison of religious ethics cannot exhaust and replace the comparative study of religion. Finally, his focus on spiritual exercises and global neighborliness reveals a stronger theological interest or drive rather than a purely scholar one in familiarizing oneself with other traditions for the potential of converting others if they are proved and shown to be amenable.

Certainly, Stalnaker is not the first one who baked theological interest or mission into comparative study, as Julia Ching's *Confucianism and Christianity: A Comparative Study* intentionally addresses religious communities and situates the book at the rising reception of Buddhism in the West. Ching argues a stronger case for the compatibility of Confucianism with Christianity than Buddhism due to shared ethical concerns for self-esteem, self-transcendence, and social responsibilities. (Ching 1977, p. xxiii) She uplifts Confucianism in order to synthesize Confucianism with Christianity for building Asian theologies acculturated to Christian doctrines. To engage Confucianism with Christianity, she adopts a modern understanding of Christianity as a humanism corresponding to Confucianism as a human-centered tradition. (Ching 1977, pp. 69-70) Her self-described approach is problem-oriented, "drawing from the nature of the traditions being studied, proceeding, in each case, from the sacred books and classical texts to the development of philosophical interpretations and their present-day relevance," so comparison is an exegetical task for her. (Ching 1977, p. xvii). However, she bends Christianity to revolve around the problems of people, God, and transcendence so that it is amenable and receptive to Confucian ideas of jen and self-transcendence as moral striving. Therefore, it is sensible to say Yao's comparative analysis of jen and agape to some extent is the continuation of

Ching's program.

Ching acknowledges the inherent incongruity between the two traditions: Confucianism is a tradition of human wisdom, whereas Christianity is a revealed religion (Ching 1977, p. xvi). Still, her exegesis on Christianity betrays her reading of Confucianism and Confucian ethics into the former. She clearly distinguishes Christianity which "is constituted by the belief in the God of Jesus Christ" from Confucianism that is sustained by ethical values, but she insists on centering man rather than Christ in her presentation of Christianity (Ching 1977, p. xxii). Her hermeneutical bias is reflected in her lopsided interest in popularizing Confucianism to a Christian audience. Yet, her comparative category of faith seems to originate from a Christian perspective alone but is foreign to Confucianism. The ambivalence of her interpretative stance reflects her caught-up between East and West, Confucianism and Christianity.

Ching identifies herself as "a comparative historian of ideas and doctrines" who maintains a theological horizon to initiate interreligious dialogues. (Ching 1977, p. xvii) Although she asserts her position as a non-judgmental one "according to any predetermined, hierarchically oriented, system of values," her focus is Confucianism "in light of certain perspectives borrowed from Christianity" (Ching 1977, pp. xviii-xix). Despite her intention to "promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue", her targeted audience consists of Christians in both the West and East Asia (Ching 1977, p. 215). Reading Confucianism against the backdrop and perspectives of Christianity has a twofold meaning: the enculturated Christians with ecumenicism in mind for realization and newer Asian Christians who search for theological expressions without leaving their cultural heritages behind. (Ching 1977, p. 215) It is ambiguous whether she wears her academic or theologian hat throughout the book. She also wavers between the emic and etic voices without clarifying her actual standpoint. At any rate, the underlying motivation of her comparison is more theological than scholarly.

Admittedly, the maturity of her comparative awareness is praiseworthy. To some extent, she anticipates Smith's challenge to the commensurability of any two traditions, as she realizes the incompatibility between Confucian rites and Christian faith. (Ching 1977, p. xx) Meanwhile, she is sober about the complexity and comprehensiveness of comparison even though she does not put it in Yearley's phrase of finding similarities in dissimilar and dissimilar in similarities. She lays out the "common themes" shared by Christianity and Confucianism such as the praxis of self-transcendence, the Absolute/God, and mystique and cult while paying attention to the similarities and differences inherent in them and implications for both sides (Ching 1977, p. xx). She also situates her comparison in the historical encounter between Jesuit

missionaries and Confucianism. She sends the caveat of "fossilization of ideas and ideals" since they are contingent on historical contexts and conditions, so she pays close attention to the evolution and transmission of key terms in comparison. (Ching 1977, p. xxiv) Her comparative study is a good example of juxtaposing two traditions, their common themes, and shared concepts within historical contexts.

How Confucianism comes to terms with Christian teachings implied in Ching's project echoes John H. Berthrong's comparative study. His double foci in his work *All Under Heaven: Transforming Paradigms in Confucian-Christian Dialogue* are "the pressing theological question of a Christian response to religious pluralism in the modern world" and setting up Confucianism as the emerging interlocutor in the renewed Confucian-Christian dialogue (Berthrong 1994, pp. 1-2). He attempts to elicit the religious dimensions of the Confucian tradition with selected historical materials, but he does not treat Confucianism as a religion *per se*, as Ching probably describes it to be (Berthrong 1994, p. 70). Yet, he agrees with Ching that its religious dimension derives from the fact that it centers on the question of the ultimate values for human life.

He also proceeds with Ching's syncretism between Confucianism and Christianity with ecumenicism in mind except that he draws heavily from the process thought represented by Alfred North Whitehead and Charles Hartshorne. (Berthrong 1994, p. 4) He remodels Whitehead's categories of eternal objects, creativity, and concrescence into a "triple thread" process-based hermeneutic of form, dynamics, and unification that describes the metasystem of Christianity and Confucianism. Yet, he confesses that the categories stemming from both Whitehead and Zhu Xi are inconsistent and unbelievably odd. (Berthrong 1994, p. 9) What is more problematic is to put Whitehead and Zhu Xi as the mediators between Christianity and Confucianism. Whitehead's understanding of Christianity is filtered through process theology while Zhu Xi represents Neo-Confucianism rather than Confucianism. Berthrong's comparative project is dominated by the process thought so that the only meeting point of Christianity and Confucianism seems to be the bridge built between Whitehead and Zhu Xi because Zhu Xi in his assessment comes closest to process theology. Hence, the so-called Confucian-Christian dialogue becomes a conversation between Whitehead and Zhu Xi due to their affinities through the lens of process philosophy.

His methodology of triple thread denotes that "any text, in any way whatsoever, can be described in terms of form, the dynamic interaction of form and the world and the necessary unification of these two traits into the why, how and what of any entity or event among the other things of the world" (Berthrong 1994, p. 9). I believe he overstates the tenability of his method and

underestimates the complexity of texts. The schematic approach informed by process thought unveils Berthrong's imposition of the Whiteheadian frame upon Zhu Xi. Specifically, form entails "the definiteness that separates it from other things", and Berthrong finds the Mandate of Heaven (Li理) in Zhu Xi as the counterpart of Whitehead's eternal objects. (Berthrong 1994, pp. 10) As for dynamics, Zhu Xi's notion of matter-energy (Qi氣) is the equivalent of Whitehead's creativity. (Berthrong 1994, p. 10) In terms of unification, it means "harmony achieved by the self and every other entity by means of its fusion of form and dynamic" (Berthrong 1994, p. 10). Bertherong suggests that "the creative advance into novelty" in Whitehead echoes Zhu Xi's "Will of Heaven (Tian Ming天命) for the increase of ethical perfection and the spiritual testing of sagely persons" (Berthrong 1994, p. 10). I am sympathetic to Betherong's effort to square Zhu Xi's ideas with Whitehead's terminology, but he goes too far to flatten Zhu Xi's idea to fit the Whiteheadian framework.

For instance, the Mandate of Heaven manifests the Confucian Way as the overarching principle that determines the nature of entities in the world, which also partakes in the principle. Whitehead's eternal objects are less sophisticated than the profound meanings of "Li" in the Confucian tradition, which encompass form, dynamics, and unification in one word. Bertherong's comparative enterprise clings to the process philosophy for a good reason, because he deems it "inherently pluralistic in nature and therefore capable of crosscultural formulation" (Berthrong 1994, p. 11). His target audience is Christians who face the challenge of religious pluralism, especially Confucianism which is probably farthest apart from acquainted theistic traditions. His reliance on Hartshorne's notion of dual transcendence illustrates how process theology's understanding of divine-world relationship opens access to the Way-humanity relation in Confucianism: the deity creates the world of finite creatures, who in turn manifests divinity through their freedom of exercising creativity. (Berthrong 1994, p. 153) However, the comparison can only be analogical. Although Berthrong is aware of the methodological problem, he does not offer a good solution to the theological reconstruction of Confucianism through analogical imagination. (Berthrong 1994, p. 49) Berthrong seems to fall in the same pitfall Yearley trapped himself but for another reason. Yearley has faith in the creativity of the comparativists for a deeper understanding of different traditions. In comparison, Berthrong puts hope in the peace-making effect of interreligious communication. (Berthrong 1994, pp. 12-15) As Bertherong's theological vision of global peace hinges on the harmony among different traditions, Whitehead and process philosophy provides a better venue for peaceful interfaith dialogues than exchanging arms and violence.

According to the genealogical account of the process movement provided by Berthrong, David Hall is also indebted to Whitehead's theoretical insights into cross-cultural dialogue. (Berthrong 1994, p. 56) He is on the side of Neville in terms of treating "Confucianism as a living, important philosophic and spiritual system" (Berthrong 1994, p. 56). Yet, David Hall and Roger Ames's collaborative project *Thinking Through Confucius* launches the method of philosophy of culture in comparative study. Precisely speaking, they name it "cross-cultural anachronism," whereby they try to "understand the thinking of Confucius by recourse to issues originating within contemporary Western philosophic culture", but issues Confucius might not entertain (Hall and Ames 1987, p. 6). Put differently, they appeal to Confucius as an exotic intellectual resource for explicating and addressing issues particular to Western philosophy as anachronistic references. They state that "the comparative method employed in this essay" has led them to "isolate a particular problem" within the Western cultural milieu and then "to employ the thought of Confucius as a means of clarifying precisely" (Hall and Ames 1987, p. 5). They believe it would form "a truer account of Confucius" independently from anachronistic references compared to "current Western understandings of Confucius" emerging from "the mostly unconscious importation of philosophical and theological assumptions into primary translations" (Hall and Ames 1987, p. 7). In my view, they have witnessed the tendency in Ching's interpretation of Confucianism and anticipate the hermeneutical biases demonstrated by Yearley, Berthrong, Yao, and Stalnaker in their readings of Confucianism from the mainstream of the Anglo-European tradition. Therefore, they encourage readers to wipe out pre-installed interpretive categories informed by those assumptions that have seriously distorted the reading of Confucius.

However, I doubt whether their theoretical move serves to insert their hermeneutical prejudices into understanding Confucianism in light of the relationship between Confucius and Western culture. They prioritize differences over similarities for a different reason than Smith. For them, recognition of what is truly alien and distinctive in Confucius's thought and practice is more fruitful for comparison since shared assumptions of similarities unveil only hidden projections inhering in the comparative categories. They explicitly say that "this present book is written in the belief, first, that in the enterprise of comparative philosophy, difference is more interesting than similarity," so their emphasis on differences between "the rich and diverse fabrics of Confucian and Anglo-European cultures" offers a great opportunity for "mutual enrichment by suggesting alternative responses to problems that resist satisfactory resolution within a single culture" (Hall and Ames 1987, p. 5). The idea of mutual enrichment seems ideal as I do not see

how Confucian culture can benefit from being instrumentalized to elucidate issues in Anglo-European culture solely. Instead, their judgment of the failings of Confucius is Anglo-European-centric and condescending. It only reflects the element of Confucianism that they think is unacceptable and useless by labeling it as "provincialism and parochialism" (Hall and Ames 1987, pp. 308-309). The pragmatism embedded in their comparative project reveals the self-claimed "truer" presentation of Confucius to be the representation of its more useful version for Anglo-European audiences. Stalnaker notices that their interpretation "draws heavily on American pragmatism" and takes up Confucius as a "launch pad" for their creative philosophizing (Stalnaker 2010, pp. 15-16). In other words, their comparative approach is not concerned with what Confucius was concerned with in ancient China but more about how Confucius helps respond to the concerns of the modern West.

While rejecting categories and dismiss similarities in cross-cultural comparison, they have to begin with what they are familiar with. They confess that their project of comparative philosophy has to start not only with categories and language in the Anglo-European tradition to articulate Confucianism, but also with the underlying similarity between ancient China and the West to accommodate differences. (Hall and Ames 1987, p. 14) Nevertheless, their approach of borrowing the familiar categories for interpreting the foreign culture undermines its explanatory power since they exclude the possibility that great thinkers in other traditions may transcend their cultural experiences. Neville notes their drawback that important "individual figures and schools rarely fit their cultural background" would be ignored (Neville 2018, p. 155). Similar to Berthrong's approach of drawing an analogy between the thoughts of Whitehead and Zhu Xi, Hall and Ames also attempt to uncover analogous structures between the cultural experiences of Confucius and the Anglo-Europeans for registering differences through similarities. For example, they appeal to the Anglo-European philosophical categories of transcendence and immanence to distinguish Western culture from Confucianism. Consequently, they argue for the lack of a transcendent dimension in early China. This reading of Confucius shows Hall and Ames are entrapped in the anachronism comparison between different cultural backgrounds because their claim is based solely on the Western philosophical understanding of transcendence. Their assessment of the relationship between deity and humanity in ancient China neglects the possible Confucian vocabulary for denoting the sense of transcendence. They muffle the emic voice of Confucianism that could speak on its terms. Most importantly, the categories they use only provide prisms for looking at Confucianism but cannot exhaust all the dimensions of Confucianism as a lively culture and

lived tradition.

Michael Puett's *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* pushes back against Hall and Ames's methodology of constructing a contrastive framework of two traditions laden with and bound by Anglo-European philosophical categories. Puett smells the danger of their approach in the sense of "taking particular texts out of context and reading them as assumptions of the entire cultures being compared" (Puett 2011, p. 21). He criticizes this approach of detaching text from its context and equating it with the complete cultural experience as cultural-essentialists. (Puett 2011, p. 18) On the contrary, he prefers restoring the historical context that gives meaning and power to the text. He objects to reducing Confucian texts to "simply examples of the common Chinese way of thinking" as Hall and Ames did but brings about "the cultural potency" those texts possessed (Puett 2011, p. 23). Puett's approach to contextualizing the texts relevant to early Chinese cosmology aims at understanding "why certain figures presented cosmological arguments, what they were reacting to, and what impact their claims had at the time" (Puett 2011, p. 23). His nuanced methodology brings texts back into the reconstructed context for examining the historical circumstances that give rise to certain cosmological statements concerning humans, divinities, and sacrificial practice and their historical consequences. He observes the tendency of self-transformation into the spirits through self-cultivation for people in both early China and ancient Greece. (Puett 2011, pp. 93-95) Later, he also makes a comparison between Augustus and Emperor Wu of Han on theocratic agenda and the ideology of imperial power. (Puett 2011, pp. 231-245) Opposed to Hall and Ames's anachronism, Puett's comparative study has the feature of synchronism. Yet, he does not explicate the theoretical grounds of his synchronic comparison but assumes that early China and Western antiquity share a similar context from which theomorphic claims arise. It is also debatable and untransparent why the significant ideas about the interaction between humans and the divine ought to be arranged in the chronological order as Puett does. However, Puett's synchronic mode of East-West comparison has opened a new venue of contextualizing both traditions in the same analytic space that demands expansion of both the scope and methodologies of comparative religion.

In recent years, scholars have begun to treat early China and Greco-Roman in parallel, and a few have even brought in Abrahamic tradition as the third party. For instance, Vittorio Cotesta's *The Heavens and the Earth: Graeco-Roman, Ancient Chinese, and Mediaeval Islamic Images of the World* presents "the vision of the universe, of the natural and social world, the conception of human beings and their destiny" in three different civilizations with the hope of establishing a global society despite conflicts and competitions that exist

among nation-states (Cotesta 2023, p. 12). Another example is Yao Xinzhong's *Wisdom in Early Confucian and Israelite Traditions*, where he focuses on comparing Confucian classics with the Hebrew and Greek wisdom literature. Though Yao adopts a hermeneutic approach to writings across religions, he does not only regard "them as historical documents of the past but also as living discourses that continue to address the central concerns of these two traditions" (Yao 2016, p. 26). He cautiously opens to "test the hypothesis about philosophical and religious divergence and convergence" in his comparative study. The cross-cultural analysis of religious phenomena and ideas in the juxtaposition of East and West at the same phase of history is further explored by *Old Society, New Belief: Religious Transformation of China and Rome, Ca. 1st-6th Centuries*. The anthology compares the historical process by which Buddhism and Christianity were introduced into and "interacted with the well-established religious and cultural traditions of the states in which they spread" (Pu and Drake 2017, p. 2). From the cases above, comparative study of religions alone is insufficient to achieve a comprehensive understanding of cultures, thoughts, and societies in two distinct civilizations. Therefore, comparative history, comparative philosophy, and comparative literature complement the methodologies of comparative religion.

In addition, theologians doing comparative theology endeavor to carry on interreligious dialogues and enrich the understanding of different religious traditions. Based on the principle of faith seeking understanding (*Fides quaerens intellectum*), comparative theology as a methodology has a strong doctrinal grounding that expresses claims about religious truth or ultimate reality. In *How to Do Comparative Theology*, Clooney and Stosch admit that doing comparative theology is a theology committing to "learning from both outside and within one's own community in a way that remains theologically sensitive and conducive to mutual transformation in study (Clooney and Stosch 2018, p. 1). In the same spirit, Catherine Cornille in *Meaning and Method in Comparative Theology* contends that comparative theology orients toward "gaining not only greater understanding of a particular religious phenomenon, but of the ultimate reality and truth itself;" namely, enhancing a theological understanding from a faith perspective (Cornille 2020, p. 2). What comparative theology is concerned with, but comparative theology does not touch upon, is spiritual advancement. Therefore, theological implication for practice is not integral part of comparative religion. Comparative religion needs not carry theological bearing or register confessional commitment with its study.

V. Conclusion

After examining the possibility of the comparative study of religion and its specific application in comparing religions in the East and the West, I am inclined to say it will still be a battlefield among different methodologies. Unlike Kimberley Patton, I am less concerned with the external threat that postmodernism poses to the comparative study of religion than with its internal coherence and consistency. I suggest a tentative framework for doing comparative religion in a postmodern and post-secular age. My goal is to defend the possibility of comparative religion while addressing the effectiveness of comparison.

First, I believe comparative religion should distinguish itself from comparative theology and distance itself from faith perspective. Comparative religion ought to build upon objective, neutral and impartial ground instead of serving any non-academic agenda. Second, the focal points of a well-rounded comparative approach should be grounded upon the prudent selection of comparative categories, addressing both emic and etic perspectives, paying attention to historicity of compared objects, and keeping a sustained balance between similarities and differences in interreligious analysis. Third, a sober awareness of comparative study as a hermeneutic practice. Comparison is an exegetical exercise of depicting and classifying religions without a prescriptive agenda. Fourth, comparative religion requires a philological basis that enables cross-cultural dialogue. Key concepts and their counterparts in the comparand are essential for bridging the gap between seemingly incommensurable traditions. Fifth, a triadic comparison among three different religions might be fruitful if the third comparand acts as "mediator" or "arbitrator" between the other two. It can illuminate similarities and differences between traditions without undermining its own uniqueness since it would be the reference point for the other two in comparison.

Certainly, the nature of comparison as an exegetical exercise faces the difficulty of warding off the hermeneutical biases of the comparativist. It is somewhat magical for the comparativist to navigate between different texts and weave threads of thought among various traditions to display discoveries at the will of one's designation. Still, the comparative study of religion will continue to conduct many enjoyable shows to watch, expand human imagination, and enrich knowledge of world religions. It is the responsibility of scholars of religious studies to demystify the magic of comparative religion with academic rigor.

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Merely *Eros*?

Rethinking Love Discourses in Pseudo-Dionysius

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Abstract: Scholarly work on love in Pseudo-Dionysius has predominantly focused on elucidating *eros* as a divine epithet. Interpreted through a Neoplatonic lens, Greek *eros* thus appears to be the cornerstone of Dionysius's conception of love. However, a closer examination of the Dionysian corpus reveals that two related concepts—notably philanthropy and communion—remain understudied. The two notions are integral to Dionysius's treatment of the triadic structure of love: providential care, mutual love, and the return of love. This article contends that philanthropy and communion are essential for understanding Dionysian *eros*. By situating Christ's philanthropy and the loving communion in the middle term of mutual love, we can better grasp the rich connotations of *eros* within Dionysian theology.

Keywords: Pseudo-Dionysius (Dionysius the Areopagite), love, *eros*, philanthropy, communion

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Introduction

Anders Nygren (1890–1978), in his seminal work *Agape and Eros*, posits a fundamental dichotomy between the Christian concept of agape (divine love) and the Hellenistic concept of eros (human love). He argues that they are "incommensurable" and belong to "two entirely separate spiritual worlds".[1] Tracing the theme of love throughout Christian tradition, Nygren accuses the contamination of Christian agape by pagan eros ("Translator's Preface," in Nygren 1953, pp. xi–xiv). He identifies Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (henceforth Denys, fl. 500) as a primary example of this syncretism, casting him as a crypto-Neoplatonist who adhered so closely to Platonic eros that he diluted Christian agape (Nygren 1953, p. 576). Nygren summarizes Denys's discourses on love in three key points. First, influenced by Plotinus and Proclus, Denys presents eros as a unitary, cosmic force that binds all creation. Second, this eros seizes the soul, inducing an ecstasy that awakens a longing for the Good and transforms the soul into a vessel for receiving and transmitting divinity. Third, Denys deliberately substitutes agape with eros, for he believes the latter carries a clearer meaning and is thus superior than agape (Nygren 1953, pp. 581–3, 592). Based on this reading, Nygren contends that the Areopagite is totally ignorant of the spiritual sense of agape, for "eros is the only reality he knows" (Nygren 1953, p. 589).

Nygren's stark dichotomy is undoubtedly rooted in his Lutheran theology.[2] Although influential, his negative appraisal of Denys has provoked many rebuttals. For instance, John Rist credits Denys with being "the first to combine Neoplatonic ideas about God as *Eros* with the notion of God's 'ecstasy'." (Rist 1996, pp. 239–40) Rist argues that by defining *eros* as a generative power that providentially goes out of itself, Denys synthesizes divine unity with providential care for the creation, thereby overcoming the thorny problem faced by his Christian predecessors who restricted agape to

1 "Introduction," in Anders Nygren, and trans. Philip S. Watson, *Agape and Eros* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press.1953), pp. 30–2. A detailed diagram illustrates that eros features acquisitive desire, an upward movement, man's way to God, egocentric love, will to possess, motivated by quality of the object; in comparison, agape stands as the opposite of eros: it is sacrificial giving, a downward movement, God's way to man, unselfish love, free in giving, motivated regardless of its object, etc. See Nygren 1953, p. 210.

2 Although some argues that Nygren's framework does not fit into Luther's teaching, for Nygren's understanding of agape is merely "one-sided" from God to human beings, while in Luther human love for neighbors and God also counts. See Forsberg 2010, pp. 92–3.

the Trinitarian unity.[1] Apart from this, de Vogel challenges Nygren's interpretation by anchoring Platonic *eros* in the Socratic tradition—specifically, the philosopher's generous care for youths and the effort to liberate those in the cave. This demonstrates that *eros* is not necessarily self-oriented but can be a selfless giving for the sake of the other (De Vogel 1981, pp. 61–2). De Vogel thus contends that Denys's originality lies precisely in making this generous *eros* central to his theology (De Vogel 1981, pp. 70–1).

Most scholarly discussions of Denys's notion of love center on his use of *eros*, particularly its ecstatic and ascending character that draws the soul towards the deity.[2] This emphasis is understandable for several reasons: it serves as a response to Nygren's contentious appraisal of Dionysian *eros*; it reflects the extensive treatment of *eros* in *The Divine Names* (DN 4.10–17); and it acknowledges the erotic tradition shared by Denys's patristic and Platonic predecessors.[3] However, this focus has left two questions unresolved. First, by fitting *eros* into the Neoplatonic framework of descension (procession, πρόοδος) and ascension (return, ἐπιστροφή), scholars often overlook its role in the third element of the triad: "remaining (μόνη)." How is *eros* manifested in this stage of remaining? Second, a re-examination of the Dionysian corpus reveals that two notions related to *eros*, namely philanthropy and communion (friendship), also play a role in Denys's thought.[4] If *eros* is not Denys's sole

1 Rist says that Augustine is puzzled about how to treat God's *amor* or self-love within Trinitarian Persons with God's providence to all, the same also arises for Origen and Gregory of Nyssa. See Rist 1966, p. 240.

2 Apart from Rist and De Vogel, there are some recent studies on Dionysian love. For example, Turner situates Denys in the linage of Christian mystical tradition streaming from the commentary of Solomon's *Song*. See Turner 1995, chapter two and three. An effort to affirm the place of love in Denys's soteriology can be found in Smith 2012, pp. 211–227. A comparison of *eros* in Neoplatonism and Denys is studied in Vasilakis 2020, especially chapter three on Dionysius, pp. 141–183. For a recent review of these discussions, see Corry 2022, pp. 302–320.

3 Denys's erotic exposition is indebted to a list of Fathers: Clement of Alexandria holds that Christian life is led by *eros* towards gnosis and perfection; Origen deems salvation as a process of ascent to the divine realm by *eros*; Gregory of Nyssa sees *eros* as an "intensified agape", the driving force in one's ascent to God by imageries of a heavenly ladder, wings of the soul, ascent of the Mountain, an arrow, a flame and a chain of love. See Nygren 1953, pp. 356–8, 389–91, 435–46.

4 The present article mainly refers to Luibheid's English translation, see Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, with references to the English translation of Jones, see Jones 1980. For the critical Greek edition, see Suchla 1990, and Heil and Ritter 2012. The Dionysian corpus is consisted of *The Divine Names* (Henceforth DN), *The Mystical Theology* (MT), *The Celestial Hierarchy* (CH), *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* (EH) and 10

concept of love, what is its relationship to philanthropy and communion? Has the scholarly debate between *agape* and *eros* caused us to neglect other aspects of Denys's discourse of love?

To address these questions, this article is structured as follows. First, it re-examines the Dionysian corpus on love and analyzes the context; next, it relates Denys's language of love to the Neoplatonic triad, specifically exploring the linkage between *eros* and the remaining stage; after that, it situates the philanthropy of Jesus Christ within this intermediate stage, arguing for its theological significance; then, it explores the communal dimension of love as an aspect of remaining love, manifested in both Denys's cosmic and liturgical theologies; finally, it offers concluding remarks on the originality of the Dionysian love discourse and its implications for the broader Christian tradition.

1. *Eros* as A Divine Epithet

The main treatment of *eros* in the Dionysian corpus lies in the fourth chapter of *The Divine Names*. At first glance, this chapter appears to cover a wide range of topics, as its title lists "good," "light," "beautiful," "love/*eros*," "ecstasy," "zeal," and the problem of evil. A more careful reading, however, reveals that the chapter is primarily confined to three divine names: Goodness, the Beautiful, and Love. These three are grouped together at the beginning of DN 4.7, and DN 4.18 provides a summary of them before addressing the problem of evil (DN 4.7 701C, DN 4.18 713D–716A). Obviously, evil is not a divine name, but a theological problem arising from the premise that all things originate from and long for the Good. The name "Light" functions as a simile for divine goodness and might be more appropriately placed in the lost (or unwritten) *The Symbolic Theology* (DN 4.5 700C). Similarly, the discussions of "ecstasy" and "zeal" (DN 4.13) are integral components of Denys's overarching treatment of love from DN 4.10 to 4.17. As Rorem suggests, the chapter's elaborate titles are likely a later editorial addition, rather than reflecting Denys's own design (Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, note 2, p. 49).[1] Therefore, this confusing title should not distract us from the chapter's core arguments.

There is no doubt that love holds a prominent place among God's divine names. Not only is it treated at greater length than Goodness and the Beautiful

letters (Ep.). Accordingly, this article cites the treatise with chapter, section and side code, for example: DN 4.7 701C, EH 3.3.12 444B; when it refers to the Greek text, the critical edition will be cited as: Suchla, 160 line 11.

1 There is no title in the critical edition of Suchla, only some subtitles are preserved in the edition of Heil and Ritter.

in DN, but its position—immediately following these two and preceding other quintessential names like Being, Life and Wisdom (DN 5–7)–signals its foundational priority. The most controversial aspect, however, is Denys's designation of divine love as "*eros*" rather than agape, a move that leads Nygren to accuse his substitution of agape with *eros*. Yet, a closer reading of the text reveals that Denys is explicitly interpreting the usage of *eros* "παρὰ τὰ λόγια" (according to *The Words*, DN 4.11 708B; Suchla, 156, line 1). The "τὰ λόγια" here, as Rorem observes, would have been deliberately ambiguous to Denys's audience, potentially alluding either to *The Chaldean Oracles* for Neoplatonists or to the Scriptures for the Christians (Rorem 1984, pp. 15–6).[1] This indicates that Denys is not substituting agape with *eros*; rather, he is attempting to explicate the existing *eros* language within these sacred texts.[2]

As DN 4.11 states, what matters most is not the exact word, but the spiritual senses it signifies. Denys does not claim that *eros* is intrinsically more divine than agape. Rather, he is discussing the scriptural usage of *eros*, as found in Proverbs 4:6, 8; Wisdom of Solomon 8:2 (LXX); and in the saying attributed to Ignatius.

> Indeed some of our writers on sacred matters have deemed the title "yearning" [*eros*] to be more divine than "love [*agape*]." The divine Ignatius writes: "He for whom I yearn has been crucified." In the introductory scriptures you will note the following said of the divine wisdom: "I yearned for her beauty." So let us not fear this title of "yearning"[*eros*] nor be upset by what anyone has to say about these two names, for, in my opinion, the sacred writers regard "yearning" [*eros*] and "love" [agape] as having one and the same meaning. They added "real" to the use of "yearning" [*eros*] regarding divine things because of the unseemly nature such a word has for men. The title "real yearning [*eros*] "is praised by us and by the scriptures themselves as being appropriate to God. Others, however, tended naturally to think of a partial, physical, and divided yearning [*eros*]. (DN 4.12 709AC)

As Denys emphasizes, the instances of *eros* in the Septuagint correspond in meaning to agape in the New Testament; the two terms therefore share a single meaning. Denys's preference for the language of *eros* arises from the difficulty of interpreting agape in the New Testament. By late antiquity, the meaning of agape may have become obscured, posing challenges for Christian

1 For the use of *eros* in *The Chaldean Oracle* (τὰ λόγια), see Fr. 39, 43, 45, 46, in Majercik 1989, pp. 62–7. *Eros* language can be found in Prv 4:6, 8; 2 Sm 1:26 (LXX).

2 This exegetical feature has been highlighted by Luibheid and Rorem, see Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, n. 150, p. 80.

exegetes. Denys instead argues that agape should be interpreted in continuity with its Septuagintal usage, where its distinctive feature is its ecstatic character. Nevertheless, Denys cautions against naming God "*eros*," since the term is commonly associated with a form of love that is "partial, physical, and divided."[1] This divine *eros* must be distinguished from its vulgar counterpart. On this reading, *eros* and agape are ultimately one and the same: what is at issue is true *eros*—an *eros* that establishes unity and alliance between God and all things.

The divine *eros* operates in three ways: it sustains the beings of the same rank, moves the superior to care for the inferior, and draws the inferior to the superior. Through these manifestations, *eros* initiates all levels of reality into a triad of providence, mutual coherence, and respect. In these unities, the nature of *eros* is revealed as essentially "ecstatic" (DN 4.13 712A).[2] This is best exemplified by Paul the Apostle. Seized by this ecstatic *eros*, Paul no longer lives his own life but is led by Christ living in him.[3] Furthermore, *eros* is the divine force behind God's activities of creating, perfecting, harmonizing and drawing creation back to Himself. Seen in this way, the names of goodness and beauty signify God's essential attributes, while *eros* denotes God's dynamic activity in relation to the created order.

Having established this dynamic feature of *eros*, Denys proceeds to address the dual appellations applied to the deity: God as the one who loves and God as the one who is loved.[4] This dual sense is illustrated by a threefold movement, depicting a circular dance around the Good, as the text describes:

> "Divine yearning [*eros*] shows especially its unbeginning and unending nature traveling in an endless circle through the Good, from the Good, in the Good and to the Good, unerringly turning, ever on the same center, ever in the same direction, always proceeding [προϊὼν], always remaining [μένων], always being restored to [ἀποκαθιστάμενος] itself." (DN 4.14 712D–713A; Suchla, 160 line 11)[5]

1 This reminds us of the distinction between heavenly love and common love made by Pausanias in Plato's *Symposium*, 181bc.

2 See also the symbolism of God's inebriation or drunkenness in Ep. 9.5, 1112C.

3 Gal 2:20, the mystical elevation to the third heaven is indicated, see 2 Cor. 12:1–10.

4 DN 4.14: "ἔρωτα καὶ «ἀγάπην» αὐτόν φασι, ποτὲ δὲ ἐραστὸν καὶ ἀγαπητόν." Suchla, 160 line 1–2. Here Denys still uses both *eros* and agape to name God's love, which is another refutation of Nygren's critique.

5 See also DN 4.17 713D: "there is a simple self-moving (erotic) power directing all things to mingle as one, that it starts out from the Good, reaches down to the lowliest creation, returns then in due order through all the stages back to the Good, and thus turns from itself and through itself and upon itself and toward itself in an everlasting

Divine *eros* manifests itself as a relentless motion that unfolds the Good to all creation and enfolds creation back into it. This dynamism recalls both the Pauline epistles,[1] and the Neoplatonic triad of rest, procession and reversion. As these triadic movements are manifestations of erotic love, they are essentially of one substance, originating from God's all-embracing, self-diffusive activity.

From the end of DN 4.14 through DN 4.17, Denys substantiates his discourse by citing the erotic hymn of his teacher Hierotheus, whose identity is unknown to us. This hymn is crucial for understanding his conception of *eros*. In the hymn, the triad of rest, procession and return corresponds to three modes of love within the celestial and ecclesiastical hierarchy, as DN 4.15 says:

> "Love, whether we speak of Divine, or Angelic, or intelligent, or psychical, or physical, let us regard as a certain unifying and combining power, moving the superior to forethought [πρόνοιαν] for the inferior, and the equals to a communion fellowship [κοινωνικὴν ἀλληλουχίαν], and lastly, the inferior to return [ἐπιστροφήν] towards the higher and superior." (DN 4.15 713AB; Suchla, 161 line 3–5)[2]

Here, love is not confined to the deity, but is shared by created beings of all levels—angels, intellects, souls and bodies (the latter three seemingly referring to the human composite). This shared capacity for love explains how God can be both the subject and the object of love: God loves the rational creatures and is loved by the latter. Both the angelic and human love function as a response to the divine love. In rational beings, love is manifested in a unifying power that facilitates their interrelationship, structured in a triad: the providential care of superiors for inferiors, the mutual regard among equals, and the return of inferiors to their superiors.

Recognizing the correlation between the providential love-mutual regard-returning love and the cosmic movements of procession-remaining-return raises two questions. First, what are the specific subjects of these triadic movements and the corresponding forms of love? Second, if procession and return denote the descending and ascending vectors of love, is mutual love

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circle."

1 Eph 4:6: "one God and Father of us all, who is above all and through all and in all." See also Rom 11:36; 1 Cor. 8:6, 12:6; Acts 17:28.

2 With my revision. See also DN 4.7 704B, DN 4.10 708A, 4.13 712A, 4.15 713B, these passages maintain an order of providence, mutuality and return; while only in 4.12 709D mutual love comes first, then providence and return.

correlated with "remaining"? If so, what do "remaining" and "mutual love" signify? The following sections will address these questions.

2. *Eros* and Triadic Movements

An examination of the sections on motion (DN 4.7–9) and on God's rest and motion (DN 9.8–9) reveals that the triadic movements are applied to different subjects. In DN 9.9, Denys correlates the threefold motions with God's own activities: He proceeds outward in creation, sustains the created beings through His care, and summons all things into union with Him. These are depicted as straight, spiral and circular movements, respectively (DN 9.9 916CD).[1] For the sensible creatures, their motions are an imitation of God's, as they proceed from God, having their being in Him, and are summoned back to Him (DN 4.10 705D). The same triple pattern operates in angels and souls, though the primacy of the movements differs. Angels, for instance, first revolve circularly as they are united with the Good and Beautiful, then proceed linearly to offer providence to their inferiors, and move spirally as a combination of these two motions (DN 4.8 704D–705A).[2] In a similar way, the soul moves in a circle by collecting its intellectual powers, in a spiral when engaged in logic and reasoning about divine knowledge, and in a straight line from the symbols to pure contemplation (DN 4.9 705AB).[3]

Notably, for God, "remaining" has two distinct senses. The first is the Deity's abiding within Himself (the Immanent Trinity in theological terms), expressed through the names of "rest" and "sitting".[4] This "rest" signifies God's immutability and stability in His own being, which in turn allows His effects in creation to sustain their own identity and goodness. This concept of divine rest, together with God's motion, forms a dialectic of rest and movement. As scholars such as Gersh and Perl have noted, God's remaining in relation to His procession should be understood through the dialectic of

1 We are warned, these depictions are not to be imagined as spatial movements or changes of God in essence, they are a concession to human praise.

2 This passage does not mention whether the spiral movement of angels is upward or downward, it is pretty likely to be downward.

3 Jones' translation is more accurate than Luibheid's, see Jones 1980, p. 141. Charles-André Bernard attempts to correlate the circular, spiral and straight motions of the soul with mystical, "discursive" and symbolical theology (see Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, note 146, p. 78), but the description is too vague here to make any accurate inference. It may relate to the relationship between mind's functioning as intellectual activities and motion stirred by the divine *eros* for the good and beautiful, namely the relationship of knowledge and love in the medieval perception.

4 "Στάσεως" and "καθέδρας", DN 9.8 916B; Suchla, 212 line 16.

sameness and differentiation, a framework on which Denys follows Proclus (DN 3).[1] Within this dialectic, God's twofold status in relation to creation is articulated: His transcendence over beings and His immanence within them. The second sense of remaining denotes God's ongoing activity in sustaining and caring for the creation (the Economic Trinity), expressed in Platonic terminology as God's impartation or participation (μετεχόμενα, DN 2.5 644A; Suchla, 129 line 3). This participation forms one part of the triad of procession-remaining-return, a structure that mirrors the one used by Proclus.

Denys's argument operates within the two senses, which fit into his two frameworks. The first is the model of "unity and differentiation," which Denys develops in DN 2. The second is the Neoplatonic triad of "procession, remaining, and return," which Denys frequently employs to interpret love and cosmic movement. In my view, the coexistence of these two frameworks introduces a certain tension in his thought.

Notably, when we examine Proclus's discourse, the relationship between the producer/cause (the One) and the produced/effect follows a strict sequence: remaining at first, procession in the middle, and return at last. This is structured in *The Elements of Theology*:

> Prop. 27: But every producer remains as it is, and its consequent proceeds from it without change in its steadfastness. (Dodds 1992, pp. 30–1)[2]
> Prop. 30: All that is immediately produced by any principle both remains in the producing cause and proceeds from it. (Dodds 1992, pp. 34–5)
> Prop. 35: Every effect remains in its cause, proceeds from it, and reverts upon it. (Dodds 1992, pp. 38–9)[3]

These extracts indicate that for Proclus, the sequence of remaining-procession-return is immutable, even if remaining and procession are sometimes inseparable. In contrast, Denys alters this sequence for God (though not for angels and humankind): He places procession first, followed by remaining and return. This subtle revision reveals Denys's originality in adapting Neoplatonism to a Christian framework. The re-structuring of the

1 See Gersh 1978, p. 51; and Perl 2007, p. 46.

2. Denys refers to a work also named *The Element of Theology*, attributed to his teacher Hierotheus, whose identity is lost to us. See DN 2.9 648AB.

3 There are actually two kinds of remaining in Proclus' theory: the produced remains in the producer, and the producer remain in itself in the act of producing. A detailed discussion can be found in Gersh 1978, p. 51. Heide suggests in Denys the rest and procession combined to convey God as productivity itself, hence for God procession means rest and rest means procession, but Heide does not deal with the order of remain and procession. See Heide 2019, pp. 52–4.

triad has been highlighted by Endre von Ivánka (1902–1974) and von Balthasar (1905–1988), and their studies have been woven into Christian Schäfer's persuasive analysis of DN.[1] However, the present article would incorporate the triad into Denys's love language, especially its correlation to his Christology and church hierarchy.

As previously argued, procession-remaining-return are manifestations of divine love. In Denys's theology, the predominant feature of love is its ecstatic nature. This renders the middle phase of remaining both significant and necessary. If remaining comes first, it implies God's initial state is one of staying within Himself—a form of "self-love" or love contained within the Trinitarian Persons. In such a reading, there is little room for remaining between procession and return, and creation holds no real significance for God. This was the thorny issue faced by Augustine and Gregory of Nyssa, who restricted God's agape to the Trinity. As Rist notes, Denys's concept of ecstatic *eros* evades the difficulty of explaining how God's agape can be bestowed on us (Rist 1966, p. 240). Similarly, in Proclus's system, the absolute self-sufficiency of the One risks making procession or overflowing unnecessary, thereby providing an insufficient rationale for emanation. By re-ordering the triad, Denys implies that God, being ecstatic, is primarily concerned with remaining in all things (in the second economic sense), rather than remaining in His self (in the first, immanent sense). If God were primarily self-contained, there would be little ontological space for creation, or even for love itself. In Perl's words, Denys's God is "intrinsically ecstatic" (Perl 2007, p. 46); He is destined to go out of Himself. Creation and providence are thus modes of His being, not dispensable actions taken to fulfill His need for pleasure or utility.

This concept of an ecstatic remaining implies a mutuality and dynamic relationship between God and creation, affirming that the intermediate rest and the present world are essential to the divine economy. The phase of remaining also highlights two issues concerning erotic love: the love manifested in the incarnation, and the love that exists among created beings. In the following sections, I will argue that philanthropic incarnation and loving communion are virtually two aspects of this remaining love.

3. Love that Remains: Christ's Philanthropy

Before Denys, thinkers like Origen and Gregory of Nyssa had already

1 Schäfer anchors the intermediate stage of halt (remaining) in DN 8-11, see the diagram in Schäfer 2006, p. 179. A summary of Schäfer's study can be found in Paul Rorem's introduction for the book, especially from pages xiv to xvi.

used the term "philanthropy" (love for humanity) to describe Christ's motive for descending in the incarnation.[1] Denys, likewise, consistently portrays Christ's incarnation as an act of His philanthropy.[2] The philanthropic language in Dionysian thought has been noted by several scholars. In an earlier article, Rist has noticed Denys's frequent use of philanthropy to denote God's goodness manifested in the incarnation (Rist 1966, note 11, p. 238). In a later work, Rist further elaborates that *eros* represents a general love for all (a "General Theory of Divinity"), in contrast with philanthropy, which signifies a special love demonstrated in the incarnation (a "Special Theory of Divinity"). Through this contrast, Rist points out that *eros* can be applied to human love, whereas philanthropy cannot (Rist 1999, pp. 379–80). Similarly, Osborne interprets philanthropic incarnation as a "love beyond call of duty"–an extraordinary love that surpasses God's ordinary providence (Osborne 1996, p. 198). Vasilakis characterizes philanthropy as the manic manifestation of God's love, with Christ serving as the bond between God and creation, who incarnated specifically for human beings as the microcosm and bond of the cosmos (Vasilakis 2020, p. 156).

While these interpretations mainly view philanthropy as a manifestation of God's cosmic love, oriented exclusively toward human salvation, this article will anchor Christ's philanthropy between the descending and ascending movements of *eros*, acting as a counterpart to "remaining" between procession and return. Since philanthropy mainly denotes Christ's love for humanity, we must first examine Denys's Christology.

In his writings on Jesus Christ, Denys employs a series of binaries: the divine and the human, affirmation and negation, hiddenness and revelation. The fourth epistle is generally considered central to understanding his conception of Christ:

> "Out of his [Christ's] very great love for humanity [φιλανθρωπία], he became quite truly a human, both superhuman and among humans; and, though himself beyond being, he took upon himself the being of humans… As one considers it [the work of Jesus] all in a divine manner, one will recognize in a transcending way that every affirmation regarding Jesus' love for humanity has the force of a

1 They see Christ's incarnation as a stimulus of human *eros* for their return to God. See Nygren, note 1, p. 374; also p. 435, 445.

2 Philanthropy occurs 18 times in Dionysian corpus. As many as 10 times it is used with Jesus (τῆς Ἰησοῦ φιλανθρωπίας), see DN 1.4 592A; DN 2.3 640C; DN 6.2 856C; CH 4.4 181B; CH 7.3 209B; EH 3.3.12 444A; EH 3.3.13 444C; EH 5.3.5 512C; Ep. 3 1069B; and Ep.4 1072BC. Sometimes it is also used with the Father (πατρικὴ φιλανθρωπία; CH 8.2 240D), thearchy (τῆς θεαρχικῆς φιλανθρωπίας, EH 3.3.8 437A, EH 7.3.7 561D) or the hierarch (EH 4.3.7 561D).

> negation pointing toward transcendence." (Ep. 4 1072AB; Heil and Ritter, 161 line 4)

Different themes are interwoven into this passage: Jesus's activities are understood through the binary of affirmation and negation, and the assertions about Him are designated to facilitate a shift from the cataphatic to the apophatic. Here, we see that *apophaticism* is not merely a linguistic or logical exercise, but is bound to the soul's ascent, much like Moses' climb up Mount Sinai in *The Mystical Theology* (MT 3 1033C).[1] Viewed this way, the "negation" pertaining to Christ's divine love is intended for human elevation. It is only after assuming human nature that He enables human reversion:

> "The goodness of the Deity has endless love for humanity [philanthropy] and never ceased from benignly pouring out on us its providential gifts… It took upon itself in a most authentic way all the characteristics of our nature, except sin. It became one with us in our lowliness… It saved our nature from almost complete wreckage and delivered the dwelling place of our soul from the most accursed passion and from destructive defilement. Finally, it showed us a supramundane uplifting and an inspired way of life in shaping ourself [sic] to it as fully as lay in our power." (EH 3.3.11 441AC. See also DN 1.4 592A, DN 6.2 856D)

A variety of salvific efforts preceded the incarnation, all of which culminate in Christ's incarnation as the decisive turning point in the divine scheme. As the apophatic nature of the incarnation suggests, Christ's loving work should be understood as a watershed between God's revelation and our salvation–a restoration of our nature from wretchedness to its original goodness. This point is also addressed in the third letter:

> "What comes into view, contrary to hope, from previous obscurity, is described as 'sudden [ἐξαίφνης].' As for the love of Christ for humanity, the Word of God, I believe, uses this term to hint that the transcendent has put aside its own hiddenness and has revealed itself to us by becoming a human being. But he is hidden even after this revelation, or, if I may speak in a more divine fashion, is hidden even amid the revelation." (Ep. 3 1069B)[2]

1 For a discussion of this linkage and its root in Proclus, see Louth 2022, pp. 167–9.

2 A second occurrence of "sudden" likens the divine activity to the activity of fire, see CH 15.2 329C; for a linkage between Christ's fire and our loving return, see EH 2.2.1–2, 393AB.

Interpretations of the word "sudden" vary. A Christian reading would relate this to Paul's sudden seizure on the road of Damascus, a point also mentioned in the fifth letter (Ep. 5 1073A).[1] One may also recall Plato's *Symposium*, where the lover ascends from the love of a beautiful body to intangible beauty, then to the beauty of knowledge, and is finally granted a sudden revelation of "the beautiful in its nature".[2] The crucial difference is that in Platonic vision, this ultimate beauty only appears at the summit of a long philosophical pursuit, whereas in Paul's experience, the unexpected revelation of Christ's light is the decisive, initiating event for his conversion.[3] Denys can be read in both ways. Read Platonically, the word "sudden" relates to Moses' arrival at the peak of Mount Sinai, where he plunges into the divine darkness at God's dwelling. Read in a Pauline way, the suddenness of Christ's self-revelation is the manifestation of Beauty itself, forming the watershed between *exitus* and *reditus*, between God's procession and our return. This latter interpretation is more useful for explaining Denys's Christocentric focus: his concentration on Christ's works rather than His nature, on His short, "sudden" appearance rather than His long hiddenness, and hence for focusing on Jesus' "divine life in the flesh" (EH 3.3.12 444B).

For Denys, Christ's role must be understood in relation to the two hierarchies. Jesus, as Denys puts it, is "the source and the perfection of every hierarchy" (EH 1.2 373B)[4]. The church hierarchy should be conceived as a response to the incarnated philanthropy, with the primary task of providing illumination so that we may attain perfection through assimilation to Him. Chronologically, the church was established by Jesus, passed down by his disciples, and is now led by the hierarchs (bishops) and sacred orders. This is why a hymn is devoted to Christ at the opening of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy*. Remarkably, in the angelic hierarchy, Christ is also invoked as the Light of the Father, diffusing radiance through angelic illumination (CH 1.2 121AB).[5] Thus, both hierarchies are carriers of this divine Light, which is ordained for our salvation.

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1 Cf. Acts 9:3. See Golitzin 2003, p. 23; and Shomaker 2016, p. 132.

2 *Symposium*, 210A–E. Apart from *Symposium*, some suggests it alluding to the third hypothesis in *Parmenides*, concerning the timeless instances between eternity and time. See Hathaway 1969, p. 80; and Golitzin 2003, p. 22.

3 Louth points out that in Platonic mysticism One comes upon the soul, while for Christians grace initiates the soul's quest for a union with God. See Louth 2007, p. 190.

4 See also EH 1.1 372A, EH 5.1.5 505B.

5 The salvific focus has been noticed by de Andia, she notices that among the four treatises, DN and MT start with prayer to the Trinity, while the two treatises on hierarchies begin with prayer to Christ, see de Andia 1996, pp. 439ff.

The relationship between Christ and the angels is especially noteworthy. As the source of angelic power, Christ holds a position of decisive superiority, which can be understood through three facets. First, in the rite of ointment, the oil for the Myron is covered by twelve folds, symbolizing the assembly of seraphim around Jesus. Seraphim receive "spiritual gifts" directly from Jesus and offer ceaseless divine praises.[1] Second, Christ fully assumes human nature, achieving a unique synthesis of the conceptual and the perceptual that remains inaccessible to angels.[2] Third, the entire work of the angels finds its ultimate consummation in Christ's incarnation; their proclamations throughout Scripture anticipated this event, foretelling what was to come to the biblical figures.[3] A notable point, as Louth argues, is that hierarchical movement between different ranks is typically impossible.[4] Yet, Jesus alone possesses the power to traverse the hierarchies: He descended into the human order to establish the church, and upon completing His work, He ascended into the hierarchy of the revealers, designated as the "angel of great counsel"[5]. This demonstrates that Christ not only surpasses the angels within their hierarchy, but also holds the authority to shape the ecclesiastical order. He is the Light itself, revealing Himself directly to humanity, while the angels remain confined to their appointed stations. By superseding the angels, Christ perfectly fulfills the role of intermediary between the divine and human realms.

In assuming humanity, the incarnated One establishes a congruity of our hierarchy and the heavenly ones. "By the fact of being God-made-man he accomplished something new in our midst—the activity of the God-man." (Ep. 4 1072C) For Denys, what is paramount is this perfect mediation–between divinity and humanity, affirmation and negation, concealment and revelation, and indeed, between the heavenly and human hierarchies themselves. These binaries capture the essential "in-betweenness" of the incarnation, which I argue is fundamental to the Dionysian conception of philanthropy.

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1 "The twelve folds" is mentioned in EH 4.2 473A, which may refer to two six-winged seraphim, see Pseudo-Dionysius 1987, note 112, p. 225; for its contemplation, see EH 4.3.4, 477C; EH 4.3.5 480BC.

2 This is a point highlighted by John of Damascus, he argues that Jesus' assuming of human nature renders human being accessible to the divine nature, which is inaccessible to the angels. See John of Damascus 2003, III. 26, p. 103.

3 Angels proclaimed to Zechariah, Mary, Joseph and the shepherds, see CH 4.4 181B.

4 I agree with Louth's view that one cannot move upward the hierarchy but is more and more assimilated into the hierarchy. See Louth 2007, p. 166.

5 Ἄγγελος μεγάλης βουλῆς, CH 4.4 181CD, Günter and Ritter, 24 line 2. Cf. Is 9:6.

4. Love among the Equals: Communal Dimension

The concept of love embedded within the hierarchy is intrinsically related to Christ's work of philanthropy.[1] For Meyendorff, there seems to be a gap between individual ascent and hierarchical order, and between Denys's Christology and his two hierarchies (Meyendorff 1969, pp. 81–2). While this article has situated Denys's Christology between the cosmic order and ecclesiastic setting, there is no such a gulf between incarnation and hierarchies. Then we must ask: what is the love that remains in the world, especially among human beings?

As argued above, providential care, love among equals, and returning love correlate with procession-remaining-return. When descending and ascending *eros* correspond to procession and return, what is the sense of the middle term, *eros* as remaining? This is not a problem for Proclus, in whose system love flows either from higher to lower or returns in the reverse order. For Denys, however, since he makes room for relationships within the same rank, the love between equals cannot be overlooked.[2] Although this has been noted by some scholars, they differ on how to interpret this mutual love. Rist infers that it refers either to the love between the Trinitarian Persons or between fellow human beings (Rist 1966, p. 241). Heide also notes the ambiguity in Denys's concept of mutual love, suggesting it could apply to the Trinitarian Persons or to equal ranks of angelic beings, though he does not develop the latter option (Heide 2019, pp. 49–51). Kupperman, conversely, argues that love between equals refers to angels and human beings insofar as they are ontologically equal, rather than to the Trinitarian Persons (Kupperman 2013).

Let us examine these inferences in turn. First, consider Rist's suggestion of mutual love among the Trinitarian Persons. In the corpus, mutual love is consistently positioned between the superior's providential love and the inferior's returning love. A trinitarian reading would therefore raise a difficult question: does Denys imply a hierarchy within the Trinity itself? This reading would suggest a certain subordinationism, which runs counter to the teachings of the Nicene Creed and the Cappadocians.[3] Denys's attitude towards the Trinitarian formula is somewhat ambiguous. Denys refers to the Son and Spirit as "divine offshoots" of the Father (DN 2.7 645B), he also asserts that "unities hold a higher place than differentiations" within the divine realms

1 Cf. Mt 22:37-39, Mk. 12:30-31, Lk 10:27.

2 Kupperman suggests that Dionysius' form of love among equals has its origin in Iamblichean theology. See Kupperman 2013.

3 Rhodes contends in Denys there is an incompatibility of the notion of beyond-being (*hyperousios*) with the doctrine of Trinity, see Rhodes 2014, p. 308.

(DN 2.11 652A). As Louth comments, there is a "unity within the Godhead that is more ultimate than the Trinity of Persons" (Louth 1989, pp. 90-91). Denys affirms the Trinitarian unity, and there is no indication of hierarchy among the three Persons of the Trinity. Based on this interpretation, I argue that the love between equals—positioned between providential care and returning love—should be understood as pertaining to the economic level, rather than the Trinitarian level.

Second, we have the suggestions by Heide and Kupperman that mutual love applies to angels. This interpretation is plausible for two reasons. Firstly, when explaining the biblical symbol of chariots in CH 15.9, Denys relates it to "the conjoined communion of those [angels] of the same rank"[1]. Secondly, the angelic hierarchy consists of nine orders grouped into three ranks, within each rank the three orders of angels are of equal status (CH 6.2 201A).[2] The primary task of angels is to transmit the divine light from God through a process of "handing down" (CH 8.2 240C).[3] However, angels of the same rank are described as communicating through "exchanging queries" among themselves (CH 7.3 209BC). The manner in which inferior angels return love to their superiors is not detailed in the extant works, though it may have been discussed in the lost text, *The Properties and Ranks of the Angels* (DN 4.2 696B).

Third, there is Kupperman's inference that the mutual love applies to human beings. While his argument is plausible, he grounds it in the Logos-logoi distinction, a framework prominent in Plotinus and Maximus the Confessor but not explicitly found in Denys. This leads to a critical question: what, precisely, is meant by mutual love among human beings, and in what sense can they be considered equal? The focus on human love, as will be argued below, should be placed within the harmony forged by the cosmic love among all levels of the created beings.

Since Denys renders mutual love among the equals, we should examine the concept of equality first. The divine name "Equality" is briefly addressed in DN 9.10, following a discussion of "inequality" in DN 8.9.[4] For Denys, inequality symbolizes the individualizing of things–their distinction from the

1 CH 15.9 337C: "τὰ δὲ ἅρματα τὴν συζευκτικὴν τῶν ὁμοταγῶν κοινωνίαν." Heil and Ritter, 58 line 11–2.

2 See also CH 8.1 240A.

3 The transmission is also through voices, as they "cry out to one another". See CH 10.2 273A.

4 This treatment also fits into the differentiation between God's immanent Trinity and economic Trinity. Notably, equality comes after the topics of greatness and smallness, sameness and difference, similarity and dissimilarity, and rest and motion in DN 9; while inequality is listed along with the names of power, righteousness, salvation and redemption in DN 8.

whole–which is preserved by divine righteousness. Equality, however, carries a dual sense for the Deity: first, God retains His own indivisibility and self-consistency; and second, God demonstrates equality by impartially proceeding to all, providing subsistence for all, and bestowing gifts upon all (DN 9.10 917A). As a counterpart to this divine equality, there exists an ontological sameness shared by all beings, stemming from their common origin and end:

> "From this [divine] beauty comes the existence of everything, each being exhibiting its own way of beauty. For beauty is the cause of harmony [ἐφαρμογαί], of sympathy [φιλίαι], of community [κοινωνίαι]. Beauty unites all things and is the source of all things. It is the great creating cause which bestirs the world and holds all things in existence by the longing inside them to have beauty." (DN 4.7 704A; Suchla, 152 line 2)

All creation comes from God and shares in God's goodness and beauty, collectively participating in the erotic yearning for return. This shared participation forms the harmony of the created order. Significantly, Denys describes this harmony with three interrelated terms: friendship (φιλία), mutuality (ἀλλῆλος) and community (κοινωνία). [1] These words are interchangeable to depict the internal relations among beings as bearers of goodness and beauty. Their inherent similarities create a congruity that embodies the Greek principle of "like is known by like" (CH 2.3 140C)[2]. Understood in this light, love between equals refers to the fundamental concord of the created cosmos.

Beyond this cosmic sense, mutual love also carries a communal dimension, conveyed through the concept of communion (κοινωνία) or philia.[3] As mentioned above, Christ is the source and end of church hierarchy,

1 DN 4.21 724A: "friendship, inherent harmony… kindly to each other" (φίλα τἀγαθὰ καὶ ἐναρμόνια πάντα…προσήγορα ἀλλήλοις, Suchla, 169 line 9–11); DN 4.19 717A: "communion, unity and concord" (κοινωνία καί ἑνότητι καί φιλία, Suchla, 164 line 15); DN 4.20 720C: "real unity and real love" (ἑνώσεως καὶ φιλίας, Suchla, 167 line 5); and DN 8.5 892C: "mutual harmony and communion" (τὴν ἀλλήλων φιλίαν καὶ κοινωνίαν, Suchla, 202 line 8).

2 See Louth 1989, p. 39. *Corpus Hermeticum* XI, 20, in Copenhaver 2000, p. 41. And also Festugiere 1954, p. 136.

3 The word philia occurs 10 times in Denys's writing, and philia only occurs in *Divine Names*. Vasilakis offers a word study of philia in the corpus, see Vasilakis 2020, note 129, p. 178. Louth also offers a lexical analysis of love, see Louth 2022, p. 156. In comparison, expressions of κοινωνέω/κοινωνία/κοινωνίκός/κοινωνός occur more

which means, the salvific work of Christ should be mediated through the church settings, namely its clerical order, liturgical setting, and material elements. This leads to a reading of *The Ecclesiastical Hierarchy* through the triadic love among the superior, the inferior, and those of equal status. EH contains a rich abundance of communion language. The most focused discussion occurs in the rite of the Eucharist and its contemplation. The Eucharist is called the synaxis (gathering) or communion. As "sacrament of sacraments," it brings unity to our divisions and establishes a "communion with the One" (EH 3.1 424C). It represents the end and perfection of all rites and divine works, wherein all participants are granted a share of divine reality and union with the body of Christ.

The synaxis is divided into two phases, marked by the exclusion of catechumens, penitents and the possessed from the second part. The first phase is open to all people, including the initial prayer, censing around the nave, psalm singing and scripture reading. The second phase is restricted to clergy, monks and laity, and comprises the placing of the bread and cup, singing and praying, the ritual kiss of peace, a second scripture reading, the Eucharist prayer, the uncovering of bread and wine, communion, and the final thanksgiving. This division indicates that while all those present are eligible to witness Christ's love, only the initiated are permitted to receive the Eucharist. Thus, although the rite is structured hierarchically, it preserves an appropriate place for every individual within that hierarchy.

Apart from this Eucharistic communion, the believer is also united to the body of the Church–an assembly of people of "equal birth" (EH 3.3.11 441B). This ecclesial body is composed of saints who are "members of Christ," existing in mutual companionship (EH 7.1 553B).[1] The communion of saints encompasses one's entire life, from baptism to death, as illustrated in the rite of anointing the dead. In one scene, the dying person is surrounded by "his peers, his neighbors with God, those living like him, bless him for having come prayerfully and triumphantly to his goal." (EH 7.1.3 556B) These are the individual's lifelong companions. In another scene, the body of the deceased is placed alongside others of the same rank, as they are "enrolled forever in the company of the saints" (EH 7.3.3 557D–560A), sharing a blessed dwelling in the afterlife. Thus, the communion with Christ is a journey accompanied by fellow saints, extending from this life to the next.

The Eucharist and funeral rites fully reveal the meaning of communion. As an expression of cosmic harmony, the hierarchical structure is not confined

in EH than in DN or CH, see "Griechisches Register", in Ritter and Heil, 287.

1 This communal dimension has been highlighted by Louth, see Louth 2007, pp. 194–6.

to the one-way, downward transmission of divine light. Rather, it aims for a universal concord and resonance across all levels of beings. This is not a static system of overflow but is oriented toward dynamism and reciprocity between ranks, as well as mutuality within the same order. Seen in this way, the Eucharist is not merely about receiving God's gifts and offering thanksgiving to Him; it is a shared divine feast among participants who are equally children of God. In light of this, the ascetic life is not a solitary pursuit. The believer is accompanied by other perfected individuals, even unto death and the afterlife, exemplifying the communion or friendship that binds them together. From this analysis, we can relate the two great commandments to the Dionysian conception of love: our love for God (the first commandment) is a returning love in response to God's providential care in the procession, while love for our neighbors (the second commandment) is the love that remains, the mutual love enacted between God's procession and our return, between God's incarnation and human union with God.

Concluding Remarks

Several remarks emerge from this study. As the above discussion shows, love in Denys possesses a richer constellation of meanings than the Platonic *eros* from which it derives. The intriguing thing is that the corpus primarily engages with *eros* language, with only occasional references to terms such as agape, philanthropy or communion. The reason behind this, this article argues, is not a lack of conceptual precision or a poverty of related ideas, but rather the inherent fecundity *eros* itself. For Denys, *eros* is the singular, unifying power manifest in the movements of procession, remaining and return. It finds expression in Christ's philanthropy and in the cosmic and ecclesiastical communion, as the manifestation of love between procession and return.

The unitary nature of *eros* is fundamental. It indicates that various concepts of love are not different in kind nor incommensurable; they are, in essence, manifestations of a single, multifaceted *eros*. Denys is not an isolated case in this approach. In the New Testament, agape predominates in the commandments and teachings on love. Plato and his followers unanimously understood love as essentially *eros*, the pursuit of goodness and beauty in the beloved. Aristotle devoted two books of the *Nicomachean Ethics* to philia, applying it to relationships between parents and children, lovers and beloved, fellow citizens, rulers and ruled, benefactors and beneficiaries, and friends. Following Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas even extended the scope of friendship to include God, oneself, one's body, angels and demons. The polysemous usage of *eros* can create a trap for readers like Nygren, who, by framing *eros* in stark opposition to agape, inadvertently overlooks the value and integration of other love languages—not only in Denys, but across both pagan and

Christian authors.

Second, Denys makes a decisive move by reordering the triad, placing "remaining" as the second term between procession and return, in contrast to Proclus's sequence of remaining-procession-return. This indicates Denys does not slavishly accept all of his Neoplatonic predecessors but adapts their framework into a Christian narrative. By positioning God's remaining between procession and return, Denys emphasizes His continuous providence within the created order—a providence that culminates in God becoming incarnate and establishing the church hierarchy. Christ's incarnation is the ultimate manifestation of this "remaining" among us, forming the pivotal watershed between descension and ascension, the cataphatic and the apophatic, the divine and the human, the angelic hierarchy and our own. Seen in this way, Jesus Christ is not marginalized in Denys's thought as some critics claim, but stands at the very center of his metaphysics, mysticism and liturgical theology. The Christocentric focus reveals Denys's creativity in Christianizing Platonism and affirms his orthodoxy, demonstrating that he is far from a Platonist in Christian disguise.

This leads directly to the final point. The intermediate stage of remaining allows for the incorporation of love between equals into the framework. The concept of communion thus applies to the cosmic concord among different beings, exemplified in the internal relationships within the Christian community. This communal vision is easily overlooked if one focuses solely on Denys's most famous treatise, *The Mystical Theology*, which describes the soul's solitary ascent to God and its subsequent plunge into the divine darkness—a journey that appears as isolated as Plotinus's "flight of the alone to the Alone". However, in *The Ecclesiastic Hierarchy*, union with God is not achieved in isolation. The believer lives and worships collectively within the whole hierarchy; it is a corporate elevation to participate in God's activity and attributes, whereby in uniting with Christ, we also unite with one another. This vision is not entirely absent even in MT. When Moses departs from the crowds, he is first "accompanied by chosen priests [as] he pushes ahead to the summit of the divine ascents" (MT 1.3 1000D), before he alone enters the darkness. This detail offers a vital correction to the conceptions of theology–such as those in certain Calvinist or modern Sino-Christian contexts—that frame salvation solely as a scheme between the individual soul and God, thereby neglecting its communal and cosmic dimensions. In Denys, this communal dimension is never lost. Throughout the corpus, he repeatedly employs the first-person plural to depict the deifying vision, as epitomized in this passage:

> "In the time to come, when we are incorruptible and immortal, when we have come at last to the blessed inheritance of being like Christ, then, as scripture says, 'we shall always be with the Lord.'… We shall be united with him and, our understanding carried away, blessedly happy, we shall be struck by his blazing light. Marvelously, our minds will be like those in the heavens above. We shall be 'equal to angels and sons [sic] of God, being sons [sic] of the resurrection.'" (DN 1.4 592BC)

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Women at the Frontlines of Faith:

Christian Service and Rural Reconstruction in Wartime Sichuan

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Abstract: This paper investigates how Ginling Women's College, one of China's leading Christian institutions for women, engaged in rural reconstruction during the Second Sino-Japanese War. Focusing on its rural service stations in Renshou and Zhonghechang, Sichuan, this paper examines how Christian women educators translated ideals of social service, citizenship, and domestic reform into local practice. Drawing on missionary archives, Guomindang (GMD) administrative documents, and local records, the paper reconstructs both the institutional design and the lived experience of these wartime experiments.

Ginling's initiatives reveal how Christian social work became intertwined with GMD programs of rural reconstruction and moral reform. Through literacy classes, nursery programs, and citizenship training courses, urban-educated women sought to improve rural women's lives while cultivating civic and moral order. Their efforts exposed tensions between their Christian, urban-informed visions of social improvement and the daily constraints of rural wartime life.

By foregrounding everyday encounters between reformers and villagers, this study highlights the social, cultural, and spiritual dimensions of Christian women's activism. It argues that Ginling's wartime rural service redefined the relationships among Christian social engagement, gender roles, and the GMD-led reconstruction initiatives, offering new insights into how Chinese Christianity adapted to and participated in the transformation of rural society during the war.

Keywords: Christian social service, Ginling Women's College, wartime reconstruction, rural women, West China

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Introduction and Historiography

In 1934, as China's Rural Reconstruction Movement (乡村建设运动) reached its peak, *Xiwang yuekan* 希望月刊 (*The Christian Hope*), a popular Christian journal in West China,[1] featured an article titled: "The Responsibility of Christianity toward Rural Women." Its author declared that the church itself bore an active duty to improve the social status of rural women, claiming that "Christianity is the only savior for rural women" and that "only Christianity values the spirit of service and charity" (He 1934, p. 5). Such assertions may sound sweeping today, yet they placed Christianity squarely within the era's broader search for national renewal and social reconstruction.[2]

More strikingly, the author voiced concern about who should carry out this work. While many assumed that educated urban women were best suited to guide their rural counterparts, he cautioned that true service required more than schooling or goodwill: "We do not oppose this approach, but we must carefully examine whether educated women are capable of taking on this responsibility" (He 1934, p. 4). His question, aimed at the secular "modern

1 *Xiwang yuekan* 希望月刊 (*The Christian Hope*) was founded in 1924 by the Canadian Methodist missionary R. O. Jalliffe. Initially created to facilitate communication among Methodist parishes, it soon developed into a non-denominational Christian periodical that reported on social and religious affairs, published essays on theology and scientific knowledge, and provided devotional materials. Its readership consisted largely of Chinese church members in West China, and by the mid-1930s its monthly circulation averaged around one thousand copies. For background on the journal, see Liu Jixi 刘吉西 et al., *Sichuan Jidujiao shi* 四川基督教史 [History of Christianity in Sichuan] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 1992), 323; Chen Jianmin 陈建明, *Jindai Jidujiao zai huaxi diqü wenzi shigong yanjiu* 近代基督教在华西文字事工研究 [Research on modern Christian literature work in West China] (Chengdu: Bashu shushe, 2013), 242. For more research on China's rural reconstruction movement, see Kate Merkel-Hess, *The Rural Modern: Reconstructing the Self and State in Republican China* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2016); Liang Xin 梁心, *Chengyan guanxiang: nongye zhongguo de nongcun zenyang chengle guojia wenti, 1908-1937* 城眼观乡：农业中国的农村怎样成了国家问题 (1908—1937) [Observing the village from the urban perspective: how did the village in the agrarian China become a national problem, 1908-1937] (Xiamen: Xiamen daxue chubanshe, 2024), esp. Chapters 8 & 9.

2 For more on Christianity's role in China's nation-building and social reform, see Ryan Dunch, *Fuzhou Protestants and the Making of a Modern China, 1857-1927* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001); Thomas H. Reilly, *Saving the Nation: Chinese Protestant Elites and the Quest to Build a New China, 1922-1952* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021); Daryl R. Ireland, ed., *Visions of Salvation: Chinese Christian Posters in an Age of Revolution* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022).

women," nevertheless opens a deeper query that would shape Christian social service for rural women throughout the 1930s and 1940s: How, in practice, could bridge the gap between educated Christian women and the villagers they sought to serve?

The unequal relationship, as well as the cultural and social distance, between educated Christian women and the rural women they sought to serve has preoccupied both historical actors and modern scholars. For several decades, historians of Christianity in China have explored how women, both foreign and Chinese, understood and practiced "women's work for women." Much of this scholarship has focused on how missionaries and educated Chinese Christians promoted ideals of Christian domesticity and moral reform. Jane Hunter's pioneering study, *The Gospel of Gentility* (1984), traced how single and married missionary women used education, medicine, and evangelism to expand women's roles within a gendered Christian framework at the turn of the twentieth century. Yet her work was largely situated within the history of Western missionary movements rather than Chinese Christianity itself.

Since the publication of Kwok Pui-lan's *Chinese Women and Christianity, 1860–1927* (1992), scholars have increasingly turned to the perspectives of Chinese women themselves, situating their religious lives within broader currents of social reform, education, and the women's movement. More recent studies have highlighted how Chinese Christian women helped shape both the modern church and Chinese society in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Lutz 2010; Littell-Lamb 2023; Stasson 2023; Bond 2024). Still, most of this work has centered on Christian efforts in urban settings—schools, hospitals, and churches in treaty ports—while the circulation of Christian ideas in the countryside, and the participation of rural women themselves, remain much less understood.

Building on this growing body of scholarship, recent works by Helen Schneider (2014) and Yun Zhou (2023) have further illuminated the role of Christian women in rural reform in Republican China. Yun Zhou's analysis of Christian print culture focuses on how urban Christian intellectuals in the 1930s imagined rural womanhood through narratives of domesticity and morality. Schneider's research on Ginling Women's College reveals how female missionaries and foreign-trained Chinese social workers translated these ideals of domesticity and womanhood into concrete social service programs, particularly during the college's wartime relocation to Sichuan. My research enters into dialogue with both of them by focusing on practice and encounter—how educated Christian women implemented social service programs in the wartime countryside, interacted with local officials, and negotiated relationships with village women. Through this lens, I seek to

understand not only how ideals of womanhood, domesticity, and citizenship were articulated, but also how they were received, adapted, and reshaped in everyday life.

While most studies of Christian "women's work for women" in China focus on the pre-1937 periods, the wartime decade remains comparatively understudied. Yet the War of Resistance profoundly reshaped the social and political landscape of China's interior, creating new conditions for reform and collaboration. Recent scholarship has reinterpreted the war not merely as a time of crisis but as a moment of far-reaching transformation, when state-building, social welfare, and rural reconstruction initiatives expanded under GMD governance (Greene 2022). Scholars such as Timothy Brook (1996) and Diana Junio (2017) have shown how Christian organizations adapted to wartime realities, forging complex partnerships with the state that blurred the boundaries between mission and government service. My research builds on these insights by examining how such collaboration unfolded at the grassroots level—how Christian women educators and reformers, working in cooperation with local officials, turned the call for wartime reconstruction into lived practice. Situating these efforts within the reconfiguration of women's public roles during the War of Resistance,[1] I argue that Christian women reformers became key mediators between state agendas and village life. Through their educational and social service work, they translated abstract ideals of citizenship and moral uplift into everyday acts of care and cooperation, revealing how Christian visions of service helped redefine women's participation in the making of wartime China.

To examine these questions, this paper turns to Ginling Women's College (金陵女子文理学院), one of the leading Christian institutions for women's higher education in Republican China. Founded in Nanjing in 1915, Ginling was renowned for cultivating educated women committed to public service. (Feng 2009, p. 13) During the War of Resistance, as the college evacuated to Chengdu, Sichuan, its faculty and students sought new ways to apply their Christian and professional training to national reconstruction. Between 1939 and 1945, they developed rural service projects in Renshou (Jenshow 仁寿)

1 For more research on the changing roles of Chinese women in public realms during the War of Resistance, see Lo Jiu-jung 羅久蓉, Yu Chien-ming 游鑑明, and Chiu Hei-yuan 瞿海源, eds., *Fenghuo suiyue xia de Zhongguo funu¨fangwen jilu* 烽火歲月下的中國婦女訪問紀錄 [Twentieth Century Wartime Experiences of Chinese Women: An Oral History] (Taipei: Academia Sinica Institute of Modern History, 2004); Danke Li, *Echoes of Chongqing: Women in Wartime China* (Chicago, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2010); Nicole Elizabeth Barnes, *Intimate Communities Wartime Healthcare and the Birth of Modern China, 1937-1945* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2018).

and later in Zhonghechang (Chung Ho Chang 中和场), combining social welfare, education, and moral reform. (Schneider 2014, pp. 123-124) These experiments were not isolated missionary ventures but part of a broader wartime movement in which Christian institutions reimagined their social mission within the frameworks of state-building and rural reconstruction. In *Keeping the Nation's House*, Schneider (2011) shows how Christian women's educational and social work complemented the GMD efforts in rural reconstruction. My study builds on this insight but focuses on the practices and relational dynamics of these wartime experiments, particularly the encounters between urban Christian reformers and rural women in Sichuan.

This study draws on a wide range of English and Chinese materials, including missionary correspondence, reports from Ginling and the National Christian Council (NCC), provincial and county government records, and local gazetteers preserved. It also consults local histories and oral accounts collected in Renshou and Zhonghechang, which illuminate how these programs were remembered at the village level. By combining missionary and official sources with local perspectives, I reconstruct both the program design and the lived experience of Christian rural reform. Methodologically, I approach these materials through a lens informed by social and cultural history, tracing not only organizational structures but also the interactions, emotions, and moral ideals that shaped everyday encounters between reformers and villagers.

By foregrounding the intimate, relational dimensions of reform, this paper shifts attention from the Christian rhetoric of "uplift" to the everyday labor of education and service.[1] The focus on Ginling's women reformers—urban, educated, and often outsiders in rural Sichuan—reveals how ideals of service, citizenship, and womanhood were interpreted and negotiated through relationships of trust, mentorship, and friendship. These small exchanges—listening, teaching, visiting, and sharing in village life—made

1 For discussions of Christian rhetorics of "uplift" in other geographical and cultural contexts, see Rajsekhar Basu, "Missionaries as Agricultural Pioneers: Protestant Missionaries and Agricultural Improvement in Twentieth-Century India," in *Tilling the Land: Agricultural Knowledge and Practices in Colonial India*, ed. Deepak Kumar and Bipasha Raha (Delhi, India: Primus Books, 2016); Nandini Chatterjee, "Education for 'Uplift': Christian Agricultural Colleges in India," in *The Making of Indian Secularism: Empire, Law and Christianity, 1830–1960* (Basingstoke and New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Marwa Elshakry, "The Gospel of Science and American Evangelism in Late Ottoman Beirut," *Past & Present*, no. 196 (2007): 173–214; Todd H. Leedy, "The World the Students Made: Agriculture and Education at American Missions in Colonial Zimbabwe, 1930-1960," *History of Education Quarterly* 47, no. 4 (2007): 447-469.

possible a kind of moral and civic education that neither the church nor the state could fully prescribe. The following sections trace Ginling's wartime experiments in Renshou and Zhonghechang, showing how Christian women educators redefined the meaning of rural service and expanded the boundaries of both religious and social life in wartime China.

The Beginnings of Ginling's Wartime Rural Service: The Renshou Experiment

Ginling College opened its first rural service center in Sichuan at Renshou in the fall of 1939. ("Nongcun funü gongzuo zai Renshou" 1940) The choice of location was strategic. Renshou was the second most populous county in Sichuan, where a Canadian mission station had long operated there (Missionary Society of the Methodist Church 1920, pp. 178-190), and the University of Nanking was expanding its agricultural extension work in collaboration with government agencies there (Li 1940, p. 59).[1] The existing network of educational and technical institutions provided Ginling with an institutional base and official support for its social service projects. Missionaries in western China had long recognized the advantages of working in market towns, or *chang* (场), where they could reach large populations with limited personnel. These towns held regular markets that drew villagers from the surrounding countryside to trade, socialize, and often attend religious services.[2] By the 1930s, American Protestant missions had already built thousands of churches in such towns, which served as vital intermediaries

1 In September 1938, an agricultural extension bureau was established in Renshou, jointly run by the Agricultural College of University of Nanking and the Agricultural Production Promotion Commission 农产促进委员会—a government agency created after the outbreak of war to increase agricultural productivity and assist local governments in setting up extension programs. Li Lying 李力庸, "Zouchu shiyanshi: kangzhan shiqi nongcan cujin weiyuanhui de nonage tuiguang shiye (1938-1944)" 走出实验室——抗战时期农产促进委员会的农业推广事业(1938-1944) [Walking out of the Laboratory-Agricultural Extension Enterprises of the Agricultural Production Promotion Committee during the War of Resistance against Japan (1938-1944)], *Liangan fazhanshi yanjiu* 两岸发展史研究, no. 6 (2008): 25-70.

2 Anthropologist G. W. Skinner introduced the concept of the "standard market town" as a self-sufficient unit in economic, cultural, and social terms in late imperial and modern China. His theory was based on fieldwork conducted in the Chengtu (Chengdu) Plain in Szechwan (Sichuan) during the late 1940s, as well as a large collection of local gazetteers. For detailed discussion about peasant marketing in traditional Chinese society, see G. William Skinner, "Marketing and social structure in rural China, Part 1, 2," *Journal of Asian studies* 24, no. 1, 2 (1964, 1965): 3-43, 195-228.

between urban and rural life. (Megginson 1968) Renshou, a busy market center rather than a typical village, fit well into this pattern.

Before the center opened, Ginling College sent students and faculty members in the spring to survey local conditions, hoping to design a program rooted in everyday rural life. One student later described the survey as a form of "social engagement" (*chouying* 酬应). ("Nongcun funü gongzuo zai Renshou" 1940, p. 70) They met the county governor, leading families, and local bankers over shared meals and tea gatherings. Through these encounters, the Ginling survey team came to see Renshou's potential as a "social center" for outreach, where villagers regularly came to trade, socialize, and exchange news ("Ginling in Chengtu, Szechuan: Summer Service 1939 at Jenshow" n. d.).

The regional social structure offered particular advantages for women's work. Compared with many parts of North and East China, local women in Sichuan enjoyed greater mobility and economic participation. They often went to market and shared responsibility for farm work while men traveled for commercial activities. Ginling workers saw this as an opportunity to involve women in their programs and envisioned night classes for them at the new rural service center in the town. (Highbaugh 1941, p. 86)

The local government's reception further smoothed Ginling's entry into Renshou. Soon after their arrival, the county governor invited the team to breakfast at his home, where officials from the cooperative bank and members of the University of Nanking's agricultural station were also present. The governor thanked them for coming and promised his support. To the Ginling workers, his "energetic and enterprising" leadership embodied the spirit of the new wartime administration ("Ginling in Chengtu, Szechuan: Summer Service 1939 at Jenshow" n.d.). Their collaboration with local authorities reflected a broader trend under the GMD government's new county system (*xin xianzhi* 新县制), which expanded the administrative role of county magistrates and encouraged them to promote welfare and reconstruction projects.[1] Even though Ginling's immediate goals focused on rural women, its work was deeply embedded in these state-led initiatives that sought to reorganize village life around the demands of wartime mobilization.

1 For the development and effects of the GMD's new county system, see Guo Conglun 郭从伦, *Guomin zhengfu xinxianzhi xia de xiancanyihui yanjiu: yi Sichuan wei fenxi kuangjia* 国民政府新县制下的县参议会研究——以四川为分析框架 [Research on County Councils under New County System in the Nationalist Government Period] (Chengdu: Sichuan daxue chubanshe, 2013), 38; Wang Xianming 王先明, *Xianglu manman: 20 shiji zhi zhongguo xiangcun (1901-1949)* 乡路漫漫: 20 世纪之中国乡村 (1901-1949) [A Long Way to Go: Rural Changes in China, 1901-1949] (Beijing: Shehui kexue wenxian chubanshe, 2017), 159-161.

During this survey trip, Ginling girls also met with village heads, who had been appointed under the new administrative system to oversee taxation, conflict mediation, and military recruitment. The government notified these leaders in advance of Ginling's visits, signaling official endorsement of the project. The students described their conversations with the heads as "satisfactory," remarking that "the country people looked frank, honest, and likeable" ("Ginling in Chengtu, Szechuan: Summer Service 1939 at Jenshow" n.d.). Such encounters reveal how rural service, religious outreach, and wartime governance overlapped at the local level, with Ginling's young women workers mediating between local male leaders and the agendas of church and state.

Ginling's rural service program was also buttressed by foreign expertise. One of the most influential figures was Dr. Irma Highbaugh, a veteran missionary educator and a leading advocate of the "Christianizing the Home" movement. In the late 1930s, she developed rural training programs in North China that combined literacy, nutrition, handicrafts, maternity care, and homemaking, aiming to help families improve their daily lives and cultivate Christian values in their relationships (Highbaugh 1936). Wu Yifang 吴贻芳, Ginling's president and chair of the NCC, eagerly invited Highbaugh to join the project (Wu 1939). Both women believed that the "uplift" of Chinese women should begin in the home and that rural education could renew the moral foundations of Chinese society (Stasson 2018, p. 265).

One of Ginling's earliest public activities was the organization of an agricultural fair, a popular form of wartime rural propaganda that combined demonstration, exhibition, and entertainment.[1] Soon after the rural service station opened, the team collaborated with the County Agricultural Extension Bureau (县农业推广所) to host a three-day fair during the Chinese New Year of 1940 ("Renshouxian nongye tuiguangsuo wei qing jialin zhidao shi zhi Sichuansheng weisheng shiyanchu gonghan" 1940). The town was filled with banners, songs, and crowds. Rooted in local festive traditions, the fair showed how Ginling's rural service quickly became woven into community life and the county's wartime campaign for production and reform. The county governor hosted the opening ceremony, and both the government and residents from surrounding areas provided strong support (Settlemeyer 1941, p. 122).

1 Such agricultural fairs, or "Agricultural Promotion Assemblies" (quannong dahui 劝农大会) were common in wartime Sichuan, where provincial agencies sought to raise productivity and morale. Zhang Jishi 张济时, "Renshou quannong dahui zhuiyi" 仁寿劝农大会追记 [Remembering the Agricultural Fair in Renshou], *Nongye tuiguang tongxun* 农业推广通讯 2, no. 6 (1940): 56.

The fair was meant to teach through participation. Thousands of farmers and shopkeepers, men and women, old and young came to see the exhibits. Under the supervision of Irma Highbaugh, Ginling students built exhibits on childcare, nutrition, and household hygiene, arranging model living rooms and hanging posters on health and domestic management. Groups of students guided visitors through each section, explaining their ideas in simple terms (Zhang 1940, p. 57). Local farmers and artisans also contributed their best vegetables, fruits, embroidery, and handmade clothes for competition. The result was something between an agricultural exposition and a lively county fair: a foreign teacher at Ginling observed that nearly eight thousand people came on the first day, "from town and hamlet" (Settlemeyer 1941, p. 122). For many rural visitors, it was their first chance to connect daily life with the broader war effort.[1] The entertainment mixed pleasure with patriotism: national songs were taught, and a display of the remains of Japanese soldiers was meant to stir pride in China's resistance (Zhang 1940, p. 57).

Though women's work was not the focal point of this event, the fair offered Ginling educators a crucial opportunity to engage the public and gain local trust. It revealed how social reconstruction depended on building cooperative relationships with local institutions, and it showed the reformers the value of appealing to everyday concerns, rather than abstract ideals. If the agricultural fair symbolized Ginling's first attempt to engage the community at large, their later initiatives in health and education sought to reach deeper—into the households and daily rhythms of women's lives.

Particularly, the idea of meeting the needs of the Chinese people, especially rural women, stood at the heart of the Ginling rural service programs (Schneider 2014, p. 129). The Ginling team believed that real social change depended on women's participation and leadership. Each project they launched aimed not only to serve villagers but also to train local women to carry on the work themselves (Highbaugh 1940, p. 144). Their efforts centered on four areas: health, economic development, education, and family life.

Ginling placed special emphasis on public health, working with the Provincial Health Bureau to improve maternal and child care—an area in which their efforts achieved some of the most visible results. When Ginling opened its clinic in Renshou, the county still lacked a public health center.[2]

1 According to the survey by the Ginling members, "Many people living just two *li* out of' Renshou did not know that China was fighting, and many others believed that it was a civil war." See "Ginling in Chengtu, Szechuan: Summer Service 1939 at Jenshow."

2 Renshou County's public health center was founded in 1941, but its facilities were rudimentary, medicines were in acute shortage, and funding was consistently inadequate. Sichuansheng Renshou xianzhi bianzuan weiyuanhui 四川省仁寿县志

The clinic treated common illnesses such as trachoma, typhoid fever, and skin diseases, provided vaccinations (mainly against cholera), and offered prenatal and maternal examinations (Deng 1940). Most services were free for poor families (Xiao 1993, pp. 109-110). A local midwife, loaned by the Provincial Health Bureau, joined the team and helped bridge cultural gaps (Chen 1941). Renshou women often gave birth without medical assistance, but they soon welcomed the midwife's presence, and women from various social backgrounds began seeking prenatal care (Highbaugh 1941, p. 84). The Ginling station also launched a "little teachers" (*xiaoxiansheng* 小先生) program, training primary school students to promote hygiene and disease prevention among their peers and families (Deng 1941).

Alongside their health work, the Ginling team launched economic projects that enabled women to earn income while preserving local traditions. The handicraft division of the rural service station promoted embroidery and cross-stitch work, and the Ginling staff helped sell the products abroad to raise funds (Xiao 1993, p. 110). About forty women joined a cooperative that produced traditional Renshou patterns. The project aimed both to sustain a local art form and to provide income for women in need (Highbaugh 1940, p. 145). At first, some participants tried to increase their pay by exaggerating the amount of embroidery they had completed or by passing unfinished pieces to others. Through regular supervision and home visits, the staff encouraged fairness and cooperation, and the women gradually developed a stronger sense of shared responsibility. By 1942, they were working together for public causes, producing more than one hundred sachets for a charity sale during the Duanwu Festival to support soldiers' families (Highbaugh 1941, pp. 85-86).

Education was another focus of Ginling's work in Renshou. The staff worked with local normal and primary schools to run literacy classes for women ("Nongcun funü gongzuo zai Renshou" 1940, p. 71). Lessons on hygiene, sewing, and childcare continued outside formal classes through demonstrations, songs, and plays—methods used during the agricultural fair and now woven into everyday learning. While such programs were common in Christian and non-Christian rural reconstruction efforts, Ginling's approach stood out for its collaboration with county institutions and deep integration into local networks. The county government often invited Ginling workers to assist with educational projects. They taught courses at the County Teacher's Institute, and trained local leaders in basic administration and community service. They also led homemaking courses in local schools,

编纂委员会 [The compiling committee of Renshou County gazetter, Sichuan Province], *Renshou xianzhi* 仁寿县志 [Renshou County gazetter] (Chengdu: Sichuan renmin chubanshe, 1990), 513.

advised on the establishment of a kindergarten, and demonstrated methods of preschool teaching. The use of the town's Ancestral Hall as classrooms showed how well their work was accepted in the community (Highbaugh 1941, p. 89; Wei 1944, p. 60).

Ginling's educational network involved church and mission schools as well. Sixth-grade girls from the Canadian Mission School volunteered as "Little Teachers," guiding nursery and summer groups under the supervision of Ginling students (Highbaugh 1940, p. 147; Highbaugh 1941, p. 89). By working closely with county officials, educators, and mission schools, Ginling's women reformers became part of Renshou's educational system. Their collaboration showed how Christian rural service could merge with local governance, advancing practical education and social reform through shared networks and goals.

Although the Renshou program did not center on overt evangelism, its workers framed their service as a form of Christian witness. Irma Highbaugh repeatedly stressed that the value of such work lay not in immediate results but in what she called the "slower values" of Christian service—patient presence and the cultivation of character in everyday life (Highbaugh 1940, p. 148). Meeting people's needs, she argued, did not mean offering charity "with pity," nor relying solely on schemes of economic improvement. Rather, it meant enabling villagers to serve themselves and one another. For Highbaugh, the ultimate goal of Ginling's work was the gradual development of local leadership: individuals who were physically capable, intellectually equipped, and willing to take responsibility for the welfare of their communities ("A plan for work in a college-sponsored rural service station" ca. 1941). In this sense, what distinguished Ginling's rural service was less the novelty of its programs than a Christian ethos that emphasized self-discipline, unselfishness, and long-term transformation through ordinary, repeated acts of service.

At the same time, Highbaugh was acutely aware of the limits imposed by wartime conditions, especially the pressure of time and the uneven preparation of personnel. In an English report, she identified the project's "greatest difficulties" as the slow process of learning local conditions in Sichuan, the need for new staff—many just out of school—to acquire practical skills before they could teach others, and the challenge of sustaining disciplined daily work outside the familiar rhythms of academic life. She cautioned her colleagues that people "do not grow like soybeans or bamboo but rather like banyan trees," a metaphor that underscored both her commitment to gradual change and her sober awareness of the demands for quick, visible results. Students echoed these concerns, noting that villagers often expected them to "know everything," even as the team struggled with limited expertise and constant turnover ("A plan for work in a college-

sponsored rural service station" ca. 1941). Highbaugh thus framed Renshou as an ongoing experiment rather than a finished model, one marked by the tension between a Christian vision of gradual moral growth and the wartime urgency for demonstrable outcomes.

Moving to Zhonghechang: Caring for Children and Reforming Domestic Life

In 1943, amid rising costs, travel difficulties, and the departure of Irma Highbaugh due to poor health, Ginling College closed its rural service station in Renshou and relocated to Zhonghechang, a market town closer to Chengdu ("The Rural Service Program at Ginling College, Chengtu, Szechuen, China" n.d.; Stasson 2018, p. 265). The Zhonghechang project built upon the lessons of Renshou, but with a new level of government partnership. Unlike Renshou, where Ginling students worked alongside foreign advisers, the Zhonghechang station was fully staffed and directed by Chinese women, who carried forward the vision of Christian rural reform (Schneider 2014, p. 133).

Zhonghechang's social and geographic setting made it an ideal site for this experiment. Once a small village, it had grown rapidly after the construction of the Chengdu–Renshou highway, becoming a busy trading center for the surrounding countryside (Zhong 2012, p. 17; Treudley 2011, p. 156). Continuous air raids on Chengdu during the war also drew families, schools, and officials to settle in nearby market towns such as Zhonghechang, bringing population growth and new demands for social services ("Chengdushi shusan renkou banfa" 1939; Wu 2014, p. 123). Existing church connections also provided a foundation for the Zhonghechang project: before Ginling's rural service team arrived, students and a pastor from West China Union Theological College had run a small gospel school there ("Chengdu U. C. C. District" 1941, p. 51). Together, these factors made Zhonghechang a place where Ginling's Chinese staff could test how to integrate Christian social service into the state-led efforts to rebuild rural communities during wartime.

This convergence of Christian ideals and wartime welfare found a tangible expression in the realm of family life. The idea of initiating social change through the family had long shaped both Christian and the GMD visions of reform, and Ginling's work in Zhonghechang reflected this shared concern. Since the 1920s, the NCC had promoted the "Christianizing the Home" (*Jiduhua jiating* 基督化家庭), based on the belief that a self-governing, self-propagating, and self-supporting Chinese church must rest on the foundation of Christian family life (O'Keefe 2017, p. 9). This vision took institutional form in 1930 with the establishment of the Christian Home Committee (*Jiduhua jiating weiyuanhui* 基督化家庭委员会), which sought to raise the status of women and children, introduce domestic "science" to rural

households, and promote hygiene and moral reform (Kuan 1937, p. 139-141).

The GMD policymakers likewise embraced the home as a frontline for moral and civic reform. Drawing on the New Life Movement's emphasis on moral discipline, hygiene, and productivity, they developed wartime family education programs that encouraged cooperation between schools and families and highlighted mothers' roles in children's physical and moral development (Schneider 2013, p. 191). While NCC reformers viewed the Christian family as a moral and faith community and prioritized its role in evangelization, the GMD state educators defined it as a tool for wartime mobilization. Both, however, shared the belief that reshaping the home could strengthen the nation.

In this overlapping landscape of Christian and state-led reform, Ginling women translated these ideals into practice through early childhood education. As Xiong Yana (Hsiung Ya-na 熊亚拿), a 1941 Ginling sociology graduate who supervised child education work in Zhonghechang, explained, "Since the basis of personality is fixed during the first six years, preschool education is of the utmost importance" (Hsiung n.d.).[1] The Zhonghechang rural experimental nursery school (*xiangcun shiyan tuoersuo* 乡村实验托儿所), co-founded in 1943 by Ginling College and the Sichuan Provincial Social Bureau (*Sichuansheng zhengfu shehuichu* 四川省政府社会处), enrolled about forty children aged two to five (Xiong n.d.). It aimed to alleviate the burdens of village families, train child welfare workers, and cultivate good citizens ("The Rural Service Program at Ginling College, Chengtu, Szechuen, China" n.d.). These goals reflected a distinctive blend of Christian service and wartime nationalism. Lessons on hygiene, proper conduct, and cooperation were interwoven with patriotic instruction, such as commemorations of "the Birthday of Sun Yat-sen" (国父诞辰) and lessons on "Our Country" (我们的国家) and "The Abominable Japan" (可恶的日本) (Xiong n.d.). Xiong stated plainly that "cultivating children's national consciousness was one of the nursery's chief goals," linking daily instruction with the GMD government's wartime educational directives (Xiong 1944b, p. 53).

In her reports, Xiong emphasized the visible improvements she believed signaled progress: clearer speech, polite greetings, better health, and new habits of washing. One grandmother marveled that her grandson, once resistant to washing, now insisted that his mother clean his face and clothes. The teachers' attention to manners, greetings, and table etiquette turned moral cultivation into a collective exercise in social order. One anecdote illustrated this transformation vividly: when a mother tried to take her child home out of

1 For Xiong Yana's educational background, see Wu Yifang to Mr. Wilmer Fairbank, 29 December 1945, YDL, UBCHEA, RG 11, Box 137-2757.

turn, the little girl burst into tears, insisting on waiting in line "like the other children" (Hsiung n.d.). For Xiong, such behavior demonstrated how proper discipline and collective order could be learned through daily practice. The cultivation of cleanliness, politeness, and self-restraint reflected a shared moral vision that linked Protestant ethics with the New Life Movement's ideals of orderly and responsible citizens.

The mentality of rationalizing everyday life was also reflected in the Ginling workers' efforts to improve children's nutrition. In the first annual report to the Provincial Social Bureau, Xiong noted that "nutrition" (*yang* 养) was as important as "education" (*jiao* 教) in the nursery's program. To strengthen the children's health, the staff served breakfast daily, including grains, soybean milk, sweet potatoes, and green vegetables (Xiong n.d.). In an English-language report, Xiong observed that most of the local children did not eat green vegetables, carrots, or tomatoes. Therefore, the nursery school served especially these "nutritious foods," and "the children gradually learned to take them" (Hsiung n.d.) She treated this change as one of the nursery's greatest achievements, interpreting the acquisition of certain dietary habits as a sign of progress (Xiong 1944b, pp. 51-52).

Ginling's nutritional work reflected a larger wartime movement to improve the health of Chinese children—what Fu Jia-Chen has described as the mobilization of nutrition science for national defense. In early twentieth-century China, nutrition science was new and far from universally accepted. Chinese nutritional activists and scientists began to promote a "scientific diet" not merely to prevent hunger but to strengthen the population and defend the nation during times of crisis (Fu 2018). By the 1940s, the GMD government had made nutrition a matter of national policy (Ren et al. 1941). Drawing on research by the Chinese Medical Association, a guide issued by the Ministry of Education recommended green vegetables as essential sources of vitamins and minerals, since milk was rarely consumed and animal products and fruits were expensive ("Zhongguo minzhong zuidi xiandu zhi yingyang xuyao" n.d.). The Ginling nursery designers followed this same logic. Rather than focusing solely on providing basic grains to ward off starvation, they aimed to supply specific nutrients—such as protein, vitamin B, and calcium—to foster robust and healthy children.

It is difficult to know whether the villagers fully understood the scientific reasoning behind these dietary reforms. Yet their growing participation in the program suggests that they recognized the authority of the Ginling workers and their methods. Within two weeks of the nursery's opening, many parents began contributing food voluntarily. The staff created a register to record the donations according to nutritional categories—vegetables, grains, and soy products—and parents followed these recommendations when offering food

(Xiong n.d.). This practice not only reduced the nursery's expenses but also turned nutrition education into a form of community cooperation. By organizing parental contributions in the language of nutritional science, the Ginling women reinforced their position as experts in family education and encouraged new ways of thinking about care and responsibility. Their efforts to improve children's health and diet suggest how Christian service ideals and modern scientific knowledge could come together in the routines of daily life.

This effort to reform rural daily life extended beyond the nursery to the families themselves. The Ginling workers treated home visits as the "key" to their success: they visited households regularly, interviewed parents, and sought their cooperation in caring for what Xiong called "problem children" (Hsiung n.d.). Twice a month, about thirty to forty parents attended meetings where staff gave short talks and demonstrations on daily care, such as making comfortable clothing and toys, improving children's nutrition, and learning songs and games to use at home (Xiong n.d.). These encounters reinforced the teachers' role as specialists in family education. By showing parents how to apply scientific and hygienic principles to childrearing, the nursery staff encouraged small but visible changes in domestic life and deepened local trust in their guidance.

Although the regular staff and student volunteers at the station sometimes wrote about villagers in a condescending way—describing them as "frank, generous, energetic, yet ignorant"—they were committed to "meeting the needs" of rural families and involving them in social service. A central goal of the program was to train local women as nursery assistants. The staff recruited village girls with primary education—seven in the first year and twice as many the next. When Ginling planned to open a second nursery to help mothers during the harvest season, a local leader organized villagers to clean and repair a house and build toilets so the project could begin. Villagers also donated bamboo for making basins, cups, and toys. This active participation encouraged the Ginling team to expand their work further, opening a summer nursery (*xialing tuoersuo* 夏令托儿所) and another for farmers' families during the busy season (*nongmang tuoersuo* 农忙托儿所) to meet the changing needs of village life (Hsiung n.d.; Xiong n.d.).

The Sichuan Social Bureau, impressed by how the program "seemed fitted to Chinese rural life," approved a budget increase in 1944 despite wartime inflation (Hsiung n.d.; "Sichuanshengzhengfu shehuichu guanyu shuoming Jinling nüzi wenli xueyuan heban xiangcun shiyan tuoersuo suoxu jingfei qing caizhengting zhaobo xi chazhao de qiantiao" 1944). The GMD government endorsed such an initiative not only because it offered a replicable rural service model but also because it aligned with the wartime campaign for civic responsibility. Yet such endorsement did not remove the

material and human constraints under which the Zhonghechang station operated. As Xiong Yana noted in her annual report, a persistent shortage of personnel shaped nearly every aspect of daily work. The local teenage girls trained as nursery assistants varied widely in educational background, making instruction uneven and labor-intensive. During the busiest farming seasons, limited staffing forced the nursery to operate only half days, falling short of villagers' needs. Even efforts to test and refine nursery equipment and toys as part of Ginling College's research program remained constrained by the lack of trained workers (Xiong n.d.).

Within these limits, Ginling's approach to service took shape through close contact with villagers. The Zhonghechang station contributed to wartime mobilization by organizing rallies to raise donations for the war effort and inviting local church members to visit soldiers' families "to let them know the love of Christ" ("Reports of Ginling's Rural Work" 1945). Such activities aligned Ginling's work with the GMD's civic discourse, yet they did not amount to a simple or passive incorporation into state agendas. Rather, Ginling's educators actively reinterpreted Christian service, translating its moral expressions into forms that resonated with wartime ideals of responsibility and sacrifice while maintaining an emphasis on care and personal transformation.

Although explicit evangelism was absent, Christian service was an indispensable part of Ginling's mission. In December 1944, the Zhonghechang rural service team collaborated with the local church to celebrate Christmas with the community. Children performed songs and plays before more than sixty parents, and during the Sunday service, seven young people were baptized. By the end of the war in 1945, the ideals of Christian service, rural education, and domestic improvement had become deeply localized—shaped as much by wartime scarcity and staffing limits as by the reformers' aspirations. A visiting missionary woman reflected on this transformation: "The work points to a new China after the war. We want thousands of such stations where devoted Chinese people become missionaries to their own people." ("Reports of Ginling's Rural Work" 1945) Her observation captured the broader significance of Zhonghechang: a place where Christian service, state policy, and village initiative converged, though unevenly and imperfectly, to meet the demands of China's wartime reconstruction.

Reworking Rural Womanhood: Education, Authority, and Affection in Wartime Encounters

Education for rural women formed a central thread in Ginling's wartime work in Sichuan, yet this concern grew out of a longer history of reform that linked women's education to national regeneration. As Andrew Liu has noted,

some May Fourth intellectuals connected the "woman question" (*funü wenti* 婦女問題) with the "agrarian question" (*nongcun wenti* 农村问题), seeing both as part of the broader search for a moral and productive citizenry (Liu 2018). During its formative years, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) also made women's emancipation central to its revolutionary cause. As Christina Gilmartin has shown, Communist leaders in the 1920s viewed the transformation of gender relations as inseparable from social revolution, calling for women's participation in political and economic life (Gilmartin 1995).

Around the same time, Chinese Christian reformers were experimenting with alternative models of social change. The Mass Education Movement (MEM), launched by James Yen, envisioned a modern and democratic nation grounded in a literate population (Hayford 1990). The MEM reformers regarded women's education as vital to this goal, prioritizing literacy education in their work for women. Instruction emphasized home economics and childrearing, reflecting the belief that women's moral and domestic roles were key to modernization. While women's emancipation was often subordinated to state-building and economic growth, the MEM nonetheless created new spaces, such as literacy schools, cooperatives, and women's clubs, where rural women began to engage in public life (Merkel-Hess 2016, p. 57, p. 62).

The New Life Movement (NLM), initiated by Chiang Kai-shek and Soong Mei-ling in 1934, extended these ideas into a state-led moral campaign and placed greater emphasis on women's role in shaping household virtue and public order (Schneider 2013, pp. 185-186). At the 1935 Conference on Work for Rural Women and Children (*nongcun furu gongzuohui* 农村妇孺工作会) held by the GMD government, delegates described rural women as vital to family life and agricultural production yet still "lacking knowledge" (Ding 1935, p. 25). Cheng Bolu 程伯卢, head of Jiangxi's provincial education department, outlined women's education as a program of national rural reconstruction: cultivating patriotic and community spirit, teaching hygiene and handicraft, and promoting practical literacy and child care (Cheng 1935, p. 12).

Long before these political campaigns, Christian missionaries and churches had viewed women's education as central to moral and social uplift. The late-nineteenth-century slogan "woman's work for woman" reflected both a theological ideal and a missionary strategy (King 1989). Through training of Bible women, literacy classes, and domestic education programs, Christian missions created early networks that promoted women's learning and participation in community life (Wong 2015; Paddle 2024). By the late 1930s, Chiang and Soong's appeals to Christian organizations to join rural

reconstruction brought these religious efforts into closer alignment with state goals of social reform (Rigdon 2009, pp. 179-180).

Within this landscape, the rural service projects of Ginling Women's College during the war years marked a new stage in this evolving movement. Building on these earlier religious and political visions, Ginling educators sought not only to teach rural women but to work with them—to make education a collaborative experiment in rural improvement. Their programs in Renshou and Zhonghechang reveal how ideas first articulated in missionary and reformist discourse were put into practice by Chinese women under wartime conditions. Though reform rhetoric often continued to portray women as dependents in need of guidance, in Ginling's work they also emerged as active participants and local leaders in shaping new forms of family and community life.

A central figure in developing Ginling's women's education program in Zhonghechang was Xu Youzhi 徐幼芝, a 1934 sociology graduate of Ginling ("Miss Tsu Yu-Dji" n.d.). After graduation, she joined the rural reconstruction project in Lichuan, Jiangxi, a joint effort between Christian reformers and the GMD government that sought to rebuild villages in areas recently reclaimed from Communist control.[1] There, she worked to improve women's literacy and emphasized "tailoring teaching to individual needs" (*yincai shijiao* 因材施教) (Xu n.d., p. 22). One of her major initiatives was a three-month women's vocational training course that combined handwork, reading, and general knowledge, aiming to prepare villagers to take leadership in improving their own communities. The course featured a "learning by doing" (*zuozhongxue* 做中学) approach, having participants share household chores, such as cooking and cleaning, to cultivate a sense of cooperation and mutual responsibility in everyday life (Xu n.d., p. 27).

Yet Xu soon realized that most students wanted only literacy lessons and resisted household labor. Reflecting later, she described the work as "reclaiming a wasteland," admitting they were still "groping in darkness" (Xu 1936, p. 36, p. 39). Her struggle revealed a common tension in Christian women's reform work: as Jennifer Bond observes, missionary-trained educators often saw themselves as bearers of modern knowledge about hygiene, childrearing, and morality, but such ideals often collided with the

1 For more on the Christian rural reconstruction efforts in Lichuan, Jiangxi, see James C. Thomson, *While China Faced West: American Reformers in Nationalist China, 1928-1937* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1969); Liu Jiafeng 刘家峰, *Zhongguo Jidujiao xiangcun jianshe yundong yanjiu (1907-1950)* 中国基督教乡村建设运动研究 (1907-1950) [The Rural Reconstruction Movement of Chinese Christianity (1907-1950)] (Tianjin: Tianjin renmin chubanshe, 2008), 160-175.

realities of rural poverty, labor demands, and skepticism toward outside reformers (Bond 2024). In Lichuan, Xu faced precisely these challenges, where local women questioned the value of literacy and preferred practical skills like knitting or mending tools that met immediate needs.

Despite these difficulties, the Lichuan experience gave Xu a deeper understanding of the rural women she aimed to serve. After returning briefly to her hometown of Changsha in 1936 to care for her mother, she became general secretary of the local YWCA, then joined James Yen's MEM movement in 1939 to conduct surveys on rural home life in Guangxi ("Miss Tsu Yu-Dji" n.d.). When Ginling invited her to lead its new service station in Zhonghechang, Xu brought a decade of experience linking women's literacy training, civic education, and rural service.

When Xu Youzhi arrived in Sichuan in March 1943, even with her earlier experience in Jiangxi and Guangxi, she found herself uncertain where to begin. "The most difficult question now," she wrote, "is what to teach." She recognized that these women needed more than literacy; they needed lessons suited to their daily lives. Through home visits and local surveys, Xu began to understand the world of the village women around her. The women had seen the textbooks once used in a local people's school (*minzhong xuexiao* 民众学校), yet they found them meaningless and unrelated to their daily concerns. When asked what they wished to learn, they hesitated, replying that reading and writing were pursuits for "wealthy townspeople." Xu chose instead to learn through daily encounters—by listening, chatting, and sharing in the women's routines. As they talked, she and her colleagues heard rural women's worries about the rising cost of goods, their confusion over "piaozi" 票子 (paper money), and their unease when local officials or police came to their homes. They spoke of children who often fell ill, asking how to prevent disease and teach good habits. Many also wished to learn to write letters or read land deeds—skills that had grown more relevant as wartime disruptions brought new dealings with officials, markets, and outsiders (Xu 1944, p. 56).

Out of these conversations, Xu reshaped her curriculum. She combined simple lessons in reading and writing with talks on household hygiene, childrearing, and the new social and political order of wartime life. Instruction in the county's administrative system, the use of money, and public sanitation offered practical guidance for dealing with the growing presence of the state (Xu 1944, p. 57). For many women, civic education thus became a way to make sense of the new order rather than a distant political ideal. As newcomers and refugees poured into Zhonghechang, they also grew curious about unfamiliar customs and manners. Xu used lessons in Chinese history and geography to situate their daily experiences within a wider national framework, encouraging them to see themselves as citizens connected to people beyond

their village (Treudley 2011, p. 100). What might have begun as a patriotic program took shape instead as a form of everyday education—linking the duties of citizenship with the ordinary cares of family and community.

In the winter of 1943–44, Xu organized a more intensive four-month women's training course that met each afternoon when farm work was light (Treudley 2011, p. 100). The program, as she and her colleague Xiong Yana later explained, aimed to prepare women "for democracy" (Hsiung n.d.). Activities centered on practice rather than lectures: participants learned how to keep meeting minutes, observe rules of discussion, chair meetings, and speak in public. Religious lessons, given by the church workers attached to the station, emphasized the moral foundation of democratic life: to overcome selfishness and serve the common good. The results, she noted, exceeded expectations. After only a short period of training, many women showed marked improvement in expressing their views. One woman in her thirties who had never attended school was able to serve as chair, recite Sun Yat-sen's political testament, and deliver reports with ease. Younger girls who had once appeared shy and self-conscious now volunteered to dance or sing on stage (Xu 1943, p. 8). One student, a young woman who earned her living collecting dog droppings for fertilizer, proudly donated ten yuan to the soldiers at the front—a gesture that, for the female Ginling educators, symbolized the awakening of civic spirit among rural women (Hsiung n.d.).

At the same time, Xu's report made clear that these changes did not erase the difficulties she and her colleagues perceived in their work. She described the women as "petty," "stubborn," and slow to cooperate—traits she regarded as products of long-standing social conditions rather than individual failings (Xu 1944, p. 57). Such dispositions, she insisted, could not be altered quickly. Nor could educators rely on harsh discipline or complete permissiveness. What was required instead was the gradual work of moral influence and personal example. Those engaged in women's education, Xu concluded, needed "great patience and sympathy" (Xu 1943, p. 8). Her assessment echoed Irma Highbaugh's repeated insistence that rural service was necessarily slow work, demanding sustained presence rather than quick results, and underscored the gap that Ginling workers themselves perceived between their reform ideals and village realities.

Ginling's women reformers therefore placed great emphasis on relationships as a condition of effective teaching. Xiong Yana observed that personal bonds between teachers and students often did more to draw local women into learning than any well-prepared curriculum. "Those who work with women," she advised, "must first be their friends" (Xiong 1944, p. 65). Friendship, however, was not an abstract sentiment but a daily practice. Home visits allowed teachers to move beyond the classroom, helping with chores,

talking while working, and sharing ordinary routines (Lin 1940, p. 55). Through these repeated encounters, Ginling students learned how village women organized their days and negotiated family responsibilities. Such shared labor and conversation did not eliminate differences in background, but they helped make cooperation possible and encouraged village women's participation in the programs.

These personal bonds were also established in the rural service station, which served as an open, welcoming space where women could step beyond their homes and fields to meet, talk, and exchange news. Village women gathered there to *bai longmenzhen* (摆龙门阵, a Sichuan phrase meaning to chat and share stories) and to seek advice from the staff. One student recalled that Irma Highbaugh was especially beloved; women came almost daily to sit and talk with her and greeted her warmly on her visits to nearby villages ("Nongcun funü gongzuo zai Renshou" 1940, p. 71). Such encounters often turned foreign and "down-river" (下江人, a Sichuan term for migrants from the lower Yangtze region) educators into trusted figures of authority. Rural women called them *xiansheng* (先生, an honorific meaning "teacher" or "expert") and sought their counsel on an array of matters—settling domestic disputes, writing contracts, or even designing clothing patterns (Xiong 1944, p. 65).

Still, this closeness did not erase social distance. Ginling workers were conscious of their urban, educated backgrounds and often viewed rural women as both admirable and deficient— "curious, generous, and industrious," yet "emotional" and "blind," as Xiong put it (Xiong 1944, p. 63). They believed that with "proper guidance," rural women could extend their influence from the household into the broader community. The programs they built opened new opportunities for participation, yet they did not challenge patriarchal norms. Teenage girls, for example, attended classes on childcare, household management, and family relations "in preparation for marriage" (Hsiung n.d.) As Xiong remarked, rural women's work was not a "family revolution" (Xiong 1944, p. 65). This ambivalence—between empowerment and restraint—mirrored what Jane Hunter identifies among American women missionaries, whose efforts to uplift Chinese women also projected ideals of Victorian domesticity (Hunter 1984). For the Ginling reformers, a sense of moral superiority coexisted with genuine friendship and emotional intimacy. Their encounters in the villages reveal both the barrier of cultural authority and the beginnings of a shared sisterhood forged through daily labor and conversations.

At the same time, rural women were far from passive recipients of reform. Their hesitation, selective acceptance, and practical demands repeatedly shaped how Ginling's programs unfolded in practice. Village women

questioned the usefulness of certain lessons, gravitated toward skills that addressed immediate needs, and responded unevenly to moral instruction, prompting educators to revise curricula and teaching methods. These everyday interactions posed subtle but persistent challenges to elite urban reformers' assumptions about rural womanhood and forced ongoing adjustments in pedagogy and priorities.

Conclusion

Ginling's experiment of rural service in Sichuan reveals how wartime reconstruction unfolded not only through institutional networks and program design but also through the slow, intimate work of building relationships. In Renshou and Zhonghechang, Christian women reformers translated ideals of service, citizenship, and moral education into small acts, such as organizing fairs, running nurseries, and visiting homes, which redefined the meaning of both "women's work for women" and Christian social engagement. Their programs were shaped by state imperatives and nationalist rhetoric, yet they were sustained by the personal trust and emotional labor of women who moved between different worlds: between urban and rural, Christian and secular, elite and popular.

Unlike earlier forms of missionary-led rural service, Ginling's wartime programs were carried out largely by Chinese Christian women whose religious commitments were closely intertwined with concerns for national survival and social reconstruction. Foreign missionaries such as Irma Highbaugh remained important mentors and facilitators, but the daily work increasingly reflected Chinese Christian actors' own interpretations of Christian service under wartime conditions. This positioning enabled Ginling workers to engage in reconstruction efforts led by the GMD government not merely as passive participants but as mediators who translated Christian ideals into forms intelligible and acceptable within local and national contexts.

The Ginling workers' experience underscores the dual nature of Christian reform in wartime China: it was both a project of moral cultivation and a negotiation of power. Their efforts introduced new practices of civic education, hygiene, and family management in village life, but they also reflected enduring hierarchies of class, culture, and gender. In tracing these tensions, this study suggests that the significance of Christian rural service lay less in its immediate results than in the possibilities it created for connection and participation.

By attending to these granular encounters—teaching, visiting, talking, and sharing in daily life—we can see how Christian women reformers contributed to wartime reconstruction not merely as agents of Western modernity or state policy, but as historical actors who shaped China's moral

and social fabric from within. Their work, modest in scale yet ambitious in spirit, points to a broader story of how religious commitment, gender, and rural reform intertwined to redefine the possibilities of social change in Republican China.

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- Text citations:

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- References:

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(Fogel 2004b)

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(Watson 2008, l. 3)

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(Lawrence 1999, para. 3 – 5)

(USCCB 1986, #14)

Recent literature has examined long-run price drifts following initial public offerings (Ritter 1991; Loughran and Ritter 1995), stock splits (Ikenberry and Stice 1996), seasoned equity offerings (Loughran and Ritter 1995), and equity repurchases (Ikenberry and Vermaelen 1995).

(Armstrong and Malacinski 1989; Beigl 1989; Pickett and White 1985)

(Stock and Watson 1999, 2002a, 2002b)

(Crisp 2006, p. 6; 2013)

Reference List

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